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REPRESSIVE PSYCHIATRY AS A MEANS OF COMBATING RELIGIOUS DISSEIDENTS IN THE SOVIET UNION

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Abstract

The article highlights the impossibility of the coexistence of modern civilization in conditions of impunity for crimes against humanity, which have no statute of limitations, but due to the lack of punishment and concealment of information it creates even greater crimes. Many of the unjustly convicted political prisoners have been rehabilitated since the condemnation of Stalin's cult of personality and his crimes in Soviet Ukraine since 1956. As a result of the mass rehabilitation of political prisoners, the regime gained serious opposition, some of whom consisted of evangelical Baptist communities who advocated genuine freedom of conscience. The Soviet regime used a whole range of preventive and punitive means to fight the opposition, an important place among which was occupied by repressive psychiatry. Therefore, the theoretical and legal framework was brought under psychiatric repression, which caused significant restrictions for the so-called mentally ill. In the 1970-80s, the punitive and repressive machine of the totalitarian system by the hated KGB developed torture for dissidents. The main role in their subjugation was relied on psychiatrists and their methods, based on the so-called “innovative” teaching of the Moscow School of Psychiatrists A. Snezhnevsky, on “slow schizophrenia.” This diagnosis was recognized only in the USSR and its satellite countries. Anyone who expressed somehow dissatisfaction with the actions of the ruling regime could be diagnosed with “slow schizophrenia.”

In the late 1970s, threats by the psychiatric hospital for active believers became systemic. The special services put pressure on the members of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners, who were engaged in printing and publishing the crimes of the totalitarian government against humanity and freedom of conscience and religion. Despite the measures taken by the leadership and intelligence services of the totalitarian regime to debunk the so-called “myths of punitive medicine in the USSR,” believers and the international community gathered many real facts and interviewed people who were subjected to inhumane torture in medical facilities of the communist state.

Keywords: repressive psychiatry, punitive medicine, slow schizophrenia, religious dissidents, Evangelical Baptists, communist regime, Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Union.

Introduction

The use of psychiatry for punitive purposes against religious dissidents during the Soviet regime in Ukraine is an urgent and socially significant problem. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 (and which intensified on April 9, 2015), the decommunization of Ukraine was not fully implemented. This was also even after the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted four laws on decommunization, including the law “On access to archives of repressive bodies of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991.”¹ Access to the archives of repressive bodies of the 1970-80s (including archives of psychiatric hospitals) is limited. This is due to the fact that the unreformed Security Service of Ukraine continues to apply the rules of corporate solidarity or mutual cover from the Soviet Committee of State Security (KGB), which was the organizer and participant in punitive operations against dissidents in the USSR.

Because of these circumstances, the problem of using repressive psychiatry against religious dissidents still remains poorly understood in Ukrainian historiography. Though, some aspects of the problem are studied in modern historiography today. The most thorough research in this area was written by former dissidents, including the president of the Association of Psychiatrists of Ukraine, Semyon Gluzman² and Volodymyr Bukovsky,³ who went through the hell of Soviet punitive psychiatry for dissents. An important contribution to the study of repressive

¹Український інститут національної пам'яті [Ukrainian Institute of National Memory]. <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/page/dekomunizatsiya-0>

²С. Ф. Глузман, *История психиатрических репрессий* [History of psychiatric repression]. <http://www.mif-ua.com/archive/article/36247>; його ж. *Украинское лицо судебной психиатрии. Новости медицины и фармации* [Ukrainian face of forensic psychiatry. News of medicine and pharmacy]. (№ 15 (289)), pp. 36-61. <https://chtyvo.org.ua>.

³В. С. Буковский., С. Ф. Глузман, *Пособие по психиатрии для инакомыслящих. Хроника защиты прав в СССР*. [A guide to psychiatry for dissidents. Chronicle of the protection of rights in the USSR]. (1975. № 13 ((January-February)).

psychiatry was made by the Russian researcher, one of the heads of the State Archives Service of the Russian Federation and a consultant to the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression under the President of the Russian Federation, Andriy Prokopenko.⁴ It is worth noting the work in this area of the director of the International Charitable Foundation Global Initiative in Psychiatry, Robert van Warren, who deals with violence in psychiatry and reforming the psychiatric care system.⁵ Therefore, research in this area is important and needs to be continued, drawing the attention of society, governments, and religions in Ukraine and around the world to the problem of impunity for concealing information, which leads to even greater crime.

The Use of Repressive Psychiatry Against Dissidents for Punitive and Corrective Purposes (1940-80s)

Repressive (also punitive) psychiatry is a form of struggle against political opponents and the isolation and imprisonment of dissidents. Cases of repressive psychiatry have taken place in many countries (including developed democracies), but the use of repressive psychiatry became the most popular in the USSR.⁶ Repressive psychiatry was quite actively used against religious dissidents in the 1960s and '80s. If all the effective preventive methods (police and KGB interrogations, demonstration-friendly courts, etc.) and punitive and repressive methods (searches with confiscation of property, fines, criminal cases) did not help re-educate the believer, the new mechanism that was actively used against religious dissidents was repressive medicine as a means of punishment with active members of the Brotherhood of Evangelical Baptists (EB).

According to Robert van Warren, the systematic use of psychiatry to imprison dissidents in psychiatric hospitals began in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, as early as the 1930s, the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes was systematic. According to a letter published by a Soviet psychiatrist in the *American Psychiatric Journal*, Andrei Vyshinsky (one of the leaders of the Soviet secret police), was the one who ordered the use of psychiatry as a means of repression. According to the author of the letter (whose name was known to the editor, but for others it remained anonymous), the first special psychiatric hospital in Kazan was used exclusively for

⁴А. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия. Карательная психиатрия: Сборник*. (АСТ, Харвест, 2005). 608 p. [*Mad psychiatry. Punitive Psychiatry: A Collection*. (АСТ, Harvest, 2005)]. <http://h-v-p.narod.ru/content.htm>.

⁵Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией до реформы психиатрической службы*. [*From Political Abuses of Psychiatry to Mental Health Reform*]. <http://www.mif-ua.com/archive/article/>.

⁶*Репресивна психиатрия* [*Repressive psychiatry*]. <https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

political purposes. Half of the patients were people who were indeed mentally ill, but the rest were people without mental disorders, such as former Estonian President Päts, who was in Kazan from 1941 to 1956.⁷

According to Russian researcher A. Prokopenko:

As early as March 25, 1948, the procedure for the application of coercive measures of a medical nature and other measures of a medical nature to the mentally ill who committed crimes was legislated. The authors of this instruction tried to substantiate legally some organizational and medical aspects of the movement and detention of mentally ill people in psychiatric institutions by removing the term “prison psychiatric hospital” from the documents. As a result of the casuistic play with the words of the great and powerful Russian language, such definitions of medical measures were born for the mentally ill who committed a crime. Such persons could be sent to involuntary treatment in special psychiatric institutions (or special departments of general psychiatric institutions) in combination with isolation or to involuntary treatment in general psychiatric and medical institutions. Such measures could be applied to “persons who committed a crime in a state of chronic illness or temporary mental disorder and found insane,” “persons who committed a crime in a state of sanity, but before sentencing patients with chronic mental illness,” “persons who fell ill with a mental illness while serving a sentence in a place of imprisonment.” In particular, it was the case that persons who were dangerous to society by their mental state due to the nature of the crime were subject to forced inclusion.⁸

Compulsory treatment was appointed only by the court on the basis of the conclusions of the examination, in accordance with the instructions on forensic psychiatric examination in the USSR of February 17, 1940. Addressing the question of whether dangerous acts have been committed by the mentally ill, and the extent to which they were dangerous to society, were also only dealt with by the court.⁹

The main criterion in deciding on the appropriateness of coercive measures of a medical nature, or to change its form, was “recovery or change in the mental state of the patient, which eliminates his danger to society or changes the degree of this danger.” When making a decision in connection with recovery from mental illness after a crime and the coercive measures of a medical nature, the court also decided: whether to resume the trial if the person fell ill after the case was sent to court, but before the deadline or entry of the sentence into force, or on the resumption of execution of the sentence; if the disease occurred during its execution or after its entry into force

⁷Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией до реформы психиатрической службы*. [From Political Abuses of Psychiatry to Mental Health Reform]. <http://www.mif-ua.com/archive/article/>.

⁸A. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия* [Mad psychiatry]. <http://h-v-p.narod.ru/content.htm>.

⁹Ibid.

(and the time of compulsory treatment was included in the sentence); or if cases were sent to the prosecutor's office in the event they were suspended before a trial.¹⁰

As A. Prokopenko points out rightly, “this work of ‘legal’ and ‘verbal’ art cannot cause a change in the mental balance of a normal person from the idea of arbitrariness towards dissidents in the USSR. The Bolshevik law enforcement officers did not have enough to lock a healthy person in a madhouse, but keeping there, determined at its discretion healthy (!!), and then sent to cut down the forest. Not everyone endured it.”¹¹

With the death of J. Stalin, the struggle for power began, which was accompanied by the weakening of the harsh regime. Subsequently, on July 31, 1954, a new instruction on the mentally ill was approved. The interdepartmental document was approved by the Minister of Health of the USSR, M. Kovrigina, and only agreed with the Ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs of the USSR and the Prosecutor's Office of the USSR. What was new in the 1954 instruction was that involuntary treatment was not accompanied by measures to isolate the mentally ill and was applied to the court compulsory measures of medical removal with the participation of prosecutors and lawyers (in fact, no one did). This instruction repeated the previous one from 1948, and some of its provisions were even strengthened.¹²

Thus, in the second half of the 20th century, the totalitarian regime legally formalized an improved punitive-repressive mechanism, which provided for the use of punitive psychiatry. It prescribed the procedure for measures to stop “counter-revolutionary activities,” “organization of forensic psychiatric examination,” and the “use of compulsory treatment of mentally ill people who have committed particularly dangerous crimes.”

After the condemnation of Stalin's cult of personality and his crimes in Ukraine since 1956, many unjustly convicted political prisoners had been rehabilitated. As a result of the mass rehabilitation of political prisoners, the regime gained serious opposition, part of which consisted of faithful Evangelical Baptist communities which advocated genuine freedom of conscience. The leadership of the USSR had to curb the growing number of believers who, returning from prisons, openly opposed all forms of abuse of power against the church and believers.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

With the coming to power of Khrushchev in 1957, it was decided to strengthen anti-religious policy. This was recorded in the decisions of the XXI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which took place in Moscow from January 27 to February 5, 1959. Khrushchev believed that the KGB should strengthen preventive measures to prevent the most odious believers from going to court; because during the trial, the faithful from the ECB defended themselves and spoke about the crimes of the government against humanity and the freedom of conscience, and criticized the regime.¹³ There was a new need for punitive medicine through psychiatry, especially since Khrushchev said that only the mentally ill can disagree with the bright prospects of building communism.¹⁴

The abuse of psychiatry for political purposes in the Soviet Union arose from the concept that people who opposed the Soviet rule were mentally ill because there was no other logical explanation for why they opposed the best socio-political system in the world.

Soviet leader Khrushchev himself formulated this in his speech:

Crime is a deviation from the generally accepted norms of behavior in society, often caused by a disorder of the human psyche. Can there be diseases, mental disorders in a communist society among individuals? Apparently, there may be. If this is the case, then there may be actions that control people with abnormal psyches ... those who on this “basis” begin to call for the fight against communism, we can say that even now there are people who are fighting against communism ... but in people, apparently, obviously do have not normal mental state.¹⁵

S. Gluzman writes in his research: “Once Khrushchev, who was very fond of loud trips abroad, gave a press conference somewhere in the West. After the speech, he was asked an unexpected question: “We know that there are still political prisoners in your country. Why are you hiding it?” Enraged, Khrushchev replied sharply: “We have no political prisoners. Dissatisfaction with the Soviet government can be shown only by the mentally ill, insane!”¹⁶

This shows that it was during Khrushchev's thaw that punitive medicine gained new official significance. The totalitarian leader's assertion that only the mentally ill could criticize the world's best Soviet political system was an indication for repressive actions and a search for “crazy”

¹³Отраслевой государственный архив Службы безопасности Украины. (1957-1958 гг.). Ф. 2.4 – Управление МГБ УССР Отдел “О”. Дело № 23. Том 2. Оп. 26. Л. 198. [*Sectoral state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine*].

¹⁴А. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия* [*Mad psychiatry*].

¹⁵Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией до реформы психиатрической службы*. [*From political abuses of psychiatry to mental health reform*].

¹⁶С. Ф. Глузман, *История психиатрических пенесий* [*History of psychiatric repression*]. <http://www.mif-ua.com/archive/article/36247>.

dissidents. However, active and thinking people regarded former political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, who had a heightened sense of justice, to have a desire for truth and self-realization. Life for them became a real hell because they became the object of a new experiment of the regime, already by means of punitive and educational medicine.

Thus, during the 1960s, the totalitarian regime directed significant investments to improve the fight against dissidents. A significant part of these funds went to punitive medicine. Specialized psychiatric hospitals had significant responsibilities to subdue dissidents, including believers.

In the early 1960s, according to Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, the totalitarian regime decided to tighten control over religious communities. Unregistered Baptist communities were closely monitored by the KGB. It was the local church activists who were repressed by the police, prosecutors, and the judiciary. The KGB special services began to involve actively medical staff in punitive and repressive measures.

On October 10, 1961, the punitive authorities initiated through the Ministry of Health of the USSR the instruction: "On the urgent hospitalization of the mentally ill who are dangerous for the society." Its meaning that a mentally ill person could be forcibly hospitalized without the consent of relatives and guardians with the help of the police. The day after hospitalization, the patient should be examined by a special commission consisting of three psychiatrists, which considered the correctness of the patient's stay in the hospital.¹⁷

Punitive medicine began to be used widely in the Brezhnev-Suslov period. The KGB special bodies managed to take a comprehensive approach to the fight against the opposition. Among a number of repressive measures, punitive psychiatry began to play a major role in suppressing dissidents. The resuscitation of Stalinism and the justification of its crimes against humanity became the credo of this period. Such tendencies only indicated that the regime would strengthen its position, attack the politically unreliable, without neglecting any means, including inhumane ones.

According to A. Prokopenko, the state security agencies monitored carefully the political mood in the Soviet society of the post-Khrushchev period and came to disappointing conclusions, which was reflected in a joint note of the KGB, the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General and the Minister of Health Care of Ukraine (Andropov, Danilov, Rudenko and Shcholokov). From a report in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (the Central

¹⁷A. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия* [*Mad psychiatry*].

Committee of the CPSU), dated by August 31, 1967, it became known that Andropov and members of the Politburo included in the category of “criminal offenses”: murderers, authors, and distributors of anti-Soviet leaflets with maniacal persistence (like their predecessors and like-minded people).¹⁸

The CPSU Central Committee liked the proposed idea of developing networks of psychiatric institutions. On October 6, 1967, the secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, which was attended by Suslov, Ustinov, Kulakov, Pelshe, Kapitonov, and Danilov, considered Andropov's note. The excerpt from the minutes № 35/13 of the meeting from the Secretariat of the Central Committee stated:

1. To instruct the USSR State Plan to prepare within two months a proposal for the Council of Ministers of the USSR for additional capital investments for 1968-1970 for the construction of new and expansion of existing psychiatric hospitals... 2. To instruct the Soviets of Ministers of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Socialist Republic) and the USSR, the Moscow Council, the executive committees of the Leningrad, Kyiv Oblast, and City Soviets of Labor Deputies to find additional premises to convert them into special psychiatric institutions (meaning prison psychiatric hospitals of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR). In Moscow, Leningrad and Kyiv, mentally ill citizens, from whom socially dangerous actions were possible, had to be taken to hospitals (in the language of modern power ministers, provided for the “cleansing” of these citizens so that they do not damage the reputation of cities—“business cards” of the USSR).

Suslov was the first to sign the protocol. To some extent, this decision was implemented, although the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, like many other institutions in Soviet times, had significant difficulties with capital construction. Thus, by 1970, the number of beds for the mentally ill in prison psychiatric hospitals of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs increased from 595 to 542,534.¹⁹

Dnipropetrovsk became the center of torture for dissidents in Soviet Ukraine, and the regime directed considerable funds here. In particular, by the end of 1950, more than 30 hospital buildings and premises had been restored at the Ihren Psychiatric Hospital in Dnipropetrovsk, and eight departments with 600 beds had been opened. The period of further expansion of the hospital and improvement of the psychoneurological centers in the region began in 1950. From 1953 to 1961, a neurology department, a narcology department, and a department for infectious patients

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

were opened. In 1962, the Ihren Psychiatric Hospital was renamed in accordance with its functions, to the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Psychiatric Hospital.²⁰

As early as 1968, another one of several specialized (prison) psychiatric hospitals in the USSR opened in Dnipropetrovsk. In Soviet times, the hospital was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Fedor Konstantinovich Prus.²¹ There is little historical information about it, but it is known that at that time it looked more like a prison; KGB officers worked here. Dissidents were sent here, including believers who could not be “broken” in other hospitals. The dissidents were asked to renounce their “schizophrenic” beliefs. This was supported by an active course of treatment—the introduction of psychotropic drugs.

In the 1970s, due to the intensification of the struggle against the opposition by psychiatric methods, a radical reorganization of the entire psychiatric service took place. Significant funds were allocated for its development, which made it possible to open during 1976 in the Dnepropetrovsk hospital departments of neuroses and other specializations in the hospital. In particular, in 1978, the neurosurgical department of surgical treatment of patients with epilepsy opened; and in 1980, the department of anesthesiology and resuscitation opened, as well.²²

Already in the early 1970s, psychiatric repression became systematic. The main place for issuing psychiatric labels was the special Fourth Department of the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatric Examinations in Moscow. This branch was actually KGB territory. The diagnoses made by psychiatrists there were supported by the highest authorities of Soviet psychiatry, whose competence was beyond doubt.

But, as S. Gluzman rightly points out:

The bitter truth lies in something else: psychiatric diagnoses were “rescribed” to healthy people not only in Moscow, but also in Vilnius, Riga, Kyiv, and Lviv. Unfortunately, these are facts. The entire system was oppressive. A special unit of the political police, the 5th Department of the KGB of the USSR, identified citizens who demonstrated nonconformist behavior. The sanctions imposed by the criminal law for this kind of “anti-Soviet slander” were relatively lenient (compared to Stalin's, of course)—a maximum of seven years in prison. The authorities did not dare to change the legislation in the direction of increasing responsibility for “anti-Soviet” activities. But even the growing wave of all sorts of “truth-lovers” could not help disturbing the Soviet party ideologues ... The way out was found

²⁰Дніпропетровська обласна клінічна психіатрична лікарня [Dnipropetrovsk Regional Clinical Psychiatric Hospital]. <http://medlib.dp.gov.ua/jirbis2/ua/lpz-anniversaries/>.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

unconventional, the practice of using psychiatry as an instrument of repression gradually developed.²³

According to A. Prokopenko, “a theoretical basis for psychiatric repression was created and a whole generation of doctors was formed who automatically identified dissidents as being insane, especially those diagnosed with ‘slow schizophrenia.’ This decision immediately led to a list of limitations: in professional opportunities and in general in working capacity, in correspondence and many others, even if they have not been prosecuted...”²⁴

As Robert van Warren rightly points out:

Many tried to analyze why people ended up in a psychiatric hospital instead of a camp, and what factors played a role in the decision-making process. Some concluded that the length of stay in the hospital corresponded to the sentence the political prisoner would have got. In other words, a political prisoner accused of “slandering the Soviet state” usually stayed in hospital for about three years (maximum term under this article of the USSR Criminal Code) and accused of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda usually stayed in a psychiatric hospital for a longer period, seven years and more (again, the maximum penalty under this article). Cynically, this can be formulated as follows: the crazier a person is, the more damage he has done to the Soviet government! In other cases, dissidents believed that mentally weak people were sent to camps quickly, and mentally strong and steadfast people had an uncertain future in a psychiatric hospital without a sentence and were tortured with neuroleptics or other means. In general, it is safe to conclude that victims of political repression have been carefully selected and that this type of punishment seemed the most acceptable to them.²⁵

According to S. Gluzman, “there are no accurate statistics on the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes. The information provided to the Ukrainian society by the archival department of the Security Service of Ukraine concerns only those citizens who have gone through court proceedings. Many more people have been subjected to so-called extrajudicial psychiatric repression, such as being forcibly hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital for a short period of time, often for one or two days, at the direction of party or administrative bodies. The most convenient diagnoses of “masking” then were paranoid disorder and slow schizophrenia. The dictate of the so-called A. Snezhnevsky’s school in the 1970s was absolute, an alternative diagnosis was

²³С. Ф. Глузман, *Украинское лицо судебной психиатрии. Ассоциация психиатров Украины*. [Ukrainian face of forensic psychiatry]. <http://www.mif-ua.com/archive/issue-9615/article-9643/>.

²⁴А. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия* [Mad psychiatry].

²⁵Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией* [From political abuses of psychiatry to mental health reform].

rejected. It was then that psychiatry became the most terrible, almost vital repression. It also facilitated the specifics of the legal field in a country where the legal basis of psychiatric practice was barely defined.”²⁶

According to S. Gluzman,

Soviet psychiatry as a scientific concept differed clearly from the theory and practice in other countries. Academician Andrei Snezhnevsky's favorite invention, “slow schizophrenia” as a diagnostic unit, was nowhere to be found except in the USSR and its satellites ... Convinced of the immortality of the totalitarian USSR, Soviet psychiatrists, especially in Moscow, did not hesitate to write “scientific” articles and defend dissertations during dissident periods. All these paper products were in medical libraries ... 10 years later, in 1982, I was surprised to see all this “scientific” literature in an open repository in the Kyiv Medical Library. And I was even more impressed by reading all this nonsense, which is difficult to convey in scientific psychiatric terminology.²⁷

Robert van Warren is also convinced that A. Snezhnevsky's diagnosis of “delayed schizophrenia” was designed to carry out large-scale repression. Schizophrenia was diagnosed much more frequently in Moscow than in other cities, according to a 1973 World Health Organization study of schizophrenia. In particular, slow schizophrenia has expanded the scope of diagnosis, because, according to A. Snezhnevsky, patients with this diagnosis were not able to live normally in a social environment. Their symptoms may resemble the symptoms of neurosis or may be classified as paranoia. A patient with paranoid symptoms retained some idea of his condition but exaggerated its importance and was able to express grand ideas of reforming society. Thus, the researcher emphasizes, the symptom of slow schizophrenia could be called “delusions of reforms,” “struggle for truth,” and “persistence.”²⁸

Soviet psychiatrists who confirmed the diagnosis of “slow schizophrenia” were convinced of the legitimacy of their actions. This was confirmed in an interview with the Soviet newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda” by two psychiatrists, Marat Vartanian and Andrei Mukhin. They believed that ordinary people might not notice a patient with “slow schizophrenia.” Because such people behaved like healthy people, but when they were asked about their beliefs, they seemed to flare up, convincing others of their rightness. Soviet psychiatrists described the beliefs of such

²⁶С. Ф. Глузман, *Украинское лицо судебной психиатрии* [Ukrainian face of forensic psychiatry].

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией* [From political abuses of psychiatry].

people as obsessions. According to M. Vartanyan, many people were sent to a psychiatric hospital with a diagnosis of “slow schizophrenia” for spreading their beliefs.²⁹

According to Robert van Warren, about a third of political prisoners in the Soviet Union were placed in psychiatric hospitals. The diagnosis of “slow schizophrenia” was given, in addition to dissidents, also, for example, to those who evade the army and vagrants. Those diagnosed were severely discriminated against and limited in their ability to participate in society. They were deprived of the right to drive a car, enter higher educational institutions, and became “impassable.” Before each holiday or mass event, people with this diagnosis were forcibly hospitalized for the duration of their stay in a psychiatric hospital. A person diagnosed with “slow schizophrenia” can easily be classified as “CD” (socially dangerous) through medical history—for example, when a person tried to resist during hospitalization or when a person got involved in a family or street fight.³⁰

Thus, a Soviet citizen who openly expressed his point of view, contrary to the general line of the CPSU Central Committee, risked being recognized as mentally ill. In Soviet society, it was believed that only crazy people could risk their children's careers, families, futures, and freedoms for the sake of politically dangerous beliefs.

Repressive psychiatry, which was initially directed against dissidents (intellectuals, active public and religious figures), received broad powers from officials of the CPSU Central Committee and, constantly adjusting its actions with the KGB, expanded its activities in the USSR. Violating basic human rights, psychiatrists tortured people, and special doctors began to invent non-existent diagnoses for citizens who did not believe in communist ideology and fought for their rights. About a third of dissidents in the 1970s and early '80s were sent to psychiatric hospitals, not to camps or settlements.

Evangelical Baptists Are Victims of KGB Brezhnev-Andropov, KGB Psychiatric Repression

Information about the use of medicine for repressive and punitive purposes against believers of the ECB and other religious denominations became known to the general public through self-published bulletins, which were secretly printed in underground printing presses and distributed among the faithful by traveling pastors from hand to hand in the 1970-80s. The bulletins

²⁹*Комсомольская правда*, (июль, 1987).

³⁰Роберт ван Ворен, *От политических злоупотреблений психиатрией* [*From political abuses of psychiatry*].

published statements by the Council of Relatives of ECB Prisoners to the governing bodies of the USSR about repression by psychiatric means.

The 1978 telegram “Again for the Faith of God—a psychiatric hospital,” was addressed to Brezhnev, Secretary General of the CPSU Central Committee, KGB Chairman Andropov, and the Minister of Health with information that a member of ECB, Volodymyr Petrovich Demkovych, was summoned to the Chernihiv Military Commissariat. There, members of the commission told him: “If he believes in God, he needs treatment in a psychiatric hospital.” The young man asked the head of the country and the KGB special services to deal with this misunderstanding. “Send the answer to the address: Chernihiv, street Shchorsa 78-A, room 118.”³¹

In a statement, V. Demkovych described in detail his story about how he was urgently summoned to the Chernihiv military registration and enlistment office to pass a medical commission. During the meeting of the medical commission, Dr. Stepura asked the following questions:

If have I changed my beliefs, do I believe in God? I said I did not change my beliefs and believe in God. After that, I was diagnosed with “dissatisfaction with the Soviet authorities” and sent to a psychiatric hospital in Chernihiv. I was outraged by this vile lie. What is it: arbitrariness or genocide against religious citizens of the USSR? I ask for your urgent intervention. I am attaching copies of the “Result of the medical examination.”³²

V. Demkovich's statement reached the secret services of the USSR, but instead of instructing them to understand the situation, it had the opposite effect. After April 8, 1978, V. Demkovych appealed again to the Chairman of the KGB Andropov Y. and General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Brezhnev L. with a request to protect him from threats of local officials to send him to a mental hospital.

Here is what he wrote in the statement:

I need to contact you again. After addressing you in a statement dated by March 12, 1978, in which I wrote about lawlessness, the medical commission of the city military enlistment office for faith in God wrote during a medical examination: “Dissatisfied with Soviet rule” and sent me to a psychiatric hospital. But, after my statement to you, I was treated differently. This time I was sent to the regional hospital for in-patient examination. After a seven-day examination with positive results, I was promised to be discharged on April 7. But after receiving a call from the military registration and enlistment office, as I was

³¹Бюллетень № 52. Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1978), с. 11, [Bulletin № 52 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1978), p. 11].

³²Ibid., pp. 11-13.

explained by doctor L. M. Gabana and the chief doctor of the regional hospital, I was detained immediately.³³

The tragic story of a young believer from Chernihiv, which began with threats to send him to a mental hospital, did not end there. Then he was dealt with by the police, who took his case to court. He wrote again to Secretary-General Brezhnev, the Prosecutor General of the Soviet Union R. Rudenko, the Prosecutor of Chernihiv, the Council of Churches of the ECB, and the Council of Relatives of Prisoners of the ECB. His letter stated that on October 26, 1978, under the pretext of a search of his personal belongings, 10 copies of spiritual literature were confiscated from him by police officers of the Novozavodsk District Department of Internal Affairs (Captain F. V. Bobik, Lieutenant A. V. Gres.), though there was nothing illegal in the literature. It presents the spiritual and moral religious teachings of famous Christian authors. On November 17, 1978, four books were handed over to him in the Novozavodsky district department of the city of Chernihiv.³⁴

As V. Demkovich testifies further:

On December 8, 1978, a general meeting of workers was deliberately scheduled at the workplace where I work. At this meeting, Deputy Chiefs of Police of the Novozavodsk Regional Department of Internal Affairs V. D. Sisa and Candidate of Philosophical Sciences V.V. Shevchenko. They insulted selected spiritual and moral religious literature and gospel teachings, giving them a political color in order to incite hostility and hatred of the working class towards the faithful. V. V. Shevchenko distorted mockingly the Gospel, saying that it justifies any crime, so that a man only believes in God. But the gospel does not justify any crime but requires creating a worthy repentance for the crime. At this meeting, it was decided to hold a public trial and transfer its decision to the prosecutor's office.³⁵

In the late 1970s, threats by the psychiatric hospital for active believers became systematic. The special services put pressure on the members of the Council of Relatives of Prisoners, who were engaged in printing and publishing information about the crimes of the totalitarian government against humanity, freedom of conscience, and religion. Bulletin № 52 in 1978 published an appeal "To all Christians in the world," to the leadership of the Soviet Union

³³Ibid., pp. 11-13.

³⁴Бюллетень № 60 Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1979), с. 37-38, [Bulletin № 60 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1979), pp. 37-38].

³⁵Ibid., p. 38.

(L. Brezhnev and O. Kosygin) for the believer G. Yu. Ritikova, who lived in the Voroshilovgrad region, Krasnodon. 1, Pidhirna street, 30. The letter stated that she was a mother of many children (nine children), whom she raised in the spirit of the Gospel. The woman described the events of May 22, 1978, when a woman came to her house again, she did not say her last name but had the following conversation with her:

Galina Yuriyivna, why didn't you come? I begged you to go to the 3rd office. I told her that I was still, thank God, in my right mind and would not go to a psychiatric hospital on my own until I was forced to. She answered, "why are you afraid, the doctor will talk to you and that's all." I flatly refused, saying, "I have nine children and I'm healthy." "But a psychiatrist will check on you, and you need to be checked, probably someone reported about you." I told her that I did not need to go to the doctor, and said: "KGB officers, police and the city executive committee are talking to us." And they come home. But she asked again: "I advise you to come as best you can. Well, there will be a car, a doctor will come to you." We said goodbye to her. The fact is that I am a member of the Council of Relatives of ECB Prisoners, and I have been repeatedly interrogated by the KGB at the order of Baroshkin, the Commissioner for Religious Affairs of the Voroshilovgrad Region, with a warning to stop petitions for ECB prisoners. Now, as experience shows, they want to treat me forcibly and make me mentally ill. My children have been orphaned because their father cannot return home either. Dear friends, what is behind this challenge? From our fellow believers, from those who do not compromise, they make mentally ill people, this has happened many times, and I have nine children, what do they want to do with me? May the Lord keep from this. On the same day, I was forced to leave my home with 6 older children and an 81-year-old mother-in-law. I took the youngest with me - the six-year-old Anna, the four-year-old of Lyuba and seven months old Daniel... I pray to the Lord that He will incline your hearts so that none of you will remain indifferent to my beliefs. May 30, 1978. Signed by G. Yu. Ritikov.³⁶

Punitive medicine for the faithful of the ECB was used throughout the Soviet Union. Thus, on March 7, 1978, in the bulletin for 1979 entitled "Again psychiatric hospital," a statement was addressed to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union L. Brezhnev, Prosecutor General R. Rudenko, Minister of Health of the Soviet Union B. Petrovsky, the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, and the Council of Relatives of

³⁶Бюллетень № 54 Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан- баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1978), с. 11-12. [Bulletin № 54 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1978), p. 11-12].

Prisoners of the ECB from the faithful of the Moscow Church of the ECB was published. The statement said,

that the faithful of the Moscow Church of Evangelical Baptists, worried about the situation of Olga Ivanovna Sevalneva, born in 1928, a resident of the village of Fryazevo, Moscow region, Proletarskaya Street 10 b. (Noginsky district). O. Sevalneva is currently in the psychiatric hospital of the city of Noginsk in the women's department and is undergoing a medical examination, which has nothing to do with her illness. In addition to medical intervention, she is subjected to psychological and administrative influence by persons unknown to her. Strict control is established over its visitors and personally over its service personnel. She is given injections, which distort her jaw and she can't speak. It is clear that she is subjected to the methods of examination that are applied to patients with mental disabilities. She is asked questions related to church affairs. She is threatened and intimidated for refusing to testify. An unknown man in plainclothes, who interrogated her, threatened: "We will make you speak." She is kept separate from everyone and we are afraid for her physical and mental condition, because those drugs and methods of influence contribute to the loss of mental and nervous stability.³⁷

The KGB special services perfected inhumane tortures with the help of psychiatry with new, more advanced methods. The self-published literature also describes cases of forced treatment of believers in venereological dispensaries. In a statement addressed to the leadership of the state and the Committee for the Protection of Believers and Human Rights in the Soviet Union, the appeal was sent by a member of the Rostov Church of the Council of Churches of the ECB Lyubov Mikhailovna Ovchinnikova:

On May 7, 1978, at 7 o'clock in the morning, I came to the place of our Christian communion (Dalekoshidna Street, 5). At about 8 o'clock the police arrived, and we were all put on a bus and taken to the railway station... The next morning many of us were taken back to the railway station. I, Olga Shchukina, Svitlana Kulakova and brothers Mykola and Yakov and three other sisters-guests were taken to the venereological dispensary (Bauman Street, 70), which is guarded by police. We protested. To which the doctor said: "Do not be afraid. We will only check the skin, because you were in the cell for the night, and you do not have passports." We were called in turn to the doctor's office. And here we learned that they not only checked the skin, but also took blood from a vein. The doctor began to

³⁷Бюллетень № 64 Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1979), с. 13-14. [*Bulletin № 64 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1979), p. 13-14*].

persuade us again, leaving the office: “Do not be afraid. We will take your blood, because we have a ruling, and then you will be taken to identify yourself.” Then they began to take blood from a vein forcibly. When I entered the office, the doctor said, “Now let's check the skin. I asked, “Why?” - She replied: “We need it.” The doctor said: “You are healthy, but you were brought by the police and we must take blood.” After the gynecological examination, the doctor began to insist on taking blood again, although she already understood that I could not be ill. In the end, they forcibly took blood from my vein. Well, now you're going to the ward. I said again, “I'm fine, I'm not going to the ward.” To which the doctor threatened and said: “I'll call the guard, and he will take you...” That's how I got to the dermatological and venereological dispensary. On Wednesday, May 10, Tetyana Oleksandrivna Pernaki received me in her office and said: “I am your personal doctor, I will check you now.” “But they checked,” I said, and then she said again, “You're really healthy, you're a girl, and I don't know why you were put here.” I replied, “If I'm healthy, let me go.” Doctor: “I have no right to release you because you were brought by the police...” I lay with all the sick in one room, there were 13 of us, and I was healthy and believed that the Lord was with me, and He was protecting me. On May 19, I was invited to the office. Dr. T. A. Pernaki, filling out the certificate of incapacity for work series 31870 1068302, asked: “What should I write?” “Write what happened, that I was healthy and passed the examination.” But Dr. Pernaki wrote a fictitious diagnosis: “Allergic dermatitis.” Your sister is in the Lord, Lyuba. May 20, 1978. Bataysk. Home address: Bataysk city, Rostov region, Zavodskaya Street, 195. Lyubov Mikhailovna Ovchinnikova.³⁸

The KGB special services acted rather harshly against the faithful, especially in cases where they used all preventive measures. Taking to a psychiatric hospital was a reliable measure of so-called “re-education.” Instead, the ECB believers hoped that protection from the arbitrariness of local authorities and the KGB was possible only with the assistance of the state leadership. Thus, a letter from Zoya Ivanivna Runova, who lived at the address: Gorky region, Gorodets, street L-Chaikina, 7 to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union Brezhnev and the Prosecutor General Rudenko. In her address, the woman noted:

Dear rulers of our country! Enjoying freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the Soviet Union, I want to address you on this occasion. I am extremely outraged by the illegal actions of local authorities against my husband, Anatoliy Fedorovich Runov. At his place of work he was repeatedly summoned by the administration, the atheist Comrade

³⁸Бюллетень № 54 Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1978), с. 7-8. [Bulletin № 54 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1978), pp. 7-8].

Malinovkin and KGB officers. At the Gorodets Combine of Consumer Services (hereinafter – CCS), where my husband A. F. Runov works, the director of CCS Comrade V. Komlev, helped actively with sending Runov to a mental hospital not as a patient but as a believer in God. As a Christian. His transfer to the KGB by Comrade V. Komlev took place after he could not refuse to preach. CCS, KGB and psychiatrists, comrades Shatyn and Ionov fabricated together a fake document with a fictitious diagnosis of “schizophrenia.” In November 1976, a medical vehicle arrived to his work. Runov was called to V. Korenkov's office, where Sergeant Filatov was staying. Komlev turned to Runov and said: “I warned you not to preach, but you did not listen.” “You will now go with us to a psychiatric hospital: if you do not want to go alone, we will handcuff you.” “A few minutes later, several strangers came in and ordered to follow them.” He spent without 7 days two months in a mental hospital. “And in 1977, in the first days of November, an ambulance arrived at my place of residence (where Runov lived) to send him back to the psychiatric hospital.” September 1, 1978. Z. I. Runova.³⁹

Not only adult believers but also their children received threats from the mental hospital for the mentally ill. First of all, it concerned the children of believers whose parents were active in preaching. According to self-published sources, in addition to the usual threats, harassment, interrogation and beatings, there were cases when children were forcibly taken from religious parents and sent to orphanages and boarding schools for atheistic education. Thus, “in the city of Saki in 1973 brothers G. Romanovich and I. Zdorov were convicted, they were deprived of parental rights for raising their own children in a religious spirit, which did not only contradict the basic norms of universal morality, but was a violation of paragraph 9 of the Decree on the separation of church and state.”⁴⁰

Also in the 1980s, secondary school teachers continued to intimidate Christian children by sending them to boarding schools for mentally retarded children. According to Halyna Vovk, her father was a presbyter of the unregistered ECB community in Yahotyn, Kyiv Oblast, when she attended elementary school. Her first communist teacher, Valentyna Ivanivna Tkachenko, constantly threatened her with the Zguriv boarding school for mentally retarded children. “And when I refused to join the Lenin's organization ‘Zhovtenyata,’ I missed school that day, the teacher

³⁹Бюллетень № 55 Совета родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1978), с. 12-13. [Bulletin № 52 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1978), pp. 12-13].

⁴⁰Братский листок. №5. [Brotherhood sheet. №5. (1973. p. 2.)].

shouted at me: ‘I’m already preparing your documents for a boarding school for fools, your parents will not help you, because they are enemies of the Soviet power.’”⁴¹

Threats and real terms of imprisonment with deprivation of parental rights to their children were received by the believers of the Council of Churches of the ECB—until the end of the 1980s. Such an inhumane policy towards children deprived them of the right to a happy childhood. At that time, the Soviet media, misinforming the whole world and its citizens, spoke about the country of happy childhood – the Soviet Union.

Thus, the punitive and repressive system of the totalitarian system in the 1970-80s only improved the methods of struggle and destruction of their opponents, which included the faithful of the unregistered communities of the ECB in the USSR. With zeal, law enforcement officials and their analysts developed inhumane torture practices for dissidents.

Psychiatrists and their methods, based on the so-called “innovative” doctrine of A. Snezhnevsky's Moscow school about “slow schizophrenia,” now relied on psychiatrists and their methods. Anyone who expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of the ruling regime in any way could be diagnosed with “slow schizophrenia.”

Already in the early 1970s, reports of unjustified hospitalization of political and religious dissidents in psychiatric hospitals reached the West and the United States. To prevent an international scandal and strengthen its reputation in the world community, the totalitarian government and intelligence services decided to set up a group of propaganda specialists who developed a plan of major measures for 1978-1979 to expose the anti-Soviet false campaign of “political abuse of psychiatry.”

In particular, they made a number of fundamental decisions on this issue:

The Ministry of Health of the USSR has to intensify the work against the establishment of a committee of investigation of abuses in psychiatry, proposed by the Association of Psychiatrists of the United States. Send materials and documents exposing the defamatory nature of the anti-Soviet campaign regularly to the Executive Committee of the All-Union Association of Psychiatrists and National Associations of Psychiatrists. 2. More active use of trips abroad by Soviet psychiatrists to disseminate truthful information about the state of psychiatry in the USSR. To involve the psychiatrists of the capitalist countries, who are friendly to the USSR, in the joint development of topical problems in psychiatry. 3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

⁴¹Записано 20 грудня 2021 р. від Галини Вовк 1977 року народження, яка мешкає в м. Яготині Київської області. [Recorded on December 20, 2021 from GalinaVovk, born in 1977, living in Yahotyn, Kyiv region].

the USSR has to prepare and send to embassies and missions abroad materials exposing the defamatory anti-Soviet campaign on this issue conducted in the West. 4. The KGB of the USSR together with the Ministry of Health of the USSR has to obtain information on the fate of those who left the USSR being mentally ill, former citizens of the USSR, and use this information in accordance with medical ethics to expose defamatory allegations against Soviet psychiatry. 5. *The State Press Agency, State Television and Radio, TASS, Literary Newspaper, and New Time magazine* had to expose a defamatory campaign in the West about the use of psychiatry in the USSR “for political purposes” and to inform the foreign public about the abuse of psychiatry in capitalist countries. To publish materials on the humane treatment of the mentally ill in the USSR, their involvement in community service. 6. State Publishing House of the USSR has to prepare and publish in Russian and foreign languages scientific publications on the organization of psychiatric care for the population of the USSR and forensic psychiatric examination for referral to national associations of psychiatrists and prominent scientists of foreign countries.⁴²

On June 12, 1980, the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee approved a secret joint resolution of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers, signed by L. I. Brezhnev and O. M. Kosygin, “On Further Improvement of Psychoneurological Assistance to the Population.” The Soviet leadership decided to organize during 1981-1985 in all republican, regional, oblast centers and other large cities to provide emergency care to the mentally ill, in order to prevent possible socially dangerous actions on their part to organize psychiatric ambulance crews, and have the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics ensure the construction and commissioning of psychiatric hospitals with 59,300 beds in 1981-1990. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR (on the territory of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic) had to ensure the construction and commissioning of special hospitals, according to Annex 5.18. in 1981-1990. The Ministry of Medical Industry had to ensure the production of psychotropic drugs for the treatment of the mentally ill, according to Annex 7 in 1981-1985 and in 1990, and the development of technology for the manufacturing and development of industrial production of psychotropic drugs—similar to the most effective drugs in this group, manufactured abroad in 1981-1985.⁴³

Despite the measures taken by the leadership and special services of the USSR, which were comprehensive and debunked the so-called “myths of punitive medicine in the USSR,” the

⁴²A. С. Прокопенко, *Безумная психиатрия* [*Mad psychiatry*].

⁴³*Ibid.*

international community gathered a lot of real facts of inhumane torture of dissidents in medical institutions throughout the totalitarian state. Evidence that the Soviet leadership used psychiatric medicine as a means of combating the opposition was the “review of 27 suspected victims of abuse, whose names were reported to delegations by various human rights organizations, the US Helsinki Commission, and the State Department—which was conducted in 1989 by a delegation of American psychiatrists who visited the USSR. Clinical diagnosis was performed in accordance with American (DSM-III-R) and international (ICD-10, draft) criteria. The delegation also interviewed patients' family members. It concluded that in 17 of the 27 cases there were no clinical grounds for exculpation; in 14 cases no signs of mental disorders were detected. A review of all cases showed a high incidence of schizophrenia: 24 of 27 cases. The delegation's report noted that some of the symptoms included in the Soviet diagnostic criteria for mild (“slow”) schizophrenia and moderate (“paranoid”) schizophrenia were unacceptable for this diagnosis according to American and international diagnostic criteria: in particular, Soviet psychiatrists attributed painful ideas to the ideas of reform, “increased self-esteem,” and so on. Apparently, this group of patients surveyed is a representative sample of the many hundreds of other political and religious dissidents found insane in the USSR, mainly during the 1970s and 1980s.”⁴⁴

Conclusions

Thus, after analyzing sources and literature on the use of medical facilities for the mentally ill to imprison religious dissidents, it was found that the Soviet punitive system returned to the practice of active use of medicine for punitive purposes in the late 1950s, when political prisoners were rehabilitated. Those returning from prisons openly opposed the abuse of power, and the lack of freedom of conscience and religion. It is shown that the totalitarian regime prepared a theoretical and legal basis for psychiatric repression, which led to a list of restrictions on the so-called mentally ill: in professional opportunities and generally in capacity, correspondence, etc., even if they were not prosecuted. It is proved that in the 1970-80s, the punitive and repressive machine of the totalitarian system in the person of KGB leaders developed torture for dissidents. The main role in their subjugation relied on psychiatrists and their methods, based on the so-called “innovative” teaching of the Moscow School of Psychiatrists A. Snezhnevsky, on “slow

⁴⁴*Репресивна психіатрія [Repressive psychiatry].*

schizophrenia.” This diagnosis was recognized only in the USSR and satellite countries. Anyone who expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of the ruling regime in any way could be diagnosed with “slow schizophrenia.” It is established that in the late 1970s threats to be taken to the psychiatric hospital became systemic for members of the Council of Relatives of ECB Prisoners, who were involved in the publication of crimes committed by totalitarian authorities against humanity and freedom of conscience. It was found that information about the unjustified hospitalization of religious dissidents in psychiatric hospitals reached the West and the United States, so to prevent an international scandal, the CPSU Central Committee and special services began to take measures to prevent the leakage of “political abuse” in psychiatry. It is established that despite the actions taken, opposition believers and international human rights organizations have collected a lot of evidence from people who suffered inhumane torture in medical institutions throughout the communist state, which proved that the USSR’s use of repressive psychiatry in the 1970-80s became the main method of combating dissidents.

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