



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

THE FINAL ARREST OF VLADIMIR SHELKOV

[This is an Open Letter written to Leonid Brezhnev by Dina Vladimirovna Lepshin, daughter of Vladimir Shelkov, and wife of I. S. Lepshin telling what happened on March 14, 1978 at the time of the final arrest of Elder Shelkov.]

In this letter we are making it known that on 14 March this year a violent, despotic and cruel reprisal, a crying injustice, took place in our home. Vladimir Andreyevich Shelkov (83 years old), Chairman of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists, and Ilya Sergeevich Lepshin were seized and arrested.

Having broken into the house by means of deception, sending an unidentified mob of more than 20 so-called "official representatives," men from the KGB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office stated that they would be carrying out a search. With insults and threats, they pushed us all into one room (those of us at home were my very aged 83-year old father, my seriously ill husband, my two sisters-in-law, niece and aunt, and my two children). We were forbidden to make the least move into the rest of the house and, after an armed guard had been set over us, they proceeded to carry out the search.

The shame and horror of it! The things that went on then!

They brought in crow-bars, spades, tongs, axes, probes, powerful lights, cameras, firearms, walkie-talkie radios, motors and so on. They broke through the ceilings, demolished the chimneys, breached and took up the floors, hollowed out and pulled down walls, tearing down the plaster; they dug hugh, deep holes under the floors (up to 2 metres in depth), broke up the asphalt paving, dug up the whole court yard and breached ceilings, walls and floors in neighboring buildings. They investigated all cesspools and toilet bowls. In a word, it was as if a bomb had gone off. This act of plunder was presided over by German Vasilevich Ponomaryov, criminal procurator and junior counsellor of justice at the Tashkent Procurator's Office. All the others taking part in the pogrom categorically refused to give their names or official positions, though we asked them more than once to show us their identity cards. G. V. Ponomaryov, as the person in charge, also refused to name the others, saying, "What do you need their names for? So that you can write about it afterwards?" My father said, "Yes, we shall write about you, as all your actions are unjust and illegal."

The procurator would not allow any of the residents to be present in the rooms being searched. Even the "witnesses" were deprived of this legal right and only looked on from afar. Such an unceremonious, unjust ban harshly tramples under-foot the right to be present at all the investigator's activities during the search. When this illegality was pointed out to Ponomaryov, he rudely told us to mind our own business, as he was a lawyer and knew what he was doing.

Ponomaryov behaved insolently and despotically, bragging and blustering, saying,

"I just have to say the word and the world will turn upside down." And he kept showing he was boss. For him, no laws or limits existed - he was going to do what he wanted by force because he was in charge.

We protest against this illegal search, as the warrant was made out for only one person, but the search was carried out contrary to law and justice by other persons in violation of Art. 55 of the Soviet Constitution, concerning the inviolability of the home.

Our seriously ill mother, in whose name the search warrant was made out, was in the hospital at the time, in a hopeless condition. We had been taking turns to watch at her bedside around the clock, but during the four-day search we were categorically forbidden to go to her by procurator Ponomaryov.

When the hospital authorities sent a message saying that our mother was dying and that we should come at once, heartless, cruel Ponomaryov remained deaf to all our requests and pleas to be allowed to visit our mother. Only after prolonged and insistent demands was I taken to the hospital, accompanied by two procurators and two officials (whose names were not given), but I was not allowed to see my mother: Ponomaryov himself went in and obtained the required improved report on mother's satisfactory condition from the surgeon in charge. I was forcibly pushed back into the car; no one paid the slightest attention to my pleas and prayers to see my mother and I was taken back to the house, which was still being searched.

My husband, I. S. Lepshin, is seriously ill; he has to stay in bed and suffers from severe heart attacks and migraine every day, migraine and heart pain at the same time. During the search his state of health took a sharp turn for the worse, medical help was vitally necessary, but the inhuman, cruel, criminal-procurator Ponomaryov showed the icy coldness of his soul in his case as well, not allowing emergency aid to be called. However, when he saw that the matter might end badly, he summoned his own medical workers. After they gave him an injection, the sick man felt even worse. I was no longer capable of watching this kind of mockery and asked to see the ampoule from which the injection had been given, but the nurse and her gang rudely pushed me back.

After this my husband was put in an ambulance and driven off to an unknown destination. I only know that a KGB man got into the ambulance with him and began to try to persuade him to cooperate with them, promising him freedom. What cynicism!

We are extremely perturbed at the hard-hearted, inhuman behaviour of the KGB officials, their amorality and sadism. Who taught them to behave like this? After all this, how are we to understand your words, Leonid Ilyich?: "Respect for right and law must be each man's personal conviction. This applies especially to the actions of state officials. Attempts to get around the law or ignore it, no matter why, cannot be tolerated. Nor can we tolerate violations of individual rights or damage to citizens' self-respect. For us as communists, upholders of the highest human ideals, this is a matter of principle." (XXIV Congress of the CPSU, Moscow, 1971, p. 81)

Very eloquently said! But in practice, what you have so often condemned still goes on. Is this not just play-acting?

You, comrade Brezhnev, said in your speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU on 24 May 1977: "We know, comrades, that certain years after the adoption of the present Constitution were clouded by unlawful acts of repression, violations of the principles of socialist democracy, of the Leninist norms of Party and

state life. This was contrary to the provisions of the Constitution. The Party precisely condemns those practices and they must never be repeated."

One of the victims of that unlawful Stalinist repression was our father, who was sentenced three times for his purely religious life and his just and legal struggle against the atheist dictatorship, and who spent 23 years of his life in camps and prisons.

And now our father has been arrested again. My husband has also been arrested.

Is it turning out, then, that "certain" distant years in the past, which were clouded by illegal acts of repression contrary to the provisions of the Constitution, have today once again become acceptable after the adoption of the new Constitution?

In addition, during the search Ponomaryov threatened my father with special punishments, tortures and new experimental methods of interrogation, saying, "When he's there, with us, he'll tell us everything and pay for everything in full," "Now he'll start talking in a different style."

How long will these empty but profuse declarations continue - proclaiming that "tomorrow" will be better than "yesterday"? "Yesterday," all right, some comrades in some places were still "acting contrary to the provisions of the Constitution," but today, fortunately, the Party has condemned this and tomorrow it must not be repeated! Have faith, honest people, wait in hope, but meanwhile . . . the usual godless carousal continues - state atheist robbery in broad daylight, arrests and bloodshed. And is this arbitrary violence not more than a merely local affair?

All this has convinced us yet again that religion is a crime in our country and that believers are arch-criminals. Owning religious literature is forbidden by state godlessness. So Ponomaryov, looking at a pile of religious books, said, "I'm very hard on criminals, I hate them." This was while he was still in our house, long before the preliminary investigation - but we were already criminals! Is this not just arbitrary power?

We firmly protest against such violent acts and demand full observance of justice and the laws, as expressed in the teaching of Lenin, the Constitution of the USSR, international agreements, the Declaration of Human Rights and the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. Are all these humane and equitable international legal norms now being proclaimed and published abroad just so much empty air? We don't want to believe that.

This whole act of banditry, carried out by insolently shameless KGB men, went on for four days.

The search warrant stated that "the residence of V. F. Shelkova may contain stores of manuscripts, libellous literature, machinery designed to print or reproduce such literature, and objects and documents which may be relevant to the case."

As a result of the search, all purely religious literature was confiscated: Bibles psalms, books dealing with moral and spiritual subjects, religious poetry and tape-recordings, tape-recordings of sermons and psalms, and all our savings down to the last penny. As for libelous literature, for confiscation of which the warrant was made out, we have never had any. The confiscated literature was purely religious in content and was not directed against Soviet power.

We firmly protest against the unjust and baseless accusations that purely religious

literature is libellous in content, as it does not attack Soviet power but is directed only against the dictatorship of state atheism, which is in its own way the state religion of the godless class. State atheism now artificially broadens the category of crimes and makes criminals out of innocent religious citizens. State atheism initiates illegal repression of the freedoms of all freely believing Soviet citizens belonging to purely religious denominations: the freedoms of conscience and belief, with their indivisible attributes - freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly.

We firmly protest against the illegal, baseless arrest of the very old Vladimir Andreyevich Shelkov and the seriously ill Ilya Sergeevich Lepshin.

We protest against the illegal search.

We protest against the barbarous and criminal actions of those who carried out the search (or robbery).

We firmly protest against the illegal confiscation during the search of:

- 1) purely religious literature;
- 2) literature dealing with law and rights;
- 3) objects of material value;
- 4) savings;
- 5) other objects of material and cultural value (photographs, slides, tape-recordings, etc.).

We firmly protest at the cruel repression and violence directed against all dissent in thought and religion by the dictatorship of state atheism in our country.

Let us put an end to shameless state atheism in the USSR!

We decisively protest against the enslaved, weak position of the True and Free Christians of our land.

Down with the criminal Legislation on Religious Cults of 1929-75, which enslaves religious people!

We demand:

- 1) that the executioners threatening their chosen victims, the honest, innocent believers of our country, should be made to stay their hand;
- 2) that the unfortunate victims of the militant violence of state godlessness, V. A. Shelkov and I. S. Lepshin, should be released immediately. Criminal charges against them must be dropped;
- 3) that everything confiscated during the illegal, baseless search-robbery should be returned;
- 4) that we should be compensated and reimbursed for all the material damage done during the search;
- 5) that such harassment by force of religion and believers in the USSR should cease.

We are seriously concerned at the state of health of the very old V. A. Shelkov and the seriously ill I. S. Lepshin and we fear for their lives and safety. If either of them come to an untimely end (as Ponomaryov threatened during the search), the whole responsibility will be yours and we are informing you of this.

If our legal protests and rightful demands are not taken into consideration, we shall be forced to inform all socialist countries and world public opinion as a whole about this arbitrary act of violence.

With respect,

Dina Vladimiraovna Lepshina
Vladimir Vladimirovich Shelkov
(and all relatives of those arrested)
Tashkent, Soyuznaya 56

19 March 1978

(Religion in Communist Lands, Vol 8, #3 Autumn, 1980, pp. 210-213)

THE TRUE AND THE FREE

In the above noted journal - Religion in Communist Lands, pp. 201-210 - is to be found a documented article entitled - "V. A. Shelkov and the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists of the USSR." It is written by Marite Sapiets, a member of the Soviet Research Department of Keston College, England, and a specialist on the Baltic States. Several paragraphs from this documentary should prove of real interest to every concerned Seventh-day Adventist. The introductory paragraph reads:

The recent death in a Soviet labour camp of 84-year old Vladimir Shelkov, leader of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists, has highlighted the activities of this small Christian sect in the USSR. Although it was known in the West that it existed as a body separated from the officially recognized Adventist Church - it is periodically attacked in the Soviet anti-religious press - it was only in the 1970s that True and Free Adventist samizdat documents began to reach the West. Certain facts soon became clear from a study of these documents: there was an unofficial press, True Witness, run by the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists as a centrally-organized group; and a large number of documents, pamphlets and articles, even books, were being produced by this "publishing house" and distributed all over the USSR (as proved by the lists of material confiscated by the KGB during searches of Adventist homes as far apart as Riga and Samarkand). In fact, owing to the information provided in these documents about the history and doctrines of the True and Free Adventists, more is now known about them than about the "official" Adventists, who have no publication of their own. Even Soviet press articles tend to concentrate on attacking the "reformist" Adventist sect and largely ignore the registered Adventists, apart from pointing out that they have "realistically assessed their position."

As to why they call themselves The True and Free Seventh-day Adventists is explained by the researcher in these words:

This "remnant" are the "True and Free" Adventists, as they describe themselves: "True," because they are true to God's fourth and sixth Commandments, thus following the example of the early Christians (Shelkov even quotes the Church Fathers Origen and Tertullian in support of Christian refusal to bear arms); "Free," because they are free from what they see as slavish subservience to the state atheist

dictatorship imposed by registration of their communities (which thus bear "the mark of the Beast," as in Revelation 13:16). The "Beast" is identified by V. A. Shelkov in his writings with the principle of state religion or state atheism as such, wrongly made use of in the past by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and now incarnate in the materialistic atheist "religion" of the Soviet State. Shelkov contrasts this "impure State" with his ideal of the "pure State," in which faith and religious expression are left to individuals and voluntary religious organizations, while state power is confined to maintaining peace and law and order. (pp. 203-204)

The persecution, and the reason for it is given by Marite Sapiets, quoting from documents: (p. 205)

The True and Free Adventists have been savagely persecuted since the 1920s, partly because of their success in maintaining their own central All-Union Council and an independent press (established on organized lines by V. A. Shelkov in 1968), partly because of their pacifism and their stubborn insistence on refusing to work or attend schools on Saturdays. About half of the known Adventist prisoners of conscience have been imprisoned for refusing to bear arms or swear the military oath, although many have declared their readiness to serve in medical or construction units (not on Saturdays, however).

Like other banned religious groups (the True Orthodox and Uniates, for example), the True and Free Adventists were arrested en masse during the 1930s and 1940s as members of an "anti-Soviet organization." Two of their leaders, G. Ostvald and P. I. Manzhura, died in prison, "cheerful and unbowed in spirit," though "exhausted and tormented." V. A. Shelkov himself, ordained as a preacher in 1929, served three sentences (totalling 23 years) in camps and prisons: 1931-34 in the Urals, 1945-54 in Karaganda, and 1957-67 in the camps of the Far East, Siberia and Mordovia, "in conditions of violence, barbarity and horror, which cannot be described in words." Avraam Shifrin, a Jewish fellow-prisoner, wrote of the impression made on him by Shelkov in Siberia: the guards pushed into their cell "a tall, thin man about 60 years old, with an intense, expressive face, framed by a long, white beard. The beard was so white that it looked unreal in the middle of our filthy cell. But even more striking than his beard were the gentle old man's eyes: they were dark and peaceful and literally radiated tenderness." He goes on to describe Shelkov's method of argument: quiet and tolerant, but knowledgeable and insisting on the final victory of good over evil.

"Shelkov's entire guilt lay in his rejection of war. Because of this the Soviet authorities feared his influence on young people: as he had deep faith and education he was able to persuade people he was right."

The trial and the trial procedures of Shelkov and four others at Tashkent are most revealing - "The abandonment of any pretense of legality or justice during the trial was excessive even for a Soviet court and seems to have shocked the officially appointed defense counsel, G. Spodik, who defied Judge N. S. Artemov in insisting that the defendant's words should be fully and correctly recorded instead of being deleted on the judge's orders." (p. 206)

One section of the indictment against Shelkov accused him of "joining with the illegal Baptist sect and the so-called 'dissidents' - such as Sakharov, Solshenitzyn, Orlov, Ginzberg, Khodorovich, Grigorenko and others." Shelkov had written to President Carter appealing for help in releasing Yuri Orlov and Alexander Ginzberg, characterizing them as "self-sacrificing, selfless men, with no thought of their own profit," who had contended for the suffering families of prisoners. However, he did not accept their philosophy as the solution of the problems which faced them, but rather proclaimed the necessity of the "pure" religion, unattached to nationality or State. Andrie Sakharov came and attended Shelkov's trial from outside the closed courtroom. He appealed to the Pope, and heads of State who were party to the Helsinki agreements, and to world opinion, condemning the sentence passed on Shelkov as "cruelty surpassing all norms of decency." (p. 207)

No voice was raised by the hierarchy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington on behalf of Shelkov. Wounded by the "bandits" of atheism, and placed in a camp in frigid Siberia to die, the "high priests" thought it best to pass by on the other side rather than defile their garments before the Soviet government by protesting the brazen inhumanity committed against Shelkov. But are not their garments stained with the blood of Shelkov, and how shall they answer in the day of final accounts?

The attitude of the Adventist hierarchy toward the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists in the Soviet Union is discussed by the researcher. It reads:

Western Adventist leaders have visited the Soviet Union, participating in "official" Adventist services in Odessa, Tallinn and other towns, but have not attempted to establish contacts with the True and Free Adventists. They are largely of the opinion that the True and Free Adventists in the USSR are an offshoot of a German reformist group that split away from the central Adventist Church during the First World War, mainly over the issue of military service. Shelkov did indeed condemn military service with reference to the 1914-18 war but he also emphasized that his objection is to bearing arms, not to military service as such (which is the same as the normal Adventist position). It is difficult for western Adventists to form a clear view of the True and Free Remnant as they have not in general studied the documents by the latter which have reached the West, but have relied instead for their information on official Adventist spokesmen.

The recent decision of the Soviet government to allow two representatives of the officially recognized Adventist Church to attend a meeting of the International Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Executive Committee in the USA may be an attempt to counter the publicity achieved by the True and Free Adventists for their accounts of anti-religious repression in the USSR. M. P. Kulakov¹ one of the Soviet Adventist delegates, told American Adventists that V. A. Shelkov and the True and Free Remnant held unorthodox views and were not really Adventists, that Shelkov had represented himself as a new "prophet," and that he had rejected contact with the official Adventist body. Similar attempts were made in the 1960s to cast doubts on the credentials of "unofficial" Baptist spokesmen by means of the "official" Baptist statements. It

is to be hoped that international Adventist opinion will suspend judgment on the True and Free Seventh-day Adventists in the USSR until more of the facts are known. (pp. 208-209)

In the October, 1979, issue of "Watchman, What of the Night?" we discussed the reaction of the hierarchy of the Church to the trial and sentencing of Shelkov. We reproduced a "form letter" prepared by Elder Alf Lohne which stated the official position of their intention "to pass by on the other side." However, there is still left unexplained certain facts:

- 1) Elder Alf Lohne on a trip to Russia in 1977 made arrangements for Elder Pierson's officially recognized "state visit" which took place in the Fall of 1978. Elder Lohne visited Tashkent (home area of Elder Shelkov) because "there were many believers" in the district. (Review, July 14, 1977, p. 4)
- 2) After Elder Lohne's visit, Shelkov was arrested as described in the first article of this thought paper.
- 3) Approximately the same time, one of the leaders of the recognized Adventist Church in Russia was in Washington to finalize on the trip of Pierson to Russia accompanied by Lohne.
- 4) Pierson on his trip never went near Tashkent where Shelkov was in prison awaiting trial, nor did he speak in his behalf to any Russian government leader. Why did he avoid Tashkent where there were so many believers? Why did he not try to visit Shelkov in prison as commended by Jesus Christ?
- 5) After the "state" visit by Pierson and Lohne, the disgraceful trial of Shelkov took place in the Spring of 1979.

If this sequence of events was only a "happenstance," then it stands as unique in the annals of history. There has been no explanation of this unusual set of circumstances by the hierarchy and their reluctance to speak up for a faithful minister of the faith. The latest word from Washington is that the leadership plan to organize a new world Division composed of Adventist churches in USSR recognized by the atheistic State.

It must be kept in mind that an editorial in The Toronto Sun (July 9, 1980) stated:

Put succinctly and as dispassionately as possible, it is inconceivable that travelling priests and clergy from the Soviet Union are anything but KGB-sponsored. That is not to say they are all KGB officers, but they are informers, propagandists, talent scouts, recruiters, watch-dogs, or whatever for the KGB. (p. 10.)

This is the type of "clergy" we now have on the General Conference Committee in the person of Kulakov, and the type of persons we welcomed to the General Conference Session of Dallas. And the fact is, and which dare not be overlooked, that so long as the laity support the hierarchy with their tithes and offerings, they are party to this situation.

¹In the Adventist Review, Nov. 8, 1979, p. 3, Elder Alf Lohne is pictured introducing Kulakov and another representative of the Atheistic State recognized Adventist Church to the delegates attending the 1979 Annual Council.

✓

A NEW FORM OF ADVENTIST WORSHIP

In Paulin Hall on the Pacific Union College campus, an early morning worship service conceived and conducted by Elder Wayne Judd of the College Theological faculty was held.¹ Its theme was - "That They May Be One." An outline was given each attendant so that he or she could respond in a predesignated way to the various sections of the worship service. While space will not permit us to reproduce the whole of the liturgy, we shall copy certain sections which indicate the ecumenical and doctrinal perceptions behind this new form of Adventist worship. One section will be in its entirety, and the other in part:

Proclamation of God's Grace

Pastor: I ask you before God: Do you turn from your sins to God?

Congregation: We do.

Pastor: Do you trust in Jesus Christ, and Him alone, as your Saviour?

Congregation: We do.

Pastor: Do you intend to rely upon the Holy Spirit to help you be like Jesus?

Congregation: Yes, we do.

Pastor: Upon this your commitment, know that the death of the Son of God upon the cross has paid the penalty for all your sins. He, the righteous One, accepted into His body the sins of the unrighteous. He, the righteous One, has transferred His robes of righteousness to you, the unrighteous. You are clean. You are holy. You are saints of God!

Corporate Testimony of Faith

[After individual testimony first by the men, and then by the women, all recited together the following:]

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is our testimony.

After the sermon, followed by the taking of the offering, and the singing of the Doxology, the General Prayer for the Worship Service was offered. However, it too, had an introductory congregational response, first by the men, followed by the women, and then all together. During the General Prayer, each time the pastor (Wayne Judd) said - "Let us pray" - which according to one observer was "numerous" during the prayer, the congregation was suppose to respond - "Lord have mercy." This was followed by a section termed "The Reaffirmation of the Great

Commision, a closing hymn, and the Benediction.

In reading through this whole liturgy, one has the feeling that we are not only drawing closer to the Anglicans (Church of England) in our doctrinal beliefs as noted by Bishop Robert Terwilliger in his comments to the delegates at the Dallas Session (Adventist Review, May 1, 1980, p. 16); but we are now formulating an order of worship that will bring us into one liturgically with this "bridge" church to Rome.

But what can be said about these ecumenical concepts stated in this new liturgy when at Dallas, the delegates voted as the belief of the Church that "The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." (ibid., p. 25)

✓

SDA PRESS RELEASE

A group of concerned Adventist business men and women have joined together in and Adventist Layman Council for the purpose of investigating and exposing the financial intrigues of the hierarchy, and how they have invested the trust funds given by unsuspecting laity. One statement to be found in the "green" release reads:

A private investigator, hired by John Felts, an Adventist layman of Ooltewah, Tennessee, and a title researcher, later commissioned by Sidney Allen, a teacher at Redlands, California, revealed that unsecured (i.e. extremely soft) loans to [Donald J.] Davenport [MD] by the Georgia-Cumberland Conference while [Elder Desmond] Cummings was president there, had been made in the amount of Three Million Dollars. . .

Knowledgeable estimates of the total amount of consecrated money which was advanced to Davenport in loans from Adventist organizations range from Twenty to Sixty Million Dollars. These consecrated, donated dollars are composed of both Conference-owned funds [tithe and offerings] and funds held in trust for Conference members who have made annuity agreements.

Write for your copy to P. O. Box 1790, Collegedale, TN, 37315. Ask for the "green" issue, and tell them you learned about this Release from the Adventist Laymen's Foundation's monthly publication.

✓

"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?" IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE ADVENTIST LAYMEN'S FOUNDATION OF MISSISSIPPI, INC., P. O. BOX 178, LAMAR, AR. 72846, USA. (It is free upon request.)