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Mollie Steimer
Statement
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Statement

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Russia of today is a great prison where every individual who is known not to be in full agreement with the Communists is spied upon and booked by the “GPU” (Tcheka) as an enemy of the government. No one can receive books, newspapers, or even a plain letter from his relatives without control of the censor. This institution which keeps the people in absolute ignorance of all news detrimental to the interests of the Bolshevists is now better organized and more strict than was the famous Black Cabinet under Czar Nicholas II.

The prisons and concentration camps of Moscow, Petrograd, Kharkov, Odessa, Tashkent, Vologda, Archangel, Solovki, and Siberia are filled with revolutionaries who do not agree with the tyrannical regime enforced by the Bolsheviks. The inhuman treatment that those people receive at the hands of their jailers can have only one purpose: that is, to wear them out physically and mentally so that their lives may become a mere burden to them.

To mention a few instances within my personal knowledge:

Maria Korshunova, a young Anarchist, while under arrest in Petrograd, was continually dragged from one jail to another. At the

end of 1922 she received a sentence of ten years' solitary confinement and was taken from Petrograd to the Moscow jail where she was supposed to serve her sentence. But she had not been there a month when she was suddenly carried off to Cheliabinsk, Siberia. Here our young comrade thought she would be let alone for a time. But no sooner had she received the first letter from her mother when again she was shipped off to another place, this time to Vitatka, which is one of the worst prisons in Russia, notorious for filth and starvation conditions, and, what is worst of all, for the outrageous conduct of the men keepers — "comrades", they are called — towards their helpless victims, the women prisoners. Since Maria Korshunova was transferred to that place of torture, no letter has been received from her and no news about her has reached the outside world.

This comrade is well known among the Petrograd workers as a woman revolutionary of great idealism and sincerity. She has often been compared with Sofia Perovskaya.

Another example:

Two years ago, Maria Veger, an Anarchist of many years standing, and a teacher by profession, was arrested as a result of a search in her home, where literature consisting of the London Freedom and Arbeiter Freund, the Freie Arbeiter Stimme (N.Y.), and some books on Anarchism (were found. Ed.)

After being held for several months in the Moscow prison, where she became sick with the tsinga (scurvy), Maria finally received a sentence of two years' exile in Archangel in the North. The official document which was handed to her read: "Two years exile in the city of Archangel for counter-revolution."

In Archangel, Maria Veger underwent extreme suffering. Malaria, a common disease in this swamp region, was added to scurvy. When an opportunity afforded itself, Maria escaped and returned to Petrograd. But she did not remain long at liberty. In July 1923, when 41 Anarchists were arrested in Petrograd, Maria Veger was among them. The agents of the "GPU" treated her with

special brutality. Whereas all the other prisoners, of whom I was one, were kept at the headquarters of the "GPU" for four days before being transferred to another prison, Maria was held there for nearly two weeks.

The prison of the "GPU" is not the heavenly home of leisure the Bolsheviks and their agents would have the world believe. I was locked up in a cell that was a closed box. It was provided with a small hole the size of a drinking cup through which air is supposed to enter, but no air enters because the corridor into which this hole leads has no ventilation. A faint lamp burns day and night in this closed box, causing severe pain in the eyes. There is nothing but a wooden bench to lie upon; lice, bedbugs and other vermin eat your flesh and make life a burden to you. The quiet of this dim, evil-smelling cell is broken only by the ridicule and brutality of a "comrade" jail-keeper.

The "GPU" representatives knew what these conditions meant to the sick Maria Verger, and they purposely tortured her. Each day she was called to the office and asked to give them "information" for which they promised to remove her to another jail where life was not so miserable. When finally convinced that she would rather die than give lying "information" about her comrades, the Tchekists ordered Maria Veger transferred to the "Home of Preliminary Detention," where she was strictly isolated and kept on the regime of the "common criminal."

The treatment in my own case was far from being endurable. Like the other politicals, I was denied the most elementary prison rights, scoffed at and ridiculed by the prison administration as well as by the higher authorities. For speaking to Maria when seeing her through the window, I was threatened with the dungeon. Being unable to endure such an existence any longer, denied a trial, and held under criminal conditions, we declared a hunger-strike, demanding better conditions and the right of visits. On the seventh day of our hunger-strike, after the prison doctor stated that we could not hold out any longer and that we must be forcibly fed,

one of the “GPU” chiefs visited us and granted our demands. But before they were granted another comrade prisoner of mine was called by the prosecuting attorney and asked if he could not use his influence with me to induce me to eat. He said he could not. The prosecuting attorney then said to him angrily: “Then she will be forcibly fed. Does she think she is dealing with the American police?” He spoke as if the brutal methods of the American police were tenderness itself compared with what he and his comrades intended to do.

The physical state of Comrade Mara Veger was becoming worse every day, but the prison doctor said he could do nothing for her under the conditions. In spite of the fact that she was seriously ill, Maria was finally condemned to three years in exile in the Solovetz Monastery, the dreaded prison situated on an island in the White Sea, to which boats go but twice a year. This penalty amounted to a death sentence, considering the condition of our comrade.

On September 16th Maria was sent away to serve the term imposed upon her, but a week afterwards word came that she was being sent back to Petrograd. After a two days’ struggle with the “GPU” officials, I finally obtained permission to see her.

Burning with a high fever, and hardly able to stand on her feet, Maria related to me the story of her journey which I shall tell here in brief:

When brought to the Vologda prison, which is half way from Petrograd to Archangel, the local “GPU” declared that Maria would not be sent any further, because all prisons and concentration camps of Archangel and vicinity (including Solovetz Monastery) were so overcrowded that the local authorities had resolved to accept no more prisoners. Maria was kept in Vologda for several days, and then sent back, together with a number of other politicals. She was shuffled back and forth, various prisons refusing to accept her for lack of space. No political knows where he will really serve his terms of exile, and none of his friends know.

I had an opportunity to talk to Maria Veger. She made no complaint about her own miserable condition, but she spoke of what should be done for those prisoners who had just been returned to Petrograd. She was particularly anxious about the fate of one woman who had been refused a visit of her seven-year-old boy, and asked that everything possible be done for her, as the woman was physically too weak to endure the suffering to which she was subjected. We got no further in our conversation because a guard compelled us to terminate the “visit.”

Comrade Veger parted from me with the following words:

“Tell the comrades abroad to organize and unite all their forces. Let them not be discouraged by the situation in Russia. On the contrary, tell them they must make use of our experience and be well prepared for the coming world revolution.”

I left her with a heavy heart. While the Communists are issuing long protests against the persecution of political prisoners (they mean only Communists) in “capitalist” countries, they themselves are imposing savage sentences upon their opponents and are forcing many of our best comrades to die slowly in the jails and concentration camps, and hundreds of others to suffer the bitter pangs of hunger and the unbearable cold of northern Russia and Siberia. The real revolutionaries of Russia today are exiled and cut off from the entire world, forbidden the right of communication with any loving person except the damnable spies who are forever shadowing their footsteps.

(Signature) Mollie Steimer