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Letter of protest to the Political Red Cross

Yakov Voykhanskiy

July 1927

The anarchist *Yakov Moiseyevich Voykhanskiy* was born in 1897. On July 3, 1927, he was arrested in Moscow. Upon being released, he wrote an appeal for help to the organization Pompolit (Aid to Political Prisoners). A quasi-independent agency, previously known as the Political Red Cross, Pompolit tried to help victims of the Soviet justice system on moral or humanitarian grounds.

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Retrieved on 4th June 2022 from www.katesharpleylibrary.net
Translated by Malcolm Archibald. Biographical information
provided by Anatoly Dubovik.

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[July, 1927]

On July 3, 1927, around 8 p.m., I was removed from a streetcar and taken to the OGPU unit in the Kursk railway station [Moscow]. Why I was taken to the OGPU rather than the police station, I don't know. I was taken there for not being able to pay the one ruble fine for getting on the tram while it was moving. Placed in a cell, I was subject to a savage beating by railway agents of the GPU, assisted by two policemen. Covered with blood, I was stomped on while being cursed and called names

like “scumbag” and “swine.” They tore off my belt and used it to tie my hands behind my back, causing me great pain. To my cries and protests, they sneered: “We beat scum like you when you’re flat on the floor.” I was almost suffocated while seven people participated in this unrestrained beat-down. I clearly remember being piled on, kicked with the heels of boots, and being choked. I didn’t hear a single protest from those present in the cell.

The initiator of this terrible beating was an agent who pounded with his fist on the table before it started, shouting and threatening me. He said he was a Party member and that he would give me “such a thrashing that I would be aching all over.” This infuriated me. I also pounded with my fist on the table and declared, firstly, that he was soiling the banner of communism instead being a role model for everyone, and secondly, in tsarist times they couldn’t intimidate me, and that it was unlikely that I could be intimidated now. I announced that I was a staunch anarchist and demanded immediate release because I was in a hurry to get home.

The response I received was that all anarchists are gangsters, to which I answered: “If I’m a gangster, then you’re ten times more a gangster.” “Ah, now I’m going to show you what a gangster I am.” And the gang assault described above began. After the beating I was rushed to the Police Station № 33 in a cab, where they untied my hands, which were burning with pain. They gave me valerian and drew up a protocol which they didn’t even give me to read, and which they didn’t require me to sign.

When my things were returned to me, I demanded that a complaint be drawn up about my beating and that my cap, covered with blood, be entered in evidence. But I was told by the guard on duty that while my beating was illegal, it was a matter of a “very unfortunate misunderstanding,” and that the police could not draw up a complaint against the GPU, who were

their superiors. And, swollen from the beatings of the GPU, I was released, with profuse apologies.

It is my wish that those in positions of responsibility deal with this issue with the utmost impartiality and, realizing its importance, take the most energetic and decisive measures to eradicate this nightmarish situation to which any person is exposed, any person at all.

[Signed Ya. M. Voykhanskiy]

Voykhanskiy was active in the underground anarchist movement in the USSR in the 1920s–1930s. In particular, he was one of the organizers of the “Union of Working Class Anarchists,” active in various cities of the USSR in 1928 – 1930. A proponent of the Platform of Petr Arshinov and Nestor Makhno, he was frequently arrested by the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD. In 1937 he was arrested in Moscow and sentenced to the VMN (Highest Measure of Punishment). However, he wasn’t shot, for he died in a psychiatric hospital in Kazan on January 1, 1940.