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Ukrainian Human Rights Organization (1971–1972)

Vasyl Derevinskyi

Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture, Ukraine
Department of political science
Dr. (History), Associate Professor
E-mail: dev1@ukr.net

Abstract

The author examined the peculiarities of creation of the first Ukrainian organization of human rights, which was created at the beginning of 1970-s – Public protection Committee Nina Strokata, on the basis of different materials and documents, which are kept in The State Archives Security Service of Ukraine. There was found out the reasons and the peculiarities of creation, the aim and the task of the program and the first human rights measures of the Committee.

Keywords: Committee; human rights; organization; resistance movement; society.

Introduction

In the process of idea direction and group growth of the Ukrainian resistance movement at the beginning of 1970-s appeared the need of creation of human rights organization, which would watch the abidance oh human rights in the subdued Ukraine. The arrest of one of the famous members of resistance movement Nina Strokata led to the creation of the first human rights association – Public protection Committee Nina Strokata. The history of the Committee creation and the attempt to develop its activities is still unfamiliar and not fully investigated question. It is briefly discussed among other questions in the investigations which were dedicated to the examination of the activities of the Ukrainian resistance movement in 1960 – 80-s.

The investigation of the peculiarities of the first human rights organization creation in Ukraine at the beginning of 1970-s is urgent and important as for history and as for society, concerning that this topic is not deeply and diversely investigated. That's why in the very article the premises, the reasons and the time of creation are discussed, the program aim and task are analyzed, the prepared documents are provided and the first human rights actions of the members of the Committee are carried out. The importance of this work is that it will attract attention of the scientific community to this topic, and allow to broaden the knowledge about it and foster its further scientific study.

Materials and methods

The main source for writing this article are archival materials stored in the State Archives Security Service of Ukraine. Valuable information was discovered in the collected works of V. Chornovil and several scientific papers and periodicals.

The important methodological function in the investigation is dedicated to general scientific principle of the objectivity of the scientific research. The systematic approach is used during the studying of the very material with the aim to avoid biased selection of facts and its biased interpretation. The vital importance is given to the principal of history, which demands empirical materials in the analysis taking into account a certain historical situation. The researched materials are also worked up in the light of critical principal. The subject of the investigation is worked up with the help of problematic-chronological, comparative-historical, logical and retrospective methods.

Discussion

At the beginning of 1970-s the situation of those who were trying to get the right for free development of personality and national community in the USSR, the government strengthened

punitive actions. The amount of people who were taking part in public events gradually was decreasing, huge petition campaigns turned into the business of one person. Many people lost the faith in expediency of that activity which did not bring fast results. The letters and appeals to authorities about breaking human rights were left, as a rule, without any answers, instead people who had wrote them were victimized. The last big petition campaign of that time, the active organizer of which was V. Chornovil, provoked damnation of V. Moroz, even though mobilized many people to the open speech against commanding self-will but did not changed the fate of V. Moroz.

The present circumstances forced to seek new forms of struggle. According to Chornovil, the relevant idea of creation of the organizational structure of human rights would carry out the activity to defend human rights. Similar ideas were taking place in other republics, in particular at the beginning of 1970-s the Lithuanian Catholic Human Rights Movement was formed [1, 63].

V. Chornovil, in particular, was imbued with this project when in Moscow in 1969 was created the Initiative human rights defense group in the USSR, and in 1970 A. Sakharov, A. Tverdokhlebov and V. Chelidzhe created the Human Rights Committee in the USSR, which became a branch of International League for Human Rights in June, 1971. The fact of their existence clarified that the people's applications which were united in the organizational structure with the declared aims was more effective than piles of collective applications or appeals from individual person with the same problem [1, 150]. The community from both sides of "the Iron Curtain" accepted stated members of organization as authorized representatives of the human rights movement. So, people addressed them to jural advice and help. In virtue of disclosure of information on creation human rights organizations, the government did not dare apply victimization against them at once. Taking into account that such famous people as academician A. Sakharov, associate member of VN USSR I. Shafarevych, O. Solzhenitsyn and others were the members of Committee of the Human Rights in the USSR, so, its figures were not arrested till the middle of 1970-s. The liberal attitude of the government towards the formation of human rights structures was explained by the very fact of their accrual in the capital of the Soviet Union, where foreign correspondent centers and embassies of different countries were situated. In Ukraine, especially in Lviv, to create similar the human rights organization was extraordinary and dangerous affair at that time, because of the other level of the government attitude to oppositionists. In I. Dziuba's opinion, there were not in Ukraine "such people who could join the Committee and KGB would consider them" [8, 311].

V. Chornovil understood that on such conditions in Ukraine, those who would create the human rights structures would be arrested at once. That's why his plans on creating the human rights organization were well-considered and challenging for the government. With the help of this plan he was trying to get new amount of space for the activities of dissidents in Ukraine. V. Chornovil started to create the human rights organization after the arrest of one of the most active participants of the resistance movement N. Strokata from Odessa at the beginning of December of 1971, who was the wife of S. Karavanskiy, who was arrested for the first time for the participation in OUN, then for speeches against russification and political arrests of 1965, and for the third time still being in Volodymyr prison, for the preparing the article on the basis of collected testimonies of convicted participants in execution of Polish officers in Katyn. When they were sentencing S. karavansiy for the third time in April, 1971, the court adopted the decision-threat for his wife N. Strokata for her persistent defense of her husband. Soon she was dismissed from work and arrested.

V. Chornovil attracted Iryna Kaly nec for the organizational work in the creation of the human rights organization after preparing the documents for the program of association. Considering social-political reality in Ukraine, they decided to announce the creation of public organization which would defend the rights of N. Strokata and postponed the perspective idea of creating wide organization which would defend human rights in Ukraine. The created Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata should have been self-governing Ukrainian organization but not a branch of the Moscow human rights organization, however it was foreseen to involve people from Lviv, Kyiv, Odessa and Moscow in its structure. The first two documents of the committee, as it turned out the only ones, were "Application form on creating Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata" and certificate "Who is N.A. Strokata (Karavanska)". The documents were united under one name "Bulletin №1", and planning to issue new materials gained during the process of investigation in the next bulletins [15, p. 124].

December 21, 1971, which was stated in the bulletin, was considered as a date of creation of the Committee. This was claimed by Iryna Kalynech at the questioning of KGB: "Bulletin №1" I consider as an affirmation of such committee' [15, p. 122]. In "Bulletin №1", which was confiscated by the workers of KGB, was a presence of changing the date from the 21 into the 30 of December by pencil and the testimony by I. Kalynech that V. Chornovil should have sent the "Bulletin" to higher authorities at the beginning of January, 1972, which led to the thinking of Lviv famous historian Yu. Zaicev that "the creation of the Committee could be dated to the third decade of December, 1971". However, at the same time he writes that December 21, 1971 is considered to be the date of creation of the Committee, which is fixed in the foreign and home publications, and also in his own one [17, p. 34]. We can make a conclusion from the testimony by V. Chornovil at the questioning of KGB that after the adopting of positions of December 21, 1971 "Bulletin №1" and Committee appeared, and later he finished working on the documents of "Bulletin" and his final version appeared in January 8, 1972 [10, l. 244].

As a result from "Application form on creating Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata", the members of the Committee started organized actions on defense of haunted citizens on political motifs, considering that the number of court haunting for free speech and defense of convictions increased. Such actions of the government had anti-constitutional character and followed by big amount of violations of current legislation and contradicted Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Pact of Social and Political Rights, which were adopted by UN General Assembly and ratified government of USSR [14, 925]. The members of the Committee started to defend N. Strokata considering that organized actions of society could bring a big contribution in moral conditions of Soviet society as her arrest, in their opinion, was very serious incident of human rights violation. Because the case was about an arrest of a person who was famous for defending of sound principals of social life and social justice and who did not give up her husband, who was a political prisoner despite big pressure but defending his interests.

To clarify the relevance of creation Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata, in the application she was compared to black-American activist Angela Devis, who was arrested for trumped-up charges of transferring weapon to the prison in the USA. The Soviet mass media regularly informed about her and the activity of allowed by the American government Committee on defense of A. Devis. That's why the organizers of Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata thought that it had a right to exist in the USSR, as its creation and activities did not contradict the Soviet legislation and it was coordinated with approvals of the Soviet Union Declaration of Human Rights and Pact of Social and Political Rights.

After the arrest of V. Chornovil, during the investigation he insisted on legal creating of the Committee and demanded to add to the materials of the investigation an application of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (because of absence of Supreme Constitutional Court) that the creation of such public committees contradicted USSR Constitution and the UN documents ratified by the Soviet Union: Declaration of Human Rights and Pact of Social and Political Rights; application on constant notifications to CPSU by "Pravda" newspaper about creation, existence and defendable action of numerous committees on defense of Angela Devis in the USA and in many other countries; application on that if the arrested members of the Committee of Human Rights in the USSR in Moscow, in that case he demanded an explanation why the Public Committee was acting at liberty for two years creating the precedent of legality and constitutionality of such actions [9, l. 332]. Chornovil did not get the reply to his petition.

The task of the created committee was to collect the facts, documents and materials which were connected with Nina Strokata and her criminal case; to acquaint its content with state and law institutions and representatives of society; to organize the petition campaign on the defense of N. Strokata; to collect money to help N. Strokata and her husband; to achieve legitimate rights and publicity of N. Strokata's trial, and in the case of sentencing to appeal it with arguments in the cassation and other institutions. There was stated in the application that during the case thewe could be used not mentioned defending measures for N. Strokata. If all legitimate measures did not give proper results the Committee would have to appeal to the Human Rights Committee UN. Then, when N. Strokata was set free the Committee would self-destruct.

In the application the society was called for active support of the Committee efforts. Those who wanted to appeal to the Committee with questions connected with the case of N. Karavanska,

and also provide the copies of appeals or objections, were asked to send all of this to one of the provided in the application addresses of Committee members.

There was planned that the members of the Committee would be: I. Kalynets and V. Chornovil from Lviv, I. Franko's granddaughter, Z. Franko and famous writer I. Dziuba from Kyiv, close friend of N. Strokata sailor of tugboat "Record" L. Tymchuk from Odessa and historian P. Yakir and famous human right activist L. Alieksieyeva from Moscow [7, l. 237; 9, l. 332].

M. Plakhotniuk took the documents of the Committee to Kyiv and held the talks with certain people on Committee membership. On the request of V. Chornovil Ya. Kendzior joined this case. Having acquainted with the application Z. Franko refused to take part in this activity considering it unreasonable to create the Committee for defense of only one person, and to her mind, the Committee should have been a branch of Moscow Committee led by A. Sakharov [6, l. 254-260]. I. Dziuba did not support the idea of creating the Committee stating that when he found it necessary he would write something in defense of N. Strokata. And he also negatively expressed his opinion concerning the idea of Z. Franko to create a branch of Moscow Committee in Ukraine, because to his mind, the practice showed that Sakharov Committee did not want to defend cases of Ukrainian political prisoners [8, l. 311]. Z. Franko also talked to M. Kotsiubynska, I. Svitlychniy, Ye. Sverstiuk, H. Kotsur, who also spoke negatively about Committee creation. I. Svitlychniy said that this idea was unacceptable and such committee would not help N. Strokata [8, l. 309-310]. Such refuses struck V. Chornovil, especially the refuse by Z. Franko, a granddaughter of I. Franko, hoping and considering that her last name would serve as a defense from repressions and as a link between Committee and society at home country and emigration [5, p. 493].

V. Stus, unlike top sixties in Kyiv, threw off the cautions and agreed to become a member of the Committee as a representative from Kyiv. Explaining his action he stated that "he was considering it his moral duty to help a person somehow being in trouble and deprived of any help... I personally said to contact officials with a request for compliance with the law during the investigation and possible trial... I would consider myself a scoundrel if I were utterly indifferent to the fate of lonely outcast woman who was in misery" [15, p. 204]. A 67-year-old Kyiv citizen O. Meshko expressed her desire to join the Committee, whose surname was included in one of the options of the Committee application. But considering her age and a threat to be arrested she was refused to join the Committee [15, p. 96].

S. Hulyk went to discuss the entry of Muscovites to the Committee at the request of V. Chornovil. In Moscow they treated the Ukrainian request restrained considering that something similar could be initiated only by Moscow [17, p. 34]. Figures of the Human Rights Committee in the USSR did not support the activity of the Ukrainian Committee, and L. Alieksieyeva refused to join it [12, p. 288]. But P. Yakir and V. Krasin agreed to become members of Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata. They agreed to spread the "Bulletin" and to give the information about creation of the Committee to foreign mass media after having instructions from Ukraine [7, l. 237].

L. Tymchuk from Odessa agreed to join the Committee, who delegated the right to put his signature on any necessary documents on his behalf. Thus, after a short preparatory period Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata was created, which consisted of seven people. But the Committee could not start the planned activity because of large-scale arrests of opposition figures in January of 1972. All the members of the Committee lost their freedom but L. Tymchuk. V. Chornovil, I. Kaly nec and V. Stus were arrested in January 12, and shortly after that P. Yakir and V. Krasin were arrested too. L. Tymchuk was not in their shoes because the materials of the Committee were not found in his apartment, and from his oral consent to their signature he flatly refused at the questioning [3, p. 217]. He was arrested later when he was detained for distributing self-publications and destruction of a bug in room installed by KGB. In December 1975 he was sentenced to one year of corrective labor [12, p. 18].

From a large number of measures announced by the Committee only in January 10, 1972 V. Chornovil could send a letter with the Committee documents to district attorney of Odessa. In his letter, V. Chornovil informed the district attorney about the creation of the Committee, which would monitor the compliance of legal proceeding of N. Strokata. He informed that the Committee materials would be send not only to the prosecuting magistracy of Odessa region but to all-union and republican authorities [11].

The letter by V. Chornovil was resent from the prosecuting magistracy of Odessa region in January 17, 1972 to KGB department in Odessa region with the formulation that there were no

reasons for attachments to the case of accusation of N. Strokata, so this letter had to be sent to KGB department in Lviv region [4, p. 71].

S. Hulyk, who was participating in the creating of the Committee and who was not arrested, could find a lawyer Poltoratskiy from Odessa for N. Strokata. He responsibly held the defense of the defendant but the sentence had been set beforehand and that's why N. Strokata got four years of labor camp of higher security. The lawyer could only assert her right for the flat. For proper performance of his professional duties the attorney experienced the harassment by authorities and lost the right to protect defendants, which is charged with Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the USSR [12, p. 300]. S. Hulyk and her husband were also under repression.

All the arrested members of the Committee were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment and exile. In the sentence for V. Chornovil in April 12, 1973 was stated that "at the end of 1971 he was an initiator to create the Committee on defense of N. Strokata ... he also wrote a document on creating this "Committee" together with other authors and the certificate on the personality of Strokata ... in these documents the slander was uttered about the activity of Soviet justice, Soviet democracy and Soviet reality" [13, p. 82; 16]. Only about in twenty years Procuracy of the USSR appealed this verdict resolving that "review of "Application on creating Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata" showed that there was nothing slanderous about the government of the Soviet Union and Soviet reality" [2, p. 842].

Conclusion

This way, at the beginning of 1970-s there was an attempt to create human rights organization in Ukraine. To develop its activities was a failure because of the imprisonment of its organizers. Because of the same reason the fact of its creation is still little known. However, the creation of the Committee became an evidence of the organized strengthening of the Ukrainian resistance movement and commitment of its leaders to the cause for which they fought. So, it showed that they were ready to hold structured and coordinated activity on defense of personality and national community in the conditions of Soviet reality. The initiative of creating Public Committee on defense of Nina Strokata found its continuation in the formed Ukrainian Helsinki in 1976, which defended the principals announced by the Committee.

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