

V. A. Shelkov and the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists of the USSR

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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”.¹

The split between the official Adventists and the True and Free Remnant took place as far back as 1924-28. The Adventist Church developed in the USA after 1844 and was officially founded in 1863, as a result of the apocalyptic visions and prophecies of Ellen White.² It has existed in the territories of the Russian Empire since the 1880s. Under the Tsars, as later under the Soviet regime, certain key Adventist doctrines led to conflict with the State: strict observance of the Sabbath day (Saturday), on which no work could be done, and refusal to bear arms or swear a military oath. The loyal greeting sent to Emperor Nicholas II by the All-Russian Council of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1905, after its legalization as a non-Orthodox denomination, is a carefully worded document (though always quoted by Soviet sources as an example of Adventist reactionary

attitudes): it promises to render to the Tsar whatever is "Caesar's"—taxes, tributes, fear and honour—while giving God "what is God's".³ The pre-revolutionary period is seen by True and Free Adventists, especially by V. A. Shelkov himself, as one of persecution by "state Orthodoxy" ("gospravoslaviye")—a parallel to the later Soviet "state atheism" ("gosateizm"). Such persecution abated after 1905 but came to a head again after the declaration of war in 1914, when the first split occurred between Adventists who were prepared to swear the military oath and thus declare their loyalty to the Russian State, and those who refused. Shelkov refers to the former group with disapproval in his article *A Recurrence of Misanthropy*, quoting loyal statements issued by "false Adventists" in both Russia and Germany in 1914 and drawing a parallel with the 1924 declaration of loyalty to the Soviet government by the "official" Adventists.⁴ The central issue in all cases is not the legitimacy of the government in question, but the infringement of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" by Adventists who were prepared to take up arms in defence of the State. The All-Russian Council of Adventists left the problem to individual conscience, while encouraging Adventists to serve in medical and construction units, as they were allowed to do in many cases.

The period looked on most favourably by all Adventists is that between 1918 and 1924, when the Soviet government was still allowing evangelization by non-Orthodox sects and in some cases encouraging the concept of "Christian socialism". The Adventists doubled their numbers, rising from 6,085 in 1916 to 12,697 in 1926,⁵ and were allowed to publish two newspapers, *Voice of Truth (Golos istiny)* and *Good News (Blagovestnik)*. During this period both the Constitution of 1918 and the Decree on the Separation of Church and State were still in force. These allowed "religious propaganda" (as well as "anti-religious propaganda") and "private" religious education. In 1929, the clause on "religious propaganda" was deleted and the Law on Religious Associations was passed, forbidding the teaching of religion by anyone except parents. The Decree issued by Lenin on 4 January 1919, allowing exemptions from military service on religious grounds, remained in force until 1926, and is the main reason for the special place given to Lenin in modern Adventist *samizdat*. Shelkov, for example, quotes approvingly Lenin's words, "let us adopt this decree to calm down and satisfy those who have already borne dreadful torments and persecution from the Tsarist government".⁶ The Adventist leader justified his own practice of living "underground" on a false passport by reference to Lenin's example under the Tsarist regime. Lenin's actual view of the Protestant sects as "a new, purified, refined poison for the oppressed masses"⁷ is not referred to.

It is doubtful whether the 1924-28 schism between the two groups of Adventists took place only over the issue of declaring loyalty to the Soviet State, as is often implied by Soviet atheist authors such as F. Fedorenko

and A. Belov. "Gratitude and sincere support" was indeed expressed to V. I. Lenin, his close associates and "the only progressive government in the world" by the Fifth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1924; but limited loyalty to "Caesar" and the authorities "instituted by God" (as in Tsarist times) had never been denied by Adventists. The official argument put forward by A. Demidov, editor of *Voice of Truth* (see *RCL* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977, pp. 88-93), was that the Adventists must stress the things that united them with the "builders of the new social order", not those that divided them from the new society. Adventism could still win toleration from the atheist regime by joining with communism to reorganize society and condemning the injustices of capitalism, imperialism and the established Churches of the West. Demidov's article "The Voice of the Protestant West" is almost the only substantial account of the "official" Adventist viewpoint in 1924, but it is available only in the form of extracts in books by atheist authors⁸ who quote only those passages which confirm the points they themselves wish to make and who avoid specifying the precise points of conflict between the "official" Adventists and the "reformist" groups. The real disagreements, as outlined by V. A. Shelkov in *A Recurrence of Misanthropy* and in *The Struggle of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists for Freedom of Conscience in the USSR*, were apparently over basic Adventist doctrines (strict Sabbath observance and military service) and registration of Adventist communities by the State. It seems clear, from both V. A. Shelkov and the atheist writer A. Belov, that the official Adventist All-Union Council, fearing to lose its limited state recognition and its journals, agreed to compromises over the question of military service: Adventists were at first (1924) encouraged by the All-Union Council to serve in the army according to individual conscience, then (1928) declared subject to conscription on the same terms as other citizens. Shelkov states that the more complete 1928 surrender of principle was then back-dated for *post-factum* inclusion in the 1924 statement, after which those Adventists who had expressed their opposition all along (led by G. Ostvald) were expelled from the Congress.

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 14:16). 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 materialist 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.

The official Adventists gained little from their compromise: by the end of the 1920s their journals were closed down and evangelization became illegal; in the 1930s the Leningrad congregation and almost all Adventist communities were dissolved and most Adventist leaders were arrested, although the central All-Union Council remained officially in existence. After a revival during the religious "thaw" of the Second World War and the post-war period, the All-Union Council was abolished by Khrushchev during the anti-religious campaign of the 1960s. Some official Adventist leaders, such as A. Demidov, have spent as many as 20 years in prison.

By 1964 the "official" Adventists had increased their numbers significantly since the 1920s⁹ and were successfully conducting evangelization among younger people. Children were being taught in groups and Adventist services were often extended to include a period of Bible study. Pamphlets explaining Adventist doctrines and using scientific facts to support Biblical texts were circulated unofficially and passed on to non-Adventists. Similar activities were going on in most of the Protestant churches and were resented by the Soviet authorities as an infringement of the law against religious propaganda. Khrushchev's campaign against the churches was in part an attempt to end such "violations". Instead, as among the Baptists and Pentecostals, it gave rise to a split between Adventists who were willing to submit to government demands to keep their registration permit and Adventists who preferred to form "unregistered" congregations and continue their church activities without official sanction. In January 1965, at a conference held in Kiev, 180 Adventist leaders (led by P. Matsanov) founded a new central body, the Council of Elder Brethren, which rejected the "official" Adventist leadership (led by A. F. Pařasei) and began to ordain its own evangelists.¹⁰ This "reformist" group seems to have merged with the True and Free Adventists of the 1920s, advocating "separation from the world" (i.e. the Soviet State) and organizing its church life—services, children's groups, charitable activities and Bible classes—without seeking registration. The "unofficial" Adventists also seem to have established links with unregistered congregations of Pentecostals and Baptists.

The state-registered Adventists exist as individual communities but often have to share a "prayer-house" with a registered Baptist congregation. It is grudgingly conceded by the Soviet press that they have even increased the number of their young people—for example, from 25.2 per cent (1967) to 32.7 per cent (1977) in parts of Moldavia.¹¹ Occasional defectors from the True and Free Adventists returning to the "official" flock are given publicity by the press—for example, T. I. Chertkov, who

wrote a letter to his brothers and sisters urging them to return to "official" Adventism.¹²

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 school 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".¹³ 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.¹⁴

Shelkov was elected leader (chairman) of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists in 1954. After his return from prison in 1967, he was instrumental in organizing the Adventist *samizdat* activities which have annoyed the Soviet authorities ever since. The success of the *True Witness* press and the photocopying and reproduction of Adventist works are tacitly acknowledged in Soviet newspapers, which accuse the Adventists of "educating children and young people in an anti-Soviet spirit" by "producing and disseminating handwritten and typed pamphlets" and "spreading literature slandering our social system".¹⁵ This last charge refers to the publicity given by Shelkov and the Adventist

press to violations of citizens' rights by the officials of *gosateizm* (state atheism): Adventist parents, such as Mariya Vlasyuk,¹⁶ deprived of parental rights; Adventist home-owners, such as N. Mikhel,¹⁷ fined for holding religious meetings or storing Adventist literature; and young men, such as Alexander Mikhel,¹⁸ imprisoned for refusing to join the army. Shelkov's vast output of articles and books (110 works were listed at his 1979 trial), which made him a leading *samizdat* author, were largely produced while he was in hiding from the authorities (like other leading "unofficial" Adventists) between 1969 and 1978. If he had not evaded arrest in this way, he would certainly have been imprisoned earlier on the same charges as those he faced after his arrest at his daughter's flat on 14 March 1978. His works, although theological in content, constantly reaffirm the True and Free Adventist commitment to pacifism, Saturday observance and evangelization of young people. In his analyses of Soviet legislation, he rejects all state interference in religious organizations and proclaims freedom of conscience as a divinely given right. On the basis of the Soviet Constitution and laws of 1918-24, he rejects later anti-religious legislation as unlawful and supports evasion of such legislation, even issuing instructions for those in danger of arrest under the title "How to Behave before Ill-intentioned Blasphemers who Unjustly Persecute Innocent Believers". A "holy silence" is recommended in reply to threats and unlawful questions.

The 1978-79 KGB campaign against the True and Free Adventists involved searches and confiscation of religious literature, and arrests and trials of Adventists found transporting or storing such literature. It culminated in the trial in March 1979 of V. A. Shelkov, his son-in-law I. S. Lepshin, and his close associates A. A. Spalin, S. I. Maslov and S. P. Furllet. The abandonment of any pretence of legality or justice during the trial was excessive even for a Soviet court and seems to have shocked the officially-appointed defence 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. Shelkov and the others were charged with "inciting citizens to refuse to participate in public life and fulfil their civil obligations", running a "conspiratorial organization", living on the means of believers and "disseminating knowingly false fabrications slandering the Soviet State".¹⁹ No fewer than 155 Adventists had stated in writing that they were prepared to testify in court that Shelkov had given a true account of their persecution by the state organs for "purely religious convictions", but they were wholly ignored by the judges and were physically prevented from travelling to Tashkent or entering the courtroom. Instead, the main prosecution witness was V. V. Illarionov, son of a well-known True and Free Adventist, and now an atheist. Before his appearance in court he had been serving an 11-year sentence (imposed in 1976) for theft, fraud and forgery.

Even he made no statement that constituted proof of the charges against the accused, merely agreeing with the court in describing Adventist *samizdat* literature as "libellous" and stating that other Adventists would condemn a sect member who joined the armed forces (although they would do him no physical injury).²⁰ No attempt was made in court to prove Shelkov's works libellous—it was merely stated that they were reactionary and anti-Soviet and that they accused the authorities of being non-Leninist.

Perhaps the most revealing section of the indictment was that accusing Shelkov and the others of "joining with the illegal Baptist sect and the so-called 'dissidents'—such as Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, Orlov, Ginzburg, Khodorovich, Grigorenko and others . . ." Shelkov was accused of storing works by these persons for "slandrous purposes". Works by Solzhenitsyn, documents by Orlov and Ginzburg, copies of the *Chronicle of Current Events* and the *Bulletin of the Council of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Prisoners' Relatives* were given as examples of slanders that Shelkov had distributed, sending them abroad to "mislead world public opinion". It is indeed an interesting fact that the True and Free Adventists had established close links with the Soviet human rights movement as a whole, sending reports to the *Chronicle of Current Events* and making contact with secular "dissidents" such as Academician Sakharov. V. A. Shelkov himself had written to President Carter appealing for help in releasing Yuri Orlov and Alexander Ginzburg, who had defended "true justice and morality" as enshrined in the Ten Commandments. He described them as "self-sacrificing, selfless men, with no thought for their own profit", who had fought for the suffering families of prisoners and had defended true spiritual values against the "cult of the God of Prisons".²¹ Nevertheless, although he obviously respected such men as fellow-fighters for universal rights and freedoms, Shelkov had criticized the dissidents for having no "united ideal": "they know what they don't want, but not what they do want".²² Some were still attached to the idea of "impure government" by the imposition of some ideology, national or religious, by the State. Shelkov affirmed the True and Free Adventist position in proclaiming the necessity of the "pure" religion, unattached to nationality or State. His views were respected, as he was himself, by people as far removed from his position as Andrei Sakharov, who came to "attend" his trial from outside the closed courtroom. Sakharov's appeal to the Pope, heads of States which were party to the Helsinki agreements and world public opinion on Shelkov's behalf condemned the sentence eventually passed on 23 March (five years in a strict regime camp) as "cruelty surpassing all norms of decency".²³ His intervention brought Shelkov's plight to the eyes of the world, but too late to save the 84-year-old man's life. Like his predecessors, Ostvald and Manzhura, V. A. Shelkov died "in chains" on 27 January 1980.

It is possible that the Soviet authorities had intended this: Shelkov had defied them too long and too successfully. The KGB officials who arrested him told the old man "Now you're going to pay for everything, grandad".²⁴ His daughter-in-law Dina described in a letter to Amnesty International how the prison authorities had refused to take warm clothing she had brought for Shelkov. The leader of the True and Free Adventists would not have found his end inappropriate, however. He himself had constantly emphasized the necessity of self-sacrifice in the "bloodless fight" against evil, in the name of divinely-given human rights.

It is impossible to predict who his successor might be. The True and Free Adventists are continuing their activities, producing long accounts of the March trial and its after-effects. It was clear from the evidence presented at Shelkov's trial that they are organized in three groups—Caucasian, Western (Baltic and Ukraine) and Central (Urals and Russia)—united by a central All-Union Council. The total number of True and Free Adventists is almost impossible to estimate: it may even surpass the "official" Adventist figure (21,500 in 1964). Their deputy chairman at the moment is Mikhail Ivanovich Illarionov from Tashkent, whose nephew gave evidence in court against Shelkov (see above). The new chairman may be his brother, another Illarionov, or one of those imprisoned with Shelkov, such as I. S. Lepshin or A. A. Spalin (both serving five-year sentences); or the choice may fall upon someone like Rostislav Galetsky, now living "in hiding" as Shelkov once did. Galetsky, now 32 years old, is the author of a number of *samizdat* documents on the situation of believers in the USSR. He has also publicly supported Yuri Orlov. In May 1978 he founded the Group for Legal Struggle and Investigation of Facts concerning the Persecution of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists in the USSR. This Group is similar in its aims to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, although it concentrates on monitoring the persecution of fellow-Adventists. It has already published more than 50 documents about searches and bugging of Adventist homes and arrests of True and Free Adventists. At the age of 13, Galetsky was already an Adventist evangelist and was expelled from a corrective school for this reason. He now travels round Adventist communities in the USSR, distributing literature and collecting new complaints about religious persecution. Like other "unofficial" Adventist leaders living such a life, he does not see his family for months on end.²⁵

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

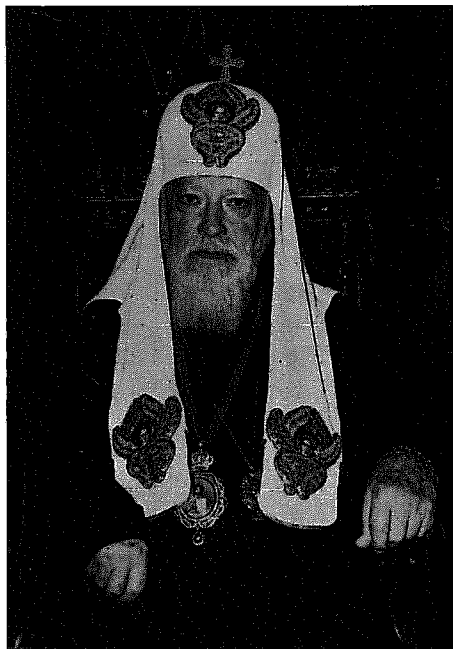


Above left Arnold Albertovich Spalin, a close associate of V. A. Shelkov, the late leader of the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists in the USSR. He was tried in 1979 and sentenced to five years.

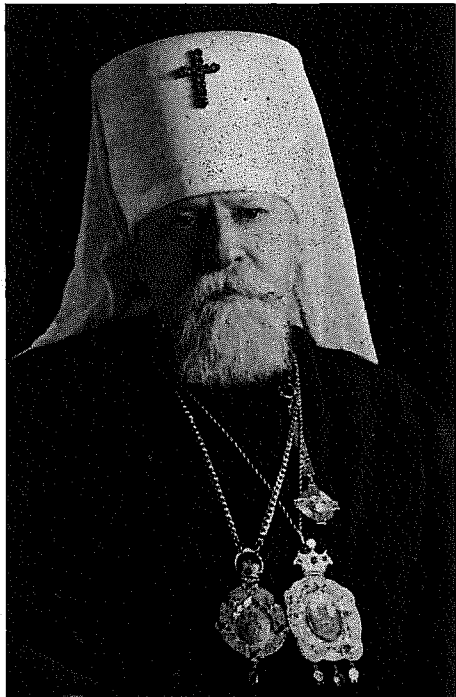
Above right Ilya Sergeyevich Lepshin, a True and Free Seventh-Day Adventist who was arrested in March 1978 along with his father-in-law, V. A. Shelkov. He was tried in March 1979 and sentenced to five years. See the article and documents pp. 201-17.



Left Alexander Valentinovich Mikhel. A True and Free Seventh-Day Adventist, he received a three-year sentence in 1978 for refusing to take a military oath. (All photographs © Keston College)



Patriarch Alexi, head of the Russian Orthodox Church 1945-70. See the article pp. 218-24.



Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsy and Kolomna, who as head of the Department of External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church from the Second World War until 1960 pursued an active foreign policy on behalf of the Church.



Nina Fyodorovna Mikhail and her children. A True and Free Seventh-Day Adventist, she was fined in 1978 for refusing to send her children to school on Saturday (the Sabbath for Adventists). See the article pp. 201-10. (All photographs © Keston College)

over the issue of military service. Shelkov did indeed condemn military service with reference to the 1914-18 war (see above) 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 by 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. Kulakov, 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 "official" Baptist statements. It is to be hoped that international Adventist opinion will suspend judgement on the True and Free Seventh-Day Adventists of the USSR until more of the facts are known.

¹A. Belov, "Adventisty i adventizm", *Nauka i religiya*, No. 3, 1978, p. 32.

²Works by E. White, e.g. *Patriarch and Prophets* and *Life of Paul*, are circulated in Russian translation in *samizdat* issued by the *True Witness* press.

³A. Belov, *Adventizm*, Moscow, 1968, p. 49.

⁴V. A. Shelkov, *Retsidiv chelovekonenavistnichestva*, n.d. (late 1977), pp. 44-7. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Excerpts on pp. 213-7 of this issue of *RCL*.

⁵A. Belov, *Adventizm*, pp. 54, 58.

⁶V. A. Shelkov, *Retsidiv chelovekonenavistnichestva*, p. 22.

⁷Lenin's phrase has recently been quoted in: A. Belov, "Adventisty i adventizm", *Nauka i religiya*, No. 3, 1978, p. 31.

⁸Quoted in: F. Fedorenko, *Sekty, ikh vera i dela*, Moscow, 1965, and V. N. Lentin, *Adventisty sedmogo dnya*, Moscow, 1966.

⁹There were 21,500 in 1964. See "Novye tendentsii v adventizme", *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma*, No. 24, 1979, p. 121; A. Belov, *Adventizm*, p. 60.

¹⁰S. Orlov, "V poiskakh vykhoda", *Nauka i religiya*, No. 3, 1978, p. 34; "Novye tendentsii v adventizme", *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma*, No. 24, 1979, pp. 120-34.

¹¹"Novye tendentsii v adventizme", *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma*, No. 24, 1979, p. 122.

¹²*ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³*Borba vsesoyuznoi tserkvi vernykh i svobodnykh ASD za svobody sovesti v SSSR*, 27 October 1977, p. 3. *Samizdat* available from Keston College.

¹⁴A. Shifrin, *Oblako molitvy nad lagerem*, 11 April 1972. *Samizdat* available from Keston College.

¹⁵V. Kassis and M. Mikhailov, "Chto tvorilos v bunkere 'apostola'", *Izvestiya*, 13 May 1979, p. 5.

¹⁶M. I. Vlasuyuk, *Zhaloba v Verkhovny Sud Ukrainskoi SSR goroda Kiyeva*, 1975. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also in *Vestnik RKhD*, No. 117, 1976, pp. 265-84.

¹⁷*Khronika: Nina Fyodorovna Mikhel*, 20 March 1978. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also in English in *Documents of the Christian Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights in the USSR*, Washington Street Research Center, San Francisco, Vol. 3, pp. 336-8.

¹⁸*Sobshcheniye: presledovaniya za religioznye ubezhdeniya v SSSR*, December 1978. *Samizdat* available from Keston College.

¹⁹*Chronicle of Current Events* (Russian edition), No. 53, pp. 15-17.

²⁰*ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

²¹V. A. Shelkov, *Prosha Prezidentu SShA Dzhimmi Karteru*, 23 February 1977, pp. 2-4. *Samizdat* available from Keston College.

²²V. A. Shelkov, *Ediny ideal*, October 1975, p. 6. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also in *Arkhiv Samizdata*, a collection of *samizdat* documents produced by Radio Liberty, AS 2349.

²³See: *Chronicle of Current Events* (Russian edition), No. 53, p. 25.

²⁴*Presledovaniya adventistov*, 10-16 April 1978, Helsinki Monitoring Group Document No. 45, p. 3. *Samizdat* available from Keston College. Also AS 3311.

²⁵*New York Times*, 16 October 1977.

Appendix

Shelkov's Daughter Protests at his Arrest

Vladimir Shelkov, the late leader of the True and Free Adventists, was arrested in Tashkent on 14 March 1978. Various of his relatives were in the flat at the time, including his son-in-law I. S. Lepshin, who was also arrested. In an Open Letter to Leonid Ilich Brezhnev, Shelkov's daughter Dina gives a description of the KGB search which accompanied the arrests. She protests at the callous behaviour of the KGB officer who supervised the search and at the confiscation of purely religious literature and objects of material value.

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, pincers, saws, mine-detectors, metal hoists, 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 huge, deep holes under the floors (up to 2 metres in depth), broke up the asphalt paving, dug up the whole courtyard and breached ceilings, walls and floors in neighbouring 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 of the search, also refused to name

the others, saying "What do you need their names for? So that you can write about us 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 underfoot 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 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 in 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. He has two or three attacks a 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 this case as well, not allowing emergency medical aid to be called. However, when he saw that the matter might end badly, he summoned his *own* medical workers. After they had given 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 round 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 decisively 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 those 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. Owing 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 of terrorism and demand full obser-

vance 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 libellous 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 Sergejevich 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 im-

mediately. 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 comes 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 Vladimirovna Lepshina
Vladimir Vladimirovich Shelkov
(and all relatives of those arrested)
Tashkent, Soyuznaya 56

19 March 1978

Lenin Cited in Support of True and Free Adventist View

In the samizdat booklet A Recurrence of Misanthropy (probably written in late 1977), the author (almost certainly V. A. Shelkov) outlines the True and Free Adventist position on national service in the Soviet army. The whole article is a detailed reply to Soviet press attacks on a young Adventist who refused a military call-up and asked for alternative national service. Shelkov maintains that exemption from military service on religious grounds is not against Soviet law, claiming the authority of V. I. Lenin as expressed in his Decree of 4 January 1919. The later abolition of this Decree (1926) is said to be non-Leninist and its justification by Soviet historians is said to involve falsification of Declarations issued by the All-Union Congresses of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1924 and 1928. The following extracts are taken from the original samizdat copy of A Recurrence of Misanthropy, pp. 1-2, 5-11, 20-3, 29-31.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

When a newspaper in a republic or region publishes long articles on the same theme over a certain period of time, under the same title, signed by the same author, does this not indicate the importance of the subject and the desire of the publishers to attract the attention of public opinion to it? It was just such a subject that was offered to the readers of the regional paper *Znamy truda*, published in Dzhambul. From 7 to 22 September this year, a journalist named Sulatskov wrote four quite lengthy articles for the paper under the general title "A Recurrence of Non-Resistance". Each article had its own subtitle.

What was this highly-placed writer telling his readers? This was his subject matter. Without naming names (this was not accidental, as we shall see) he tells us of a young man who was called up for

active service in the army. The boy was one of those sincerely believing Christians—the Seventh-Day Adventists—whose purely religious convictions and individual consciences will not allow them to take up arms. At the same time they do not refuse to serve in the army, but legally ask to be exempted and given a different service as an alternative to the bearing of arms. This is just what the young man did: he openly and confidently revealed his religious beliefs to the military call-up board and asked, both orally and in written form, to be assigned some type of labour or other service as an alternative to military service at the choice of the commission, as long as the service suggested did not involve bearing arms and thus did not offend the conscript's own religious conscience. [. .]

[The articles in Znamya truda were written in answer to a letter from this young Adventist, appealing for support. Ed.]

[. .] What kind of portrait of the religious “non-resister” emerges from Sulatskov's words, in your opinion? It seems a bit too full; the author has overdone it: he's bourgeois and anti-social in his behaviour, refuses to fulfil his obligations, co-operates with the enemy and foreign agents, has a false passport, refuses to defend the Fatherland and so on. Such a monster would hardly even appear in nightmares. [. .]

However, the problem is quite clear: is refusal to take up arms on religious grounds a crime, or is it not? Can a court condemn it? Is it unpatriotic, or a criminal act?

V. I. Lenin replied: NO! It's not a crime! It can't be tried! It's not unpatriotic or criminal!

And we, as religious citizens, say “No” together with Lenin. And if a pacifist “non-resister” is condemned and imprisoned today, in a time of peace, contrary to Lenin's words, then he is being condemned for his religion, for his purely religious (not political) views. [. .]

On what did the conscript base his plea for exemption from military service? In the legal sense, he relied on the basic law of our State; in the practical sense, on the strict fulfilment of this law while V. I. Lenin was alive [. .]

[After quoting from an early Decree on freedom of conscience (23 January 1918) which permits exemptions from civil obligations at the discretion of people's courts, the author goes on to quote the Leninist Decree of 4 January 1919. Ed.]

DECREE

of the Soviet of People's Commissars,
4 January 1919, on Exemptions from
Military Service on Religious
Grounds

1) Persons who are unable to serve in the armed forces because of their religious beliefs are to be given the right (by decision of a people's court) to alternative service for the same period as their contemporaries: in medical services, primarily in hospitals for contagious diseases, or in corresponding socially useful work, at the choice of the conscript himself.

2) In making its decision on alternatives to military service for citizens, the people's court is to demand a report from the Moscow United Council of Religious Associations and Groups in each individual case. The report must make it clear that the religious belief in question does exclude participation in military service and that the person named is acting sincerely and honestly.

3) As an exception to the norm, the United Council of Religious Associations and Groups has the right, after a unanimous decision, to make a special application to the Presidium of the All-Russian Soviet Central Executive Committee for full exemption from military service, without alternative civil duties, if it can be precisely proved that the alternatives are incompatible with particular religious convictions, or sectarian literature, or the personal life of the person concerned. [. .]

The Decree of 4 January 1919 had great significance as a state decision which developed the principles behind a socialist solution of the problem of freedom of conscience and which established in practice that Soviet citizens had full freedom of religious conviction. It also had moral and political significance, enabling working people with religious beliefs, especially peasants, to rally round Soviet power by increasing their trust in the religious policies of the socialist State, leaving no room for doubt as to the

sincerity of the Soviet government's aims and the principled nature of its actions in such a delicate area as religious conviction and feeling. The clear and firm position taken up in defence of the armed forces against sabotage by selfish and hostile elements under the pretext of religious conviction only made the Decree of 4 January more convincing to the religious population. The international effect of the Decree was also great. Its text was broadcast abroad over the radio. "When this Decree was published", writes Bonch-Bruyevich, "it made a great impression. The foreign press reprinted it with amazement, writing everywhere of the great humanity shown by Soviet power in this Decree." [. . .]

But let us analyse the way in which a member of the Union of Soviet Journalists makes a mockery of Lenin's Decree, together with Lenin's humanism towards believers. The author writes that the Decree was in force "only until 2 August 1926. That date should be remembered." Yes, it should be. The author, however, should be reminded that the Decree was annulled, not by comrade Lenin (he was no longer among the living), but by *other comrades*. In our own day, it has become fashionable to speak and write about returning to the teaching and practice of Leninist norms and principles. But to be constantly talking about something is very far from doing it, even rarely. This is a banal truth but not unimportant.

The author further writes that whereas the military field tribunals of the Tsarist autocracy sentenced those who refused military service "to death, without delay", though "afterwards a Cabinet of Ministers would 'mercifully commute' this sentence to hard labour for life, Vladimir Ilyich himself investigated all appeals and complaints to the authorities from pacifists, and he demanded that his colleagues too should carefully examine them. This was so even in cases where the complaints were unfounded." However, if these complaints and requests were well-founded, resulting from purely religious convictions, there was no talk of refusal—the requests were granted without further discussion.

The journalist begins to undermine Lenin's Decree on Exemptions from Military Service on Religious Grounds

by quoting V. I. Lenin's words, allegedly noted down by Bonch-Bruyevich during the *Sovnarkom** meeting at which this Decree was adopted. We have plenty of grounds for doubting the veracity of Bonch-Bruyevich's notes, allegedly taken down from V. I. Lenin's words at this meeting. For some reason Sulatskov does not refer to the complete collection of Lenin's works, where such an important document as Ilyich's speech on the adoption of the Decree of 4 January 1919 could hardly have failed to be included. Perhaps Sulatskov was too lazy to look through the collected works? But a precise reference to the works of V. I. Lenin would be worth some effort by a journalist searching for a document he needs. However, he does not give it: he refers to some note taken down by Bonch-Bruyevich, and again makes a mistake—he does not say where Bonch-Bruyevich's words come from, and gives no reference to his sources. The quotation is merely given in inverted commas. As they say, take it for what it's worth, reader.

We have realized over and over again what atheist integrity is worth, when it is a question of the authenticity of documents they use. Is this perhaps why such writers often accuse believers of forging certain historical documents—to hide their own guilt?

Whether this is so or not, let us take Bonch-Bruyevich's notes at their face value and accept their authenticity. Let us see what Lenin said on adopting the Decree. "I am sure", we read, "that this Decree will not be long-standing . . . Time will pass, people will calm down, as they will not see forcible means used by the Red Army . . . But meanwhile let us adopt this Decree to calm down and satisfy those who have already borne dreadful torments and persecution from the Tsarist government." That was what V. I. Lenin said.

From V. I. Lenin's speech we see that he had to use forceful persuasion on the members of *Sovnarkom*, who were atheists, arguing that they should agree

**Sovnarkom* is short for *Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov*, the Council of People's Commissars. This was the original name of the supreme executive body of the Soviet State. In 1946 it became *Sovet Ministrov*, the Council of Ministers.

to support the Decree he was insisting on, which would exempt sincere believers from military service on the grounds of religious conviction. In other words, the members of *Sovnarkom* who were present had not yet developed V. I. Lenin's humanism on this subject, and did not develop it later either; today, the same is true, as Sulatskov and others like him show in their writings.

What line of argument did the journalist Sulatskov find suitable for himself in the quotation he gives from V. I. Lenin? He seized upon the words "not long-standing", ignoring the reason which Lenin suggested for the fact that the Decree would not be long-standing. Taking this word out of context in a biased way, the author had so much faith in it that he gave it an absolute meaning. In doing so, he said what he wanted to be true rather than what was true. V. I. Lenin said that he was sure the Decree would not be long-standing. In Lenin's opinion, this would depend on life itself, on the concrete facts of reality, on the success of educational work which, in Lenin's words, would have to go on for years, decades. He believed that the number of people who rejected military service on religious grounds would grow smaller and smaller with time. So the Decree was to remain in force while it was needed in practice, while there were still even a few sincerely religious people who could not bear arms in the military forces because of their convictions. [. . .]

Pursuing his unlawful aim, the author, for the sake of the date 2 August 1926 [when the Decree of 4 January 1919 was abolished. *Ed.*] plays like a true juggler with the facts relating to the Adventist Congresses of the 1920s. He writes:

"At the Fifth Congress of Adventists in 1924 . . . the leaders had to sign the declaration of loyalty to Soviet power. It included a triumphant promise to 'carry out state duties, in both civil and military service'."

In this phrase, truth is mixed with lies. It is true that in 1924 the Fifth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists took place in Moscow, at which a Declaration was issued. But the Declaration spoke of the civil duties of Seventh-Day Adventist members only in general terms, advising each member to resolve such problems

according to his own individual conscience. There was no mention in the 1924 Declaration of the triumphant promise to carry out military duties. That promise was made at the Sixth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists, which took place in 1928, when the atheist authorities forced some Seventh-Day Adventist leaders to compromise and agree to break certain of God's laws, including the commandment "Thou shalt not kill", while all true Seventh-Day Adventists, who would not agree with this decision, were expelled from their apostate fellowship. The true and uncompromising leaders, such as Ostvald, were excluded from their midst by the apostates and handed over to the authorities. The decisions of the Sixth Congress, including the triumphant promise to carry out civil and military duties on the same basis as other citizens, were then published. Such was the sadly notorious 14th paragraph of the Resolution of the Sixth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists.

So why was there any need for Sulatskov to keep quiet about the Sixth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1928 or to transfer the decisions of this Congress to the 1924 Fifth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists? Here we see the true Jesuitical cunning of the atheists. Quickly scanning these journalistic details of congresses, declarations, decisions and so on, one might think that the author had simply got the facts wrong. But that is not the case. Here the fanatical atheist reveals his precise and cunning calculations. The heart of the matter is as follows.

The Decree on Exemption from Military Service on Religious Grounds was abolished on 2 August 1926, allegedly because it was no longer appropriate—that is, because there were no longer any people who needed an unarmed alternative to armed military service. Apparently all Adventists were by now in this category also. Do you want proof of this? Well, the proof is that the decision of the Sixth All-Union Congress of 1928 was back-dated to become the 1924 Declaration of the Fifth All-Union Congress—i.e. to a date preceding the abolition of Lenin's Decree of 4 January 1919.

If the facts are to be set out correctly, in chronological order, the disgraceful

behaviour of the atheist architects of this deception will be clear to all: it was only in 1928 that the Adventists (though not all of them) were forced to promise that they would serve in the army—that is, two years after Lenin's Decree had been abolished. In other words, it looked as if the Decree had been abolished, not because people no longer needed it, but because nobody took these people into

account any more; merely because the atheists in power had only one desire—to bury the Leninist Decree as quickly as possible, as it was not to be “long-standing”. This desire arose from distorted atheist consciousness, which inspired the perpetrators of this arbitrary act and which works according to the following principle: the law does not exist to serve man, man exists to serve the law. [. . .]

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