

THE HERITAGE LECTURES

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The Limits of
Glasnost

By Natan Shcharansky



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THE LIMITS OF GLASNOST[®]

by Natan Shcharansky

I must begin by telling you that I have known of The Heritage Foundation for some time. For the last few years, on those lucky days when I could read the Soviet press in the Soviet prison, when I was not in the punishment cell, I saw many bad words about The Heritage Foundation, and I concluded that it was a very good organization. That is why I quickly agreed when it was proposed that I meet the people whom--I do not know if it is true or not--the Soviet propagandists characterized as the source of the most "reactionary" ideas of President Reagan.

Unfortunately during this short visit to Washington we have received very sad news. Two days ago, Anatoly Marchenko, an outstanding dissident and member of the same Helsinki group which Yuri Orlov and others founded in 1976, died in the Soviet prison. There is a parallel between Marchenko's fate and mine. He was in the same prison as I. His uncompromising position, a refusal to talk to the KGB, a refusal to give up, was practically identical with my position. He was on a hunger strike which continued for some three months, approximately the same as my hunger strike of 110 days in 1982.

I know that I was very close to death; nevertheless, at the last moment the authorities gave up and met my demands, which were very modest: simply the right to write letters to my family. For more than a year I could not write even one letter. And I recovered and I could write letters. In Marchenko's case, however, the outcome was tragic. Why did this happen? In my case there was tremendous pressure on the Soviet Union and the campaign of protest all over the world, to a great extent due to the efforts of my wife, and also to the efforts of many other people who were actively involved.

No Complaint. In the case of Anatoly Marchenko, we did not succeed in organizing such a campaign. Maybe it is because of some personal reasons, the uniqueness of the efforts of my wife. But, I think it is not the only reason. In fact, Anatoly Marchenko was very well known. After the release of Yuri Orlov he was definitely the number one Soviet prisoner of conscience. His book, *My Testimony*, was very well known in the West. But there was almost no complaint in the West.

I think one of the serious reasons for it was that Gorbachev has really succeeded in organizing an effective public relations campaign to create an image. As a result, even the most liberal people would agree that Gorbachev, although part of the Soviet system and therefore not about to make fundamental changes, nevertheless wants more legality, wants to be more human, want to be more close to the West, and therefore should be given a chance by the West.

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I noticed that this opinion is very strong when I was speaking to the correspondents--with all their sympathy to me personally and to the cause which I was defending. Despite their desire to help, they wanted not to believe that the state of human rights in the Soviet Union is much worse now, and that in fact Gorbachev is much tougher on these issues than Andropov, Brezhnev, and Chernenko. Western public opinion now is much more cautious in criticizing the Soviet Union, because it wants to hope that by encouraging Gorbachev, it can have serious democratic changes.

And as a result, Anatoly Marchenko died in prison after almost no reaction to his hunger strike from the world press. It was different during my months of hunger strike, when heads of government were sending telegrams and protests, and when there were demonstrations near Soviet embassies.

Dangerous New Law. Another example of Soviet propaganda success is the recent emigration law. Soviet spokesmen in Vienna and in Reykjavik, in private meetings and meetings with delegations of American politicians, said that the new emigration law will make the process of leaving the Soviet Union very smooth, simple, and quick. The Soviets have succeeded in creating an impression that Gorbachev is trying to make the process of emigration from the Soviet Union more legal. But Jewish activists in Moscow think, and I agree with them, it is the most dangerous anti-emigration step of the Soviet Union since 1972 when they tried to stop emigration by taxes on education. At that time, there was strong protest and after six months Moscow stopped using that law.

Why is the new law dangerous? Because unlike the old law, there is no broad provision for reunification of families. It provides only a narrow basis for reunification: with your children, or your parents, sister or brother. That means that the overwhelming majority of those people who already applied for visas cannot even apply again because they do not have immediate relatives in the West. And those who can apply (less than 10 percent of the number who want to leave) also can be refused on a variety of pretexts, which have been placed in the law.

Important to Protest. We can see that there have been practically no immediate protests against the emigration law from the West. And even more, opinions appear in the mass media saying that this is one more demonstration that Gorbachev probably wants to make the Soviet system more liberal. And that is why explaining the real meaning of this law was one of the main topics of my discussion in Washington, in the White House, the State Department, and in Congress. It is very important to protest now, when the Soviet Union thinks that the Administration is very weak because of the Iran case, and believes that Congress does not support the Administration.

It is very important to demonstrate that America is strong as always and that Congress and the White House have the same position on human rights and freedom of emigration. This has been in fact the direction of my efforts during all this week. I think that I will stop now and answer questions.

Senator John Heinz (R-PA): I would be interested in knowing what it is that you have urged the Administration to do in order to give our human rights agenda more visibility at this time?

Mr. Shcharansky: I was explaining how important it is to send a clear message to the Soviet Union that you in the United States are not deceived by the new emigration law, that you do not accept it, and that it can only harm the chance for reaching any understanding between East and West.

For a long time, the Administration, and not only the Administration, thought that the accent must be on quiet diplomacy. While everybody agreed with me that quiet diplomacy cannot work without a public campaign, it is frequently thought that it is better not to irritate Gorbachev, and that it is better to let him save face and then make some concessions. But the only result is that Gorbachev can conduct a very successful public relations campaign. And the image of the Soviet leader and of the Soviet regime has changed. Those now pushing for expanded trade with the Soviet Union are not absolutely condemned by public opinion, because public opinion has definitely changed in favor of the Soviets.

And at the same time, the status of emigration is the worst since Khrushchev's years. Attacks against religious observers are larger in scale, and attacks against Hebrew teachers are more serious than before. And I think the time has come to start condemning the Soviets publicly for that in the U.S. Congress and at high levels of the Administration.

Unidentified Guest: There is a substantial move to increase our exchanges with the Soviet Union--cultural, scientific, educational, and so forth. The President and Mr. Gorbachev reached this agreement in Geneva in 1985 and the Secretary delivered a speech in Los Angeles last year, calling for massive increases in exchange programs. I wonder if you would give your assessment of how these programs might be used to effect a change in human rights performance, if at all.

Mr. Shcharansky: On the one hand, the Soviets have a very closed society, where there is no public opinion, at least no public opinion which can control their leaders, or can influence them in any way. On the other hand, we have a society of free individuals. The Soviets use the same terms for characterizing absolutely different institutions. The Soviets do not need elections to the Supreme Soviet. So why do they conduct their rubber stamp "parliament?" Because they needed to show that they have the same institution of a Parliament so the Parliamentarians from the Soviet Union and from America can meet and discuss the same problems. The fact that Congress in the United States is really independent from the President and is elected by the people and the Supreme Soviet in the Soviet Union is simply a puppet of the Politburo is ignored when these meetings are taking place. And in such exchanges, the principal differences between the societies is forgotten. An example is the disgraceful agreement between the American Bar Association and the Association of Soviet Lawyers. On the one hand, we have American lawyers defending individuals in courts of law, while on the other hand, we have the people who help the KGB to find quasi-legal processes to punish dissent. The real counterparts to the American lawyers to meet in the Soviet Union are imprisoned human rights activists.

It is the same with the Western peace groups meeting the official peace movement representatives in Moscow. I met with representatives of the real Soviet peace movement--in prison--they were my cellmates. My cellmate signed a letter to the Soviet leaders, calling on them to declare Latvia a nuclear-free zone. He was put in prison for anti-Soviet agitation.

Is there any use in such meetings? I think that they are absolutely senseless. But it does not mean that there should be no contacts. No, there can be if they are really effectively used. How? If Western peace activists want to meet their Soviet counterparts, they should insist that they meet with the unofficial Soviet peace activists.

Carl Gershman, National Endowment for Democracy: I would like to follow up on the question about exchanges. It is assumed that the Soviets would not accept conditions for exchanges. Is it possible to have independent contacts? Is the situation open enough to have independent contacts from the West to the East, outside the framework of formal exchanges. And a second question: you mentioned that the Soviet Union is a closed society; what can be done as part of the exchanges to open up a closed society?

Mr. Shcharansky: Of course, these are two different questions. First question. I was unofficially, during the last three years before my arrest, a spokesman on the Jewish emigration movement and a spokesman for the human rights group. It meant that I was meeting practically every day not only with correspondents, not only with politicians when they were coming, but with scientists, with students, with sportsmen, with tourists. And we had a wide range of discussions. Many Jewish refuseniks, many dissidents had such contacts. Later, in my criminal case, I could find the list of more than three hundred American tourists alleged to be my criminal contacts, and 37 American correspondents who were also accused of being my accomplices. So it means that the KGB of course never accepted such contacts as legitimate. I think these two years of discussions were much more important and much more successful than all those contacts which are made every day on an official level by Senators and Congressmen when they come to the Soviet Union. Their meetings with top officials would only help the public relations campaign.

Now, what can be done to open up Soviet society? First of all, I think that it is not simply a question of making the society more open, and not simply a question of support for the people who suffer in the Soviet Union. It is in the fundamental interest of the West to make the Soviet society more open. In the competition between Western societies and the Eastern world, each of the sides has its own advantages. In the West, because of the freedom, scientific progress is much faster. The resulting technological advantage can be used to defend the West. On the other hand, the Soviet Union has very important advantages of its own. In a closed society, it is impossible to detect what is happening. The people have no control over the actions of their government, and the society is very well organized around a very militant ideology.

That is why the idea of all arms control agreements is to limit the use of technological progress. It means that the West loses part of its natural advantage. Such agreements would make sense only if the Soviets lose part of their natural .e

advantage: their society must become more open. That is why linkage between arms control agreements and human rights is quite natural. Whether you implement linkage or not, it exists. We must insist that each time we have a serious agreement in the military field, or we have some important economic agreement, the price the Soviet Union must pay for this is to make its society more open. I think that the Jackson Amendment of 1973 was very important example of such linkage.

Claire Boothe Luce: May I? Just as an historical footnote, the first attempt for exchanges that I remember was initiated by President Eisenhower. He had a program, in which he did me the honor to ask me to head, called "People to People." This program was inspired by the same moral and sentimental motives that have characterized the American body politic and Congress ever since I can remember. The program was a failure, as you can well imagine and stopped, I think, as a result of the Hungarian invasion, which rather disappointed people. After that, programs have intermittently arisen. And I remember when I first joined--that was now over ten years ago--the President's Foreign Intelligence Board. And an assessment was made especially not of the people to people, or the cultural exchanges, but of the exchanges in the scientific field. And the finding was that on every one of these exchanges, we were, so to speak, suckered. What happened was that our scientists would agree to go provided that scientists of a like importance, and who had equal contributions to make, should also appear, whether they came to the United States or we went there. Now, what happened, invariably, is that whoever it was they were most anxious to see was indisposed. It was not that he was under arrest, but he just did not show up. So the exchange of information and ideas was largely what we contributed in the way of hard scientific news, and a sort of gentle massage from the Russian scientists about how truth knows no boundaries. All the other programs I have seen have suffered a like fate. I think the difficulty is in getting Americans to understand that their good impulse is wasted. And that takes a good bit more doing than you would think. Even where, as who knows better than you, the human rights issue is attached to negotiations as a condition and is signed by the Soviets, it comes to nothing. So, I do not think you can do more except keep reiterating to these people what a waste of time and money it is likely to be unless it is pursued most carefully by the State Department and by the White House.

Gary Thatcher, Christian Science Monitor: Will new communications technology have an impact on Soviet society?

Mr. Shcharansky: I know the Soviets have problems. On the one hand, there were discussions during the last two years what to do, urgently, to computerize the country, at least to some extent. On the other hand, they have the problem of how not to let their population obtain independent information. For instance, they are concerned with what to do with direct T.V. broadcasts from space. But the KGB knows how to cope with this problem, they now how to use the Western technology, which comes to them first of all for the needs of the KGB and for the needs of military defense.

And, on the other hand, we see how the KGB is taking steps to increase the control. Recently, for example, there was an additional clause to Article Seventy. Where before it was not permitted to distribute "anti-Soviet" books, leaflets, now it

is also video tapes, which means that you cannot now bring video tapes from the West and show them to your friends if the tapes have not officially passed censorship. Or, in some cities, which are close to those areas where you can see T.V. from abroad, the KGB and the police check for antennas. So you must not underestimate the power of the KGB to keep under control hundreds of thousands of people. They know very well, they have experience. The worst thing that will happen for them is that they will have to increase the number of camps. Now they have 5 million people in the camps. They have the experience of having 50 million. So it is not such a serious problem for them.

Unidentified Guest: What is the current state of the dissident movement?

Mr. Shcharansky: It is a real difficult question, because I went directly from prison to the West. There are many things which I do not know. Let's take the most powerful, the Jewish emigration movement. I mean the most powerful because it has not only a bigger number of people involved directly but also the most close contacts with the West, information, materials, and direction. The main institutions of this movement, like scientific seminars are destroyed, closed. It is now a much bigger risk to teach Hebrew, because more people are arrested for this. Samizdat magazines like *Jews of the USSR* are closed because one person after another is repressed for this and now there are no more.

If you take dissident movements, there was the so-called Solzhenitsyn Fund. It practically does not exist any longer because all those who took the responsibility of distributing money to the prison people are arrested. That is why such forms of public activity which existed before my arrest simply do not exist.

It is even more true, unfortunately for all the other movements. The collaboration between the non-Jewish, the Jewish, and the others which I think was highest was when we created the Helsinki group. I had very close contacts every day, for example, with the Pentecostals, who of course were seriously oppressed, and with representatives of the Catholic Church. But now there is a problem to have these contacts even inside every movement. That did not exist in the previous time. Only one movement continues existing, though not openly, and that is the Jewish emigration movement. The others are mainly in despair, their leaders are imprisoned or they are almost in an underground form.

And I think to a great extent the West has to be blamed because they did not react adequately. The Soviet Union is constantly raising repressions against everybody who was to any extent encouraged by the Helsinki agreement. And the status is much worse than it was before the signing of this agreement. Did the West recognize this, could it not wait? The only real reaction was that there was long sessions for years and years, without success.

