

Andrei Amalrik, *Stat' i pis'ma 1967-1970* [Articles and letters] (Amsterdam, 1971)

TO THE USSR JOURNALISTS UNION

Esteemed colleagues!

On October 18 of this year I was summoned to the Sixth Department of the Moscow municipal police, and a man named Denisov, calling himself an associate of the Municipal Police Administration, informed me that I was carrying on a "parasitic and antisocial lifestyle" and would be expelled from Moscow on the basis of the Decree of 4 May 1961. I refused to acknowledge myself as a parasite and was not about to put my signature to any warnings. I find the action of the police to be immoral and unlawful.

Since December 1966 I have been working as a freelance correspondent for a series of newspapers, mainly for the print agency Novosti (APN). My articles and interviews have been repeatedly printed in APN bulletins and published in the Soviet and English press. At present there are seven articles assigned to me at APN, and I have received new assignments from two editors. When I told Denisov about this, he answered that it was of no interest to him what or for whom I was writing. In this regard I want to ask you whether print news work is "parasitic and antisocial" as Denisov is trying to represent it?

I cannot regard myself as a "parasite," not only because I am a journalist. I write plays, and although none of them have yet been published or staged, I have a right to reckon that my literary work be acknowledged as work, and not "parasitism." This year, at the suggestion of a director, I reworked a scene from Gogol's story "The Nose," and now my manuscript is being looked at in several Moscow theaters. Denisov also counted this as "antisocial activity."

Therefore, although I am not a member of the Journalists Union, I would still request your defense as a Soviet journalist from the illegal and arbitrary actions of the police.

So that I am understood correctly, I want to add that in 1965 I was already expelled from Moscow according to this Decree. The People's Court and the police organs did not then take into account that, while not being on staff anywhere, I was working the whole time in various publishing houses as a freelance proofreader and translator, and furthermore, I was taking care of my paralyzed father, a class 1 invalid. In 1966 the RSFSR Supreme Court revoked the sentence as unfounded and I returned to Moscow. Now Denisov is informing me that the police assembling the dossier on me in 1965 were correct, and the Supreme Court incorrect in revoking the sentence. This point of view, especially for a jurist [in the sense of a functionary in the judicial system], strikes me as extremely dangerous.

In contrast to Denisov I do not put in doubt the decision of our supreme judicial organs, but I do not think that a dossier has to make its way all the way to them each time. The revocation of the unjust sentence gave me the opportunity to return to Moscow, but did not give life back to my father, who passed away shortly after my expulsion, having been left without any help. I myself returned from Siberia in critical condition. I have a congenital heart defect, and in exile I had to perform very heavy physical labor. Eventually an expert medical opinion that I was unsuited for heavy physical labor was obtained, and this is indicated in the resolution of

the Supreme Court. In what manner, above and beyond all of this, do they want to hold me accountable according to the 4 May 1961 Decree that just makes provision for “obligatory assignment to physical labor”? I can find only one explanation for all of this. I presented the story of my expulsion with all the violations of Soviet laws in the book “Unwanted Journey to Siberia,” which I have just completed. It is this book which has summoned a desire to take vengeance upon me among those accountable in my first expulsion—a vengeance violating the laws anew.

In order to avoid new violation of laws, new injustices for my family and myself, I am appealing to you.

29 October 1968

AN OPEN LETTER TO A. KUZNETSOV*

Esteemed Anatolii Vasilievich!

I wanted to write to you as soon as I heard about your appeal to people on the radio – to me as well—and your article “The Russian writer and the KGB.” I did not do it immediately because I was living in the countryside, where my letter would scarcely reach you. But perhaps it all turned out even for the better that I am writing to you several months later. First of all, I heard more about—I was not able to read—your letters to the PEN Club and to Mr. Miller and I was able to understand you better. Secondly, it could have seemed that my voice—a voice appealing to you from a country you have left—would sound as if it were in concert with the voices in the West who have condemned you for your flight and the means you chose for it.

It’s not like that at all. I think that if you as a writer were not able to work here or to publish your books in the form that you wrote them, then it was not only your right, but in some sense your authorial obligation as well to depart from here. And if you were not simply able to pick up and leave, like any person in the West can do, then the persistence and cleverness that you demonstrated for this deserves only admiration. The fact that you exploited the method of your persecutors and thereby twisted them around your little finger, I think, is not at all blameworthy, but that you transformed a vicious denunciation into an inoffensive humorous production with your open article and failure to return can bring harm only to the magic of denunciations as it exists in our country.

However, in all the things that you are writing and saying while abroad, or in any event, what I have heard, there are two things that seem to me incorrect and to which I thus want to object with all openness.

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You constantly talk about freedom, but about external freedom, the freedom around us, and you say nothing about internal freedom, that is, the freedom where the authorities can do

* Kiev writer (b. 1929) with good Soviet credentials who nonetheless fell afoul of the authorities after trying to write about the occupation of Kiev during World War II (including the massacre at Babi Yar); sought political refugee status in August 1969 in London.

much to a person, but it is not in their power to deprive him of his moral values. But obviously this kind of freedom and the responsibility tied to it is a necessary presupposition of external freedom.

You write about how the KGB has persecuted and blackmailed the Russian writer. Of course, what the KGB was doing can only summon condemnation. But it is not clear what the Russian writer has done to oppose it. Confronting the KGB is terrifying, but what exactly was threatening the Russian writer if he had refused on the eve of his first trip abroad to cooperate with the KGB. The writer would not have gone abroad, which he surely very much wanted to do, but he would have remained an honorable person. Having refused similar cooperation in general, he would have lost some—even extremely significant—share of external freedom, but he would have attained greater internal freedom. You are always writing: I was summoned, I was ordered, the censors always drove me to my knees... etc. It seems to me that if you were constantly making concessions and doing what your heart condemned, then you did not deserve better relations on the part of the KGB or the censor either.

I think that I am fair in leveling this reproach at you. I have always tried not to do what my heart would condemn. I not only did not join the Party, like you, but also not the Komsomol and even the Pioneers, although as a small boy I was persistently urged to do this. I preferred to be excluded from the university and surrender the hope of becoming a historian, but not to amend anything in my work which I thought correct. I preferred in general not to bring my poems and plays to Soviet publishers rather than to distort them in the hope that I would be published. It would be a long story how I came to the attention of the KGB, but I will touch upon what you have been writing about.

In 1961 someone in the KGB politely suggested that I write general reports on the mood of the intelligentsia, and I also politely refused, upon which the matter ended. In 1963 I was taken to Lubyanka at night and ordered to write a denunciation of one of the American diplomats who had supposedly subjected me and other Soviet citizens to malicious ideological treatment [“processing”]. I again refused, although now I was threatened with a criminal process. In 1965 I refused in general to have conversations with them, which then cost me exile to Siberia. But the main thing, living in this country and continuing to write and do what I regard as correct, I can at any moment again be thrown in prison or dealt with in some other fashion. That is why I think that I am personally justified in reproaching you.

But maybe I am also not justified in doing this. Most of all because I am almost ten years younger than you and I was only lightly touched by a much more terrible era [i.e. World War II] that coincided with your youth and in which you were formed as a person. Even today the regime exists in no small part on the dividends from the capital of fear accumulated in that era. And it’s not just a matter of the KGB, but that the whole atmosphere of Soviet life and Soviet upbringing is such that a person is already trained to meet with the KGB and to enter into the relations in which you found yourself.

Maybe I am also not justified in reproaching you because people might object to me that although you constantly entered into compromises and simply dishonorable acts, you thereby managed to get your books into print—if in distorted form—and received recognition in your country as a writer and thereby made a contribution to its culture, while my plays, whether they are good or bad, became only my property or the property of a narrow group of people, that I am not a writer, not in the eyes of the regime, not in the eyes of society, and that is why whatever I might say or write, it will not seem so important to anyone and my “literary

honor” will turn out to be as worthless for me in the end as virginity for a forty-year-old woman.

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1 November 1969

Translation: KH