Committee of Concerned Scientists, Inc.

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Affiliation for identification purposes only.

Lilli S. Chertoff
Executive Director

June 6, 1975

Dr. Marshall Nirenberg
Building 36, Room 1C27
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Md. 20014

JUN 10 1975

Dear Dr. Nirenberg:

Jack Cohen has told me of your kind intention to write a letter on behalf of Dr. Shtern. I am enclosing herewith some brief background material on the case, together with a draft letter you can use as you see fit.

Very briefly, Dr. Shtern is an endocrinologist who practiced many years in his town of Vinnitsa. Shortly after he applied for permission to emigrate to Israel with his family, he was accused of poisoning children, accepting bribes, and similar outrageous charges. The case came to trial accompanied by the usual difficulties with witnesses -- some patients refused to testify, at great personal risk to themselves, and others willingly gave false testimony. He was found guilty and sentenced to eight years at hard labor.

There is absolutely no point in talking about the travesty of justice which took place in the case; it occurs daily in the Soviet Union. The only thing we can ask for with any hope of success is clemency and commutation of sentence. He is a terribly sick man and the conditions in the labor camp have already aggravated his condition. He cannot possibly survive very long. His second son has now been given permission to leave and in fact has been ordered to leave in a few days. That will leave Mrs. Shtern quite alone and helpless.

Our most recent information is that he is preparing an appeal for presentation to the USSR Supreme Court. It is doubtful that they will take jurisdiction in the case, or that any appeal will be considered. However, we must pursue every avenue still open to us, to plead for his release.

We are most grateful for your concern, and for your willingness to translate that concern into action. Will you please send me a copy of the letter you send to Podgorny?

Sincerely yours,

Lilli S. Chertoff

LSC:df

WORKING DRAFT

President Nikolai V. Podgnorny
The Kremlin
Moscow
RSFSR, USSR

Sir:

I am writing to you, as the supreme voice of authority in the Soviet Union, to plead for the release of Dr. Mikhail Shtern.

Dr. Shtern by this time is a sick and tormented man, prematurely aged by his experiences. He suffers from severe health problems and I fear for his life under the regimen of the labor camp. Certainly, he will never survive to serve his eight-year sentence.

The Soviet Union today is one of the world's great powers. Its place among the nations is secure and does not depend on keeping one frail, sick man in prison. The prestige of the Soviet Union abroad can only be enhanced by a humanitarian and generous act of clemency in his case.

I and many of my colleagues in science have welcomed the reduction in tensions between our two countries as a result of the policy of detente. We are in the forefront of exchanges in science between the USSR and the United States. But those exchanges cannot take place without the collaboration and support of American scientists,and their enthusiasm for such cooperation is not encouraged when they read about Dr. Shtern or other Soviet scientists whose desire to emigrate to Israel has resulted in severe punishment.

I urge you to grant amnesty to Dr. Shtern, and allow him and his wife to leave so that they may join the remaining members of their family and live out their remaining years in peace.

Sincerely yours,

PERTINENT ADDRESSES IN U.S. AND U.S.S.R. FOR PROTEST

(Please retain for future reference)

President Gerald Ford
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20525

Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin
Embassy of the U.S.S.R.
1125 16th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Procurator General Roman Rudenko
Pushkinskaya Street 15A
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

Chairman Vladimir A. Kirillin
State Committee on Science and Technology
The Kremlin
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

M. Keldysh
USSR Academy of Sciences
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev
The Kremlin
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

President Nikolai V. Podgorny
The Kremlin
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

Premier Aleksei Kosygin
The Kremlin
Moscow
RSFSR
USSR

Senator Henry Jackson
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Your own Congressman

Your own Senator

The head of any academic or scientific institution in the USSR known to you, or with whom you have professional contact.

Committee of Concerned Scientists, Inc.

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New York, N.Y. 10022
Tel. (212) 752-0812

PROFILE: Dr. Mikhail SHTERN

BORN: 1918

FROM: Vinnitsa

ADDRESS: USSR
Ukrainian SSR
Vinnitsa
Osipenko 7/9
Tel. 28813

OCCUPATION: Endocrinologist, chief of a polyclinic

STATUS: Married. Wife: Ida, born 1917. Sons: Viktor, born 1941 (physicist, now working as a postman); Avgust, 1945 (Ph.D., biology, now tutoring)

ARRESTED: 5/25/74

INVESTIGATION COMPLETED: 10/18/74

CHARGES: a) "Bribery";b) possibly, "attempted homicide"

TRIAL: Date to be announced; due end of November, 1974.

In September 1973, the Shtern family took the first step in the emigration process when they received a vyzov (invitation) from Mrs. Shtern's sister in Israel. Immediately following this, the entire family became the target of systematic harassment; unofficial searches, calls to local government offices, interrogations. This preliminary campaign culminated in the arrest of Dr. Mikhail Shtern on May 25, 1974 during a KGB search of the Shtern apartment. Four days later the family was informed that an investigation had been opened in preparation for court action against Dr. Shtern.

The Vinnitsa Procurator's Office stated explicitly that the accusation was in retaliation for the entire family's desire to emigrate to Israel, while the Chief of Investigation for the Ukrainian Republic commented that he didn't "like people going to Israel." Apparently acting on orders sanctioned by the Regional Communist Party, the procurator attempted to accumulate evidence to support bribery charges. In view of the weakness of the evidence, however, additional charges were sought and "found."

According to Mrs. Shtern, on the 9th of September, Maria Grigorievna Soloveichuk, residing in the village of Kitaigorod, Ilienetsky Raion, Vinnitsa Oblast, came to the Vinnitsa Oblast Dispensary and demanded to know what "Dr. Shtern had poisoned her son with." As Mrs. Soloveichuk informed the dispensary workers, interrogators at the Ilienetsky Municipal Procurator's Office had asked her and other residents of the village, in particular Elena Timoshenko, for information which would prove that the physician Shtern had "taken bribes and sold drugs." The authorities explained that they needed this information to possibly save the "lives of children deliberately poisoned by Shtern."

Not satisfied with the explanation given by the dispensary workers, Mrs. Soloveichuk went to the Shtern's apartment. Upon hearing the entire story, and learning how evidence was being initiated and gathered, Mrs. Shtern, (Dr. Shtern was still in custody) requested that Mrs. Soloveichuk tell this to the Vinnitsa Oblast Procurator. Mrs. Soloveichuk attempted to comply, but was directed instead to the administrator of the investigative department, Procurator Potapov. Mrs. Shtern's request to have the informants recite their charges in her presence, and their version of how the investigation was conducted, was denied. Instead, the local man merely "conversed" with Mrs. Soloveichuk privately and then sent her home.

Despite endless searches and confiscation of property worth 3,000 rubles, authorities found no evidence to support their charges. The bribery charges alone carry a maximum penalty of 20 years.

N.B. Vinnitsa is a remote Ukrainian town whose isolation has served as cover for recent anti-Jewish outbreaks. In 1973, Isaak Shkolnik, an unskilled laborer, was tried and sentenced to 7 years on charges of "treason." In recent weeks, one of the few remaining activists in the town, Mikhail Mager, has been continually harassed and under surveillance.

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Appeal by the Shtern Family to the Medical Profession and to all concerned people:

In September, 1973 our family received an invitation from our mother's sister, living in Israel; immediately after receipt of this invitation we all began to undergo systematic and continuous harassment and persecution. On May 12th, 1974, our flat was broken into by unknown persons, for an unknown purpose; at this time all members of the family were called to different state and local government offices, and all retained in these various places for more than 4 hours. On May 25th, 1974, our father was arrested; the arrest was carried out by officials of the K.G.B.: 10 men burst into the apartment in the most brutal manner, without any warning or ringing of the bell or any previous notification whatsoever. On May 29th, 1974, during the investigation, the procurator of the Vinnitsa Office openly stated that the reason for the preparation of an accusation against our father was connected with our desire to emigrate to live in Israel.

When it became clear that the attempts of the K.G.B. to institute a political or even a civil case were doomed to failure as they had no evidence of any kind, of either political activity or of bribery or corruption of any sort, the case was handed over to the Procurator's Office with instructions to prepare some sort of case so that our father could be brought to trial. When the accusation was presented to him, a further search was undertaken, and all his personal documents were removed, including his diploma of Kandidat Nauk, original manuscripts of scientific articles, a list of scientific works and so on;

At the request of the Vinnitsa Procurator, exit visas for the younger son and his wife have been held back.

In spite of the obvious absurdity and the open dishonesty of the accusation being prepared and presented against our father, a doctor with more than 30 years experience in medical practice, the official governmental organs have been persisting for the last 4 months with their efforts to press the charge of "attempting to poison little children who were under his care as a doctor." Officials of the investigating authorities are browbeating witnesses, compelling them to give false testimony, accusing the doctor whom they have always trusted and respected of the intention to poison their children. This was stated by M. SOLOVEICHUK and E. TIMOSHENKO on September 9th, 1974. These two are relatives of former patients of our father.

Thus as it has not been found possible or convenient to bring a charge of violation of the criminal law code, or of abuse of his rights as an official (by the taking of bribery), they have now decided to bring a charge against this doctor of "attempting murder," highly reminiscent of the infamous "Doctors' Plot" case of 1952.

It is up to the consciences of all honest people not to allow this to take place. We appeal to the Medical Profession and beg you to help us to save our father, whose whole aim in life has always been to help to save the lives of others.

Signed by all members of the Shtern family,
September 26th, 1974

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