

Agursky Defends Barabanov

Mikhail Agursky is becoming widely known in the West for his defence of various individuals in the Soviet human rights movement. (Our first reader's letter from the Soviet Union comes from Agursky – see p. 29.) On 29 August last year he addressed a letter to Academician B. N. Petrov, who had added his signature to a public condemnation of Sakharov. Agursky asked him: "Why have you thrown a stone at him? What answer will you give to your conscience and to God in whom you, as an Orthodox Christian, believe?" In RCL No. 6, 1973 (p. 36) we listed a document on early Soviet anti-religious policy by "M.B.B." This article was in fact written by Agursky who wishes his authorship to be known. We now print his press statement about the danger threatening Yevgeni Barabanov (see RCL No. 1, 1974, p. 29). The same warning has been given by Yevgeni Kushev, a young Orthodox poet, (godson of Anatoli Levitin) who left the Soviet Union at the beginning of this year. Kushev said: "The atmosphere surrounding Yevgeni Barabanov is now such that he may be arrested . . . They have turned his parents against him. If he is forgotten in the West, then he will certainly be arrested."

In Moscow the Russian art critic Yevgeni Barabanov is under the threat of prosecution merely because he has passed literature to the West, chiefly religious-philosophical publications forbidden in the Soviet Union for ideological reasons.

In this way he enabled many spiritual treasures to be saved either from the threat of deliberate destruction or from the threat of burial in obscurity. He is even charged with sending photographs of people unjustly condemned for imaginary crimes.

There is nowhere in the West, including those countries which are so often mentioned – Greece and Spain – where prosecution for such actions could even be conceived. Meanwhile in the Soviet Union, in the country which untiringly suggests to the whole world that it is the most free state, Barabanov is threatened with seven years of imprisonment and three in exile.

The Barabanov case is not only his personal affair. The fate of the entire spiritual life of the many peoples of the country, irrespective of their religious and national differences, is now being decided.

I appeal to all people who value religious freedom and ask them to defend Barabanov. I especially appeal to all Christian organizations, since Barabanov is charged principally with passing on religious literature. In this affair a tremendous responsibility lies with the World Council of Churches, which deliberately digresses onto questions of secondary importance; this authoritative organization does not pay the least attention to the suppression of religious liberty on a massive scale.

I also appeal to Jewish national organizations in all the world to stand in defence of Barabanov, since the rescue of Eduard Kuznetsov's diaries, with which he has also been charged, is his remarkable service to the Jewish people.

Moscow, 21 September, 1973