

# PROTESTANT PRISONERS IN THE USSR



Since it began, Amnesty International has worked for the release of Protestant prisoners of conscience in the USSR. Most of the information available on such prisoners concerns members of the "dissenting" wing of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, of whom more than 1,000 are known to have become prisoners of conscience during the 1960s and 1970s (not counting many who have been jailed for one or two weeks for petty offences or "on suspicion"). Other Protestants who are often imprisoned for exercising their rights of conscience belong to the Pentecostal and the Seventh Day Adventist sects. The photographs on these pages are of Baptist prisoners of conscience and some of the places of imprisonment where they have been held. The cases illustrated are typical.

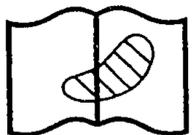
"Dissenting" Baptists are subject to persecution in the USSR because they do not abide by stringent official restrictions on religious rights. According to Soviet law, believers are not allowed to teach religion to children in an organized way (for example, through Sunday Schools). Most kinds of privately organized religious activities are forbidden by law, and those which are permitted (such as prayer meetings) may be conducted only with the knowledge and consent of the authorities. Religious believers who abide by these and other regulations may have their congregations registered with the authorities, who may replace the elected leaders of these congregations at any time. Believers who do not accept these conditions are in an illegal position, and imprisonment is but the most severe of the many forms of persecution to which they regularly are subjected for attempting to go on living according to their beliefs.



Yekaterina Barin was tried in August 1976 in the Ukraine for teaching children about religion. She was sentenced to 2½ years' imprisonment, which she is serving in a camp near Kharkov.

This photograph shows the Baptist Pyotr Siemens (born in 1950) being led away from his trial in 1975. Siemens, whose head had been shorn during his pre-trial detention, is in the center of the picture. He is being taken to a "Raven" (*Voronok*), a truck for carrying prisoners. He had been convicted of "anti-Soviet slander" and teaching religion to children and was about to begin the sentence of 3 years' imprisonment imposed on him.

After the trial a government newspaper in Kazakhstan called Siemens a "poisoner of souls" for "seducing" young people to religion.



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5 June 1977: the trial of Ivan Schlecht and Yakov Jantsen in the town of Kant in Kirgizia. Schlecht and Jantsen were charged with "teaching religion to children in an organized manner" after local authorities broke up a Sunday School meeting in Schlecht's home. The trial was held not in a normal courthouse but in the propaganda center of the enterprise where Schlecht worked as a fitter. The photograph above shows a group of local Baptists who gathered outside the building. The Baptists were held back until all seats were filled by a group of school pupils who were bussed in by the authorities. Schlecht's wife was allowed to attend the trial only after he threatened not to speak during the proceedings if she were not admitted. Both men were sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment.

The photograph below shows a card composed by Baptists in Kazakhstan regarding three Baptists in Central Asia who were sentenced to imprisonment in 1977. Ivan Schlecht (bottom left) and Yakov Jantsen (bottom right) are shown with their families. On the top left is Yakov Wolf, who was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment for his leadership of an unregistered Baptist congregation.



Вольф Яков Петрович

Любимые  
УЗНИКИ  
З А П А Д Н О Е  
ЕВАНГЕЛИЯ



Семья Ивана Шлегеля

ПОМНИТЕ МЕРУ ИЗЫ



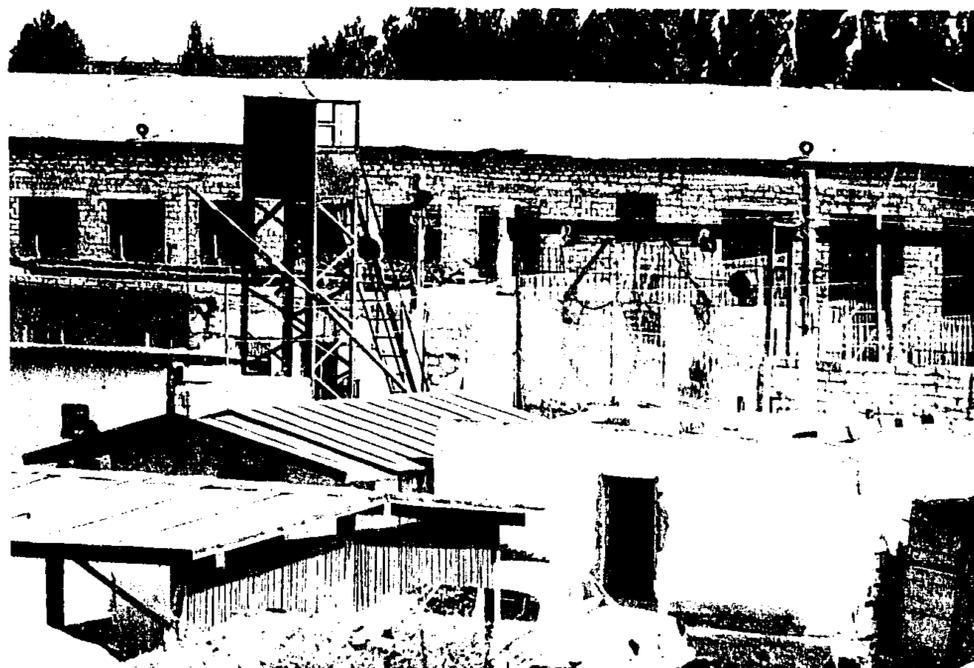
Peter Peters, the pastor of the unregistered Baptist congregation in Rostov-on-Don, in the south of the Russian Federation. He was detained in August 1977 when police broke up a prayer meeting of the congregation. The authorities had twice in the preceding week forcibly taken down a tent which the Baptists had set up for their prayer meetings in the yard of a member of the congregation. Peters was subsequently released, but was re-arrested in January 1978 during a two-month period in which, according to Baptist sources, seventy members of the congregation were sentenced to ten or fifteen days' imprisonment. Peter Peters was sentenced in March 1978 to 2 1/2 years' imprisonment. This is his third sentence of imprisonment.

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Pyotr Serebrennikov is a member of the unregistered Baptist congregation in the village of Ivanovka, in Azerbaïdzhân. In 1976 the congregation submitted complaints that they were being harassed by local government officials because of their efforts to conduct their religious life. Pyotr Serebrennikov (who was born in 1900), his brother Ivan and two women from the congregation were arrested. All but Serebrennikov were released. He was tried for "anti-Soviet slander" and "infringing citizens' persons and rights under the guise of conducting religious ceremonies". In spite of his age he was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment. However, he was released in 1977, before completing his sentence.



This photograph (left) shows part of the perimeter wall of the camp in the city of Baku (Azerbaïdzhân) where Pyotr Serebrennikov served part of the sentence imposed on him in 1976.

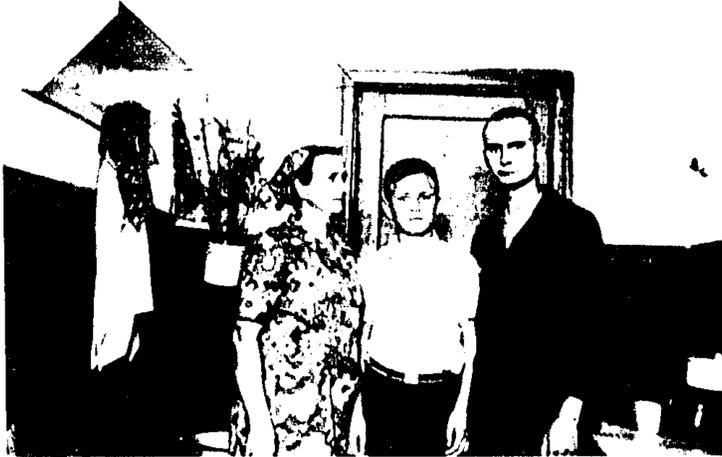


This photograph (right) shows another part of the perimeter wall of the same camp (shown above) at Baku. A watch tower stands to the left of the center. Coiled barbed wire on top of an exterior wall is visible below and to the left of the watch tower.

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Anatoly Koplik was sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment in September 1975 because, after being called up for military service, he had refused to take the soldiers' oath or bear arms. He is serving his sentence in a colony in Blagoveshchensk, near the Soviet-Chinese border. This photograph was taken in July 1977, when Anatoly's mother (and younger brother) came several thousand miles on one of the two extended visits allowed each year under Soviet law: each extended visit lasts up to 3 days. Before she was allowed to see her son, officials of the camp administration tried to persuade her to influence him. They showed her letters which they had received from Amnesty International adoption groups working for Koplik. They asked her how Amnesty International came to know so much about her son's situation and whether her son had been in contact with "this organization". She replied that he was not allowed to enjoy fully his legal rights of correspondence with his family, let alone with anyone abroad.

During her visit Mrs Koplik tried to give Anatoly some onion and garlic to help build up his strength. These were confiscated from him and the visit was ended ahead of time.



The photograph shows Anatoly Koplik in the relatively luxurious visiting room in his camp in Blagoveshchensk.

Georgy Vins, the imprisoned Secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists which is not officially recognized. His father, a Baptist pastor, died in imprisonment in 1943, and his son, Pyotr Vins, a member of the Ukrainian "Helsinki" monitoring group, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in April 1978. Georgy Vins was arrested in 1974 and subsequently sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment and 5 years in internal exile. The photograph shows him in his prisoner's uniform in a strict-régime corrective labour colony in Siberia.

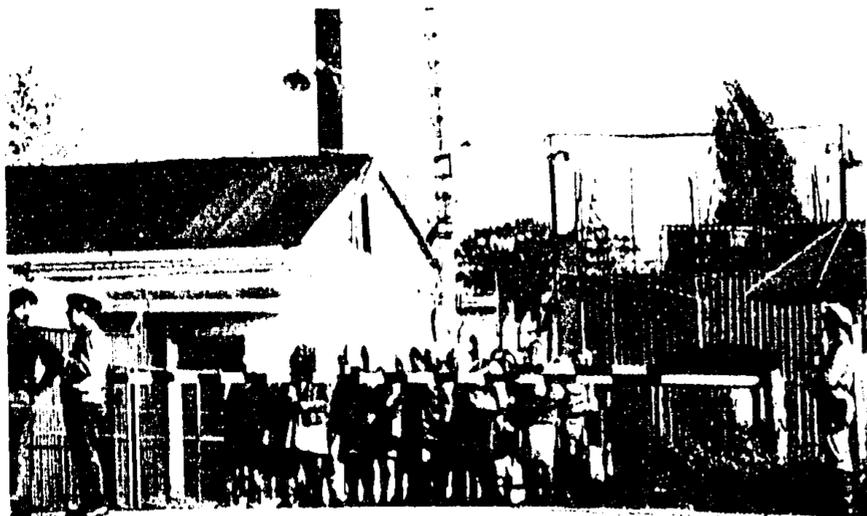


Lyudmilla (left) and Larissa (right) Zaitseva.

The Zaitseva sisters were among four Baptists who were arrested in a town near Leningrad in March 1977 after police discovered, during a house-search, that they had been printing religious literature. All four went on trial in November 1977 and were sentenced to imprisonment. Lyudmilla (born in 1946) was sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment; Larissa (born in 1951) was sentenced to 3½ years' imprisonment.



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These rare photographs are of parts of the exterior of a camp in the town of Ust-Labinsk, Krasnodar Territory, in the south of the Russian Federation. They were taken by friends greeting the Baptist Dina Kravchenko as she was released in September 1977 at the end of her 4-year sentence in the camp.

The first plate shows the camp gate through which Dina Kravchenko was released.

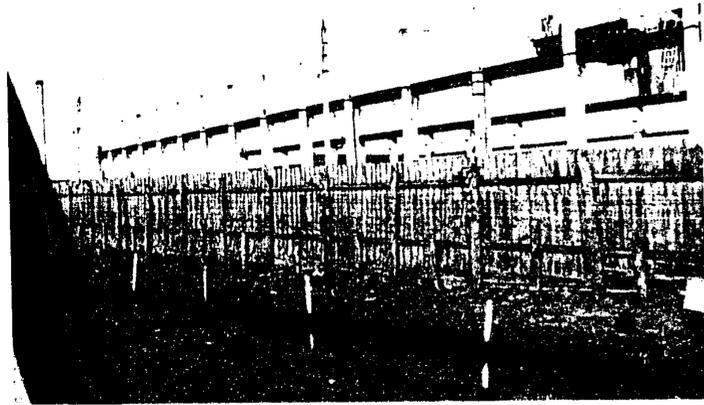
To the left of the camp gate in the second plate can be seen a "Raven" (*Voronok*).

The third plate shows her (holding flowers) in prayer with friends and relatives.

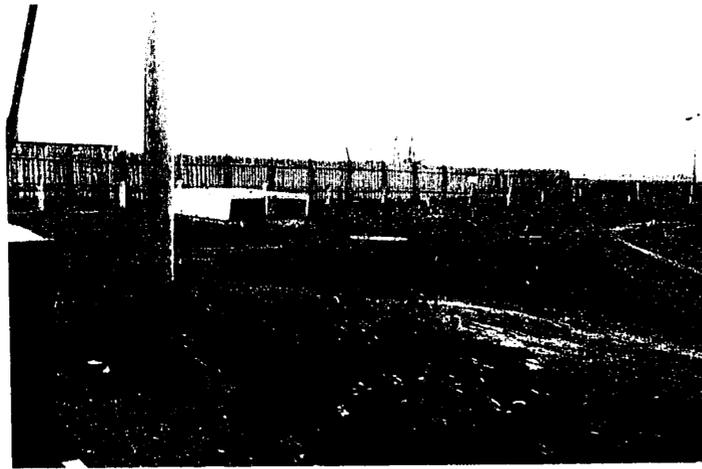


One view of a corrective labour colony (camp) near Zyryanovsk in Kazakhstan. A watch tower is visible to the left of the photograph.

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Amnesty International is a world-wide human rights movement which is independent of any government, political faction, ideology, economic interest or religious creed. It works for the release of men and women imprisoned anywhere for their beliefs, colour, sex, ethnic origin, language or religion, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. These are termed "prisoners of conscience".



These pictures came to Amnesty International unlabelled but with the pictures of Dina Kravchenko's release. They are clearly of perimeter walls and barbed wire fences of a camp, probably the one from which Dina Kravchenko was released.



Another view of the corrective labour colony (camp) near Zyryanovsk in Kazakhstan.