

## CITY THROWS ITSELF ON THE MERCY OF THE BEATERS

Residents of Blagoveshchensk, who suffered during the time of a police special operation a year ago, have written denial statements en masse. Human rights advocates who arrived from Moscow were booed in an organized manner in front of television cameras



A year ago (10—14 December 2004) there was a police pogrom in Blagoveshchensk, which received broad fame in the whole world as an operation completely identical with those mop-ups and filtropoints that have become an integral part of life in Chechnya.

One year later, on 10 December 2005, human rights advocates arrived in Blagoveshchensk – member of the presidential council on contributing to the development of civil society in Russia and chair of the Moscow Helsinki Group Lyudmila Alexeyeva and Lev Ponomarev, executive director of the movement «For human rights». Both had been here a year ago, when the tracks were still fresh from the events, the clarification of the circumstances of which is now taking place in court. (eight police officers are being held criminally liable.)

The human rights advocates were eagerly awaited in Blagoveshchensk. True, different people awaited them in different ways.

### Yellow isn't in fashion!

A few minutes after 10 AM. In many countries and on many continents people are celebrating World Human Rights Day – the corresponding Declaration was adopted on 10 December 1948. The administration of Blagoveshchensk strongly resisted, but nevertheless did allocate the city House of Culture and Leisure – it is right in the center of the city – for the meeting of the mop-up victims with the human rights advocates. Alexeyeva and Ponomarev are climbing up to the stage. The hall is packed. A woman is running around – she is checking the microphones. You can get dizzy from the quantity of television cameras: even a group from Channel One has come to imprint the human rights advocates – that is a great rarity.

10:25. Ponomarev is just able to pronounce a few words when men in suits and neckties start to rapidly step out along the aisle to the stage. That same woman fluidly hands out the microphones to them, and Ponomarev will no longer be heard any more, he is “disconnected”. The goons, however, are “amplified” to the point where your ears are ringing. It is clear, first, that everything has been excellently prepared and second, that those who did the preparing are not for Ponomarev.

“We’re no simpletons here for you! Not little boys! We don’t need no western inoculations!”

“Shove off, you won’t make an orange revolution! We don’t need it!”

“Did you come here for free? Whose money did you spend?”

Ponomarev tries to reply, but answers have not been stipulated. Alexeyeva gathers air in the lungs and shouts something, but the gullets of the brave chaps turn out to be tin plated. The folks from the capital are no match for them! Lyudmila Mikhailovna stands on the stage with difficulty: she is 78 years old and her legs are ill. Anyone can see this who is in the hall. But it has been decided not to observe niceties.

The hall boos, claps, stomps – not the whole hall, just the first few rows.. Time and again “Get out of here!” is heard. But the audience in the back of the hall is quiet for some reason.

“Hey, you, yellow one! Yellow isn’t in fashion!” This is already the goons turning their attention to Veronika Shakhova, the now-legendary Blagoveshchensk journalist – she was the first to shout to the whole world what was happening in the mopped-up city, by which she stopped the police lawlessness. Then Veronika was the editor in chief of the city newspaper “Zerkalo”, from which she was soon ousted for manifesting honesty and assistance to the victims of the mop-up. “Hey, yellow one! Quit working off the money! You’ve got 10 thousand for each ‘victim!’”

So Shakhova’s a billionaire now? There were hundreds of victims, after all...

“We’re defending ourselves from your invasion — of the human rights organizations! This was the last time you came here!

“You demanded that the lads write statements! You paid them for statements! And now they’re refusing!”

“We won’t let you in the city any more!

It must be admitted, the shouters weren’t insincere — they truly did despise the human rights advocates from the capital.

The back of the hall starts to disperse — to leave the hall through the side doors. But you can hear a strong solo by the woman responsible for the microphones – this is the director of the House of Culture. The woman shouts: “Everybody back! Do not disperse! They have to leave here first! The cameras

have to show how we're casting them out!"

Lyudmila Alexeyeva descends the three steps down from the stage with difficulty, every movement comes to her with great physical labor. The Bashkirian human rights advocate Ildar Isangulov has disappeared someplace. No, he's back, only now he's wearing different clothes for some reason. By his side, content, leaning on a tripod like on a walking stick – Ruslan Sharafutdinov, head of the press service of the MVD of Bashkiria. It turns out that in the expulsion operation, Ildar got not only just boos, but also two liters of the local mayonnaise, thrown at him. No, these weren't natsbols [National Bolsheviks], specializing in our country in such acts, but lads who after the dousing, as witnesses insist, jumped right into a car with license plates of the administration of the president of Bashkiria.

In a word, the expulsion of the human rights advocates by the efforts of the people, recorded by the television cameras of all the main and republican television channels of the country, had taken place.

And this is just the time to ask oneself several questions. First, who were "the people"? And second, where during this were the victims — the victims of last year's mop-up, for the support of whom both Alexeyeva and Ponomarev had personally spent so much strength and energy in difficult times for them?

### **A rally of the bureaucrats**

The expulsion of the human rights advocates was carried out by local state employees. A minimum of 15 people were demanded for the event from each enterprise and organization living on budgetary funds and found under the jurisdiction of the executive power – as the event participants themselves reported. The people were provided with buses, and everything was done in such a way that to refuse was impossible. The agitator starting the shouting was none other than the deputy mayor of Blagoveshchensk, comrade Ivanov. That was his leitmotif about the "American inoculations".

The most active people giving the rebuff turned out to be rural – they had been brought in through the rayon agroadministration and from the forestry administrations. The directors and petty bureaucrats were those goons who were doing the loud yelling. A certain geographic remoteness of the agro and forestry administration contingent from centers of distribution of information quickly made itself known.

"8 drug addicts were beaten up!", they assured me, exiting the hall and continuing to feel outrage. "And why are you defending them?"

I attempt to interject that the people beaten up by the police and now having the status of victims at trial were several hundred...

But it is all useless. "You just don't know! Only eight!" There then follows a retelling of the myth about how the underworld had wanted to subordinate Blagoveshchensk to itself, while the nice policemen courageously stood fast, and now are even sitting on the defendants' bench for this, although they are heroes, while among the so-called victims there are plenty who had ended up behind bars themselves last year.

This last is true. Six persons out of several hundred are being brought to court hearings from the SIZO.

"They're murderers! Rapists!", the bureaucrats gathered for the expulsion do not tire of repeating. "The police were right to beat them. They got caught for a reason. 20 people have already been locked up for serious crimes!"

I bring attention to a discrepancy: if there were only 8 victims, then why have 20 of them been locked up?..

"We've got nothing to talk about with you", the officials immediately parry. They turn around and disappear into the snowdrifts. A couple minutes, and the trail has gone cold. No way to catch up.

By the way, the accusation addressed at the victims is more than serious. It is one thing to steal a chicken (there is no money for food – a poor people live in Blagoveshchensk), but serious and particularly serious crimes are something else entirely.

"Was there something like that?", I ask the victims. "How many of you were locked up?"

They are unable to answer – nobody knows people who have been locked up, or what they had committed. Strange: it is a very small town.

I go to the GROVD [police precinct station], in order to ask this same question, because it is a matter of principle – the argument "why defend people like THAT" is very popular in the bureaucratic and police milieu of Bashkiria.

Nevertheless, there is no answer at the GROVD either. The chief of the local public safety police, Timerkhay Ilyasov, waves his hands in horror and sends me to the MVD of the RF, to Moscow – they know everything better over there. Surely it can not be that Timerkhay Rashitovich does not know about something that, if it did happen, happened in his diocese? So maybe there never were any "twenty locked up victims"? And all of this has been concocted for an effective whitewashing? Or maybe Ilyasov, like other police chiefs, is simply afraid of everything and anything now – driven into a corner by examinations and explanatory memos?

Analyzing her own expulsion, Lyudmila Alexeyeva spoke thus: everything took place because "they're afraid of us", and "it is good that they are afraid; next time they won't go for a mop-up".

One can soothe oneself with this. But is that the whole picture? Or is it perhaps a symptom of a

completely different phenomenon?

Under Putin, it is known, the bureaucratic class has grown to numbers exceeding the Soviet bureaucracy. After such an expulsion of the human rights advocates from Blagoveshchensk it can be asserted: this class has outgrown Homo Sovieticus in skill as well.

The bureaucracy today is that same aggressive majority. There are oodles of them, they are ready to fight for their access to the budgetary feeding trough, giving a most passionate rebuff to those from whom might emanate a threat of the removal of the established power. It's dog-eat-dog. And nothing like this was observed even a year ago: the bureaucrats sat quietly, conversed with human rights advocates over tea and only then, after these had left, did they weave their web in their offices. Now it is clear: different times have arrived. Even the petty bureaucracy does not wish any dialogues, compromises, tolerance and does not experience the desire to be considerate of anybody.

"Do you know who you're defending?" shouted one of the forestry administration managers. "Shit - heads! They are shit - heads!"

And poked a finger at someone who was disappearing off into the blizzard. These were those same victims.

### The minority beaten into obedience?

Where were the victims? While the bureaucrats were performing their well-rehearsed rebuff to the human rights advocates, deftly passing the microphones back and forth, what was amazing was, probably, the main thing: and where were those for the sake of whom and at whose invitation the human rights advocates had come to Blagoveshchensk? Why did none of them, not a single person, get up and attempt to at least cry out "Stop! Think! What are you doing?"

Next to me a woman was crying, observing this witches' Sabbath, and quietly wailing:

"They didn't beat you enough, it means, if you're not saying anything now... But 'these' have forgotten how their children were crawling on their knees before the cops then... It means, it needs to be repeated."

And so, at first, in the hall, the victims kept silent. Then they turned and walked out. Even later, they turned off their telephones and didn't communicate with anyone any more. The truth of the tragedy of Blagoveshchensk is in this, too.

And now, documents – a statement to the name of procurator-general from Blagoveshchensk resident Pavel Borodin. The text will explain much. The statement is one of a series of such, that are called "denial statements" in Blagoveshchensk. From people who had been victims of the mop-up, but then "they" had "worked" with these, dangling all kinds of prospects before them (mostly jobs – the thing that is in the shortest supply in the city), and then came the series of "denials".



Borodin's statement — typical: "I had hotheadedly given testimony that I had been hit four times with a truncheon when the noise had spread out [cited in accordance with the original—A.P.] beyond the borders of our republic I became ashamed for my behavior I want to make an open-hearted admission that the first time I had an explanatory memo yielding to emotions. The second time I did not ascribe the seriousness of my explanation too.... I ask you to take into attention my open-hearted admissions... I hope it will help in the justice of this question..."

Certain of the victims went even further – they renounced their claims against the police, concurrently they demanded of procurator-general Ustinov that he "restrain" his employees. "...The procuracy of the RB has initiated a case against my desire. I have once again begun to be invited to the procuracy of the RB and forced anew to give testimony against Gilvanov [that precinct policeman that beat without a mask, and he is now threatened with the biggest punishment—A.P.]... I ask you... to influence the actions of your subordinates. I, A.S. [the name is known to the editorial staff, but the author of the statement asks that it not to be named publicly—A.P.], wrote to the procuracy a statement on dismissal of the case against operative plenipotentiary A.S. Gilvanov."

And even more candidly: "...they took testimony from me, where I in resentment for the actions of the police embellished the events just a teeny little bit, about which I regret genuinely. During exit from the basement there were many of us, we decided to embellish the given events so the traffic cops and OMONs would really get it good, we were 20—30 people, I assert yet again, that I am repenting... After a certain time they called me in to the procuracy where I gave initial testimony, completely not realizing the consequences. I now have no claims against either the police or the procuracy and my sole desire to forget these days... From Alexey Nikolayevich Gorshenin out of the village of Ilyina Polyana."

And a real gem: "To the procurator-general from inhabitant of the village of Ilyina Polyana V.N. Gulin. ...On 11 December of the year 2004 I went for water and slipped in so doing obtained a contusion of the

thigh and shin... I applied to the hospital, where I said that the OMON had beaten me up... because I was mad at the police... they called me in to the procuracy 5—6 times and I am tired of all this... I ask to dismiss...”.

The majority of the “denial statements” are carbon copies of one another, because they would come to the homes of the victims and dictate them. The administrative resource in so doing was activated most subtly and skilfully. What was being offered for the “denial”, and by whom, is known both to us, the newspaper, and to the procuracy, a verification is being conducted. That the “contrition” came to people with difficulty, but not for free, is already a fact.

A disgrace? Of course. Because nobody can help you if you do not want to help yourself. It can not be said that the “repentees” shouted at the human rights advocates louder than the others. No, they simply stood off to the side silently and looking forlorn. Grown men who did not protect the 78-year-old Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alexeyeva, who was with great difficulty overcoming the three steps from the stage of the Gouse of Culture and Leisure to the jeers of other brawny goons...

### **Police blackmail**

Before the anniversary of the mop-up, Veronika Shakhova, former editor in chief of the city newspaper “Zerkalo”, conducted a sociological investigation in Blagoveshchensk. To the question: “Can you or your close ones become victims of the arbitrariness of the law-enforcement organs?”, 64% anonymously responded “I have already been a victim” and 32% said “I do not rule out such a possibility”. [Information published based on the data of the first issue of the newspaper “Zerkalo plus”, which has just begun to come out with the financial support of the embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands in the RF.]

86% [sic] — that is practically the entire city. And only 1% of the people said: “No, I can not be a victim of the arbitrariness of the enforcers of the law”.

This is too serious a disproportion for it even to have been possible for the bureaucrats’ rally to have occurred on 10 December. Likewise there should not have been any “denial statements”... But it did take place, and they do exist... The fact is that the police in the city and in the republic remain extremely strong and to pose a grave danger to everyone around them. They constantly threaten people with arrests and criminal articles – those who complain. In the year, blackmail has been added to the threats. All kinds of rumors are rife in Blagoveshchensk – emanating from the police. That as long as the trial is going on, nobody will be catching any criminals. That the underworld already has Blagoveshchensk firmly in its paws. And that the police – which the people of Blagoveshchensk have wronged – will not lift a finger until...

Until not a single complaint is left...

And this is pure blackmail. While those responsible for the mop-up remain at their old jobs. And not in spite of the human rights advocates, but in spite of the president himself. Remember the official incantations after the events in Blagoveshchensk? The top brass in the MVD of the RF were announcing that the deputy minister of the MVD of Bashkiria Smirnov had been dismissed from service. The president even supposedly issued a document on this account. (To find the text on the official presidential website, by the way, proved impossible.)

But what was the real story? Smirnov didn’t go anywhere, he continues to sit in the same chair as before. And to issue orders before the eyes of the entire republic. Let us cite one of them, No. 674 of 11 November 2005, it concerns officers of the UVD [Administration of Internal Affairs] of the city of Sterlitamak. Yes, Smirnov is sitting quietly, but a fact’s a fact: in a whole year, not one single step has been taken to punish even a single person from the ranks of the police top brass.

And that means: what is the president against this wall of *siloviki* and bureaucrats? Absolutely nothing. Zero. The *siloviki* vertical did not want to care one bit about the executive vertical. This is a cabinet police putsch. And, that means the police violence against the country continues.

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