

# Plea to West on Soviet 'mad-house' jails

By Peter Reddaway

An appeal to Western psychiatrists from Vladimir Bukovsky, the Moscow writer, has just reached the West. Dated January 28, it calls on the psychiatric profession to concern itself with the Soviet practice of imprisoning dissenters in mental hospitals.

In particular, it asks psychiatrists to study some 150 pages of documentation on individual cases, and to express their opinion on them.

Mr. Bukovsky was first arrested in 1963 for possessing Milovan Djilas's book *The New Class*. Declared insane, he spent a year and a half in the Leningrad prison-hospital. In December, 1965, he organized a demonstration of 200 people in Moscow which demanded an open trial—under the banner "Respect the Constitution!"—for the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuly Daniel. For this he was again arrested, and held in the Serbsky Institute for Forensic Psychiatry.

The next summer—in Mr. Bukovsky's words—"a representative of Amnesty International arrived in Moscow and, as I learnt afterwards, threatened to carry out an inquiry into the affair. After that, in August, 1966, I was released without any explanation."

In January, 1967, he organized another demonstration in defence of some writer friends who had been arrested. This time no effort was made to label him insane, and he spent his three-year sentence in one of the 10 labour camps of the Voronezh region.

This is the full text of his appeal:

"In recent years in our country a number of court orders have been made involving the placing in psychiatric hospitals ('of special type' and otherwise) of people who in the opinion of their relatives and close friends are mentally healthy. These people are: Pyotr Grigorenko, Ilya Rips, Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Valeria Novodvorskaya, Ivan Yakhimovich, Vladimir Gershuni, Victor Fainberg, Victor Kuznetsov, Olga Iofe, Vladimir Borisov and others—people well known for their initiatives in defence of civil rights in the Soviet Union.

"This phenomenon arouses justified anxiety, especially in view of the widely publicized placing of the biologist Jaurès Medvedev in a psychiatric hospital by extrajudicial means.

"The diagnoses of the psychiatrists, who have served as expert witnesses in court, and on whose diagnoses the court orders are based, provoke many doubts as

regards their content. However, only specialists in psychiatry can express authoritative opinions about the degree of legitimacy of these diagnoses.

"Taking advantage of the fact that I have managed to obtain exact copies of the diagnoses of the forensic-psychiatric teams which examined Grigorenko, Fainberg, Gorbanevskaya, Borisov and Yakhimovich, and extracts from the diagnosis on Kuznetsov. I am sending you these documents and also various letters and materials which reveal the characters of these people.

"I will be very grateful to you if you can study this matter and express your opinion on it. I realize that at a distance and without the essential clinical information it is very difficult to determine the mental condition of a person, and either to diagnose an illness or assert the absence of any illness.

"Therefore I ask you to express your opinion on only this point: do the above-mentioned diagnoses contain enough scientifically-based evidence not only to indicate the mental illnesses described in the diagnoses but also to indicate the necessity of isolating these people completely from society?"

"I will be very happy if you can interest your colleagues in this matter and if you consider it possible to place it on the agenda for discussion by the next international congress of psychiatrists.

"For a healthy person there is no fate more terrible than indefinite internment in a psychiatric hospital. I believe that you will not remain indifferent to this problem and will devote a portion of your time to it—just as physicians find time to combat the use of the achievements of their science in ways harmful to mankind.

"Thanking you in advance,

V. Bukovsky"

Mr. Bukovsky's studied tone is clearly influenced by the fact that he is appealing to professional bodies.

By contrast, many Soviet dissenters have already expressed strong views. Last June, for example, after the internment of Jaurès Medvedev, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel prizewinning Soviet writer, declared in an open letter:

"It is time to think clearly: the incarceration of free-thinking healthy people in mad-houses is spiritual murder; it is a variation of the gas chamber, but even more cruel: the torture of the people being killed is more malicious and more prolonged."

Quite exceptionally, Mr. Medvedev was released at once.