

Letter from Prosecutors to Zhdanov October 28, 1938 – English transl.docx

Letter from members of the Procuracy of the USSR, October 28, 1939, appealing to A. A. Zhdanov for changes in the Procuracy and calling for a halt to the criminal behavior of the NKVD

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Dear Comrade Zhdanov!

We, the employees of the Procuracy of the USSR ask that you attentively read this letter, which was written by us after long reflection and with a single purpose — to inform the Central Committee of the party about shocking occurrences in the operation of the Procuracy and the NKVD.

The party's Central Committee decision of November 17, 1938, identified the grossest distortions of Soviet laws by NKVD organs and obligated those organs and the Procuracy not only to stop these crimes but also to correct the gross violations of law that have resulted in mass sentencing of totally innocent, honest Soviet persons to various sorts of punishment, often even execution. These persons — not a few, but tens and hundreds of thousands — sit in camps and jails and wait for a just decision; they are perplexed about why and for what they were arrested and by what right the bastards from Ezhov's band persecuted them, using medieval torture.

It would seem that the party's Central Committee decision of November 17, 1938, should have mobilized all attention on immediately rectifying the criminal policy of the bastard Ezhov and his criminal clique, which has literally terrorized Soviet persons, upright, dedicated citizens, old party members, and entire party organizations.

In reality, something else is happening.

Comrade Pankrat'ev, who has replaced Comrade Vyshinsky, cannot guarantee implementation of this critical decision of the party Central Committee because of his lack of authority in the Procuracy and particularly in the eyes of NKVD personnel.

It is strange to say, but it is a fact that Comrade Beria not only is not burning with desire to free totally innocent people, but to the contrary is conducting a definite policy to hinder this effort and is using his authority to maintain the “honor of the uniform.”

Therefore, the decision to charge a special conference of the NKVD with reviewing its own decisions executed by Ezhov's band is a big mistake.

Here, at a special conference, the decisive role and final word belong not to the representative of supervision the Procurator — but to Comrade Beria and his entourage,

who, with all the means and resources at their disposal, are violating the requirements of the Procuracy to stop these actions.

Comrade Pankrat'ev, who attends these meetings, bows his head to Politburo candidate member Comrade Beria and silently goes along with obviously wrong decisions.

Thus, at these special conferences the absolutely correct and lawful protests of the Procuracy of the USSR are crushed with the direct connivance of the Procurator of the USSR, Comrade Pankrat'ev.

One only needs to review what took place at the last special conference sessions and speak with the procurators who directly prepared these matters and it becomes apparent that the line followed by Comrade Beria has nothing in common with party directives.

Such practices have disoriented the staff of the Procuracy of the USSR, those honest procurators who directly monitor these scandalous cases and spend sleepless nights and grieve for guiltless Soviet persons condemned by Ezhov's band.

We earnestly beseech you, Comrade Zhdanov, to take up this matter of utmost importance, and if there is no chance of changing the criminal practices pursued within the walls of the NKVD, to change the system, to entrust the Procuracy with reviewing matters incorrectly handled by Ezhov's band — excluding from these matters the authority of Comrade Beria, who intentionally or unintentionally is cultivating a defense of the “honor of the uniform” of NKVD personnel at all costs.

Just consider that hundreds of thousands of people guilty of nothing continue to sit in jails and camps, and nearly a year has passed since the party's Central Committee took its decision.

Can it really be this does not worry anyone?

Speak with the procurators of the special procuracies (railroad, navigation) and they will tell you facts that will make your hair stand on end, and they will show you these “cases,” this disgrace to Soviet power.

At the same time, we ask you to correct the very grave error of Comrade Pankrat'ev's appointment. Give us a director with a high degree of authority who can take on even Beria.

We senior employees have always been puzzled by the relationship of the party leadership and government to the staff of the Procuracy, the sharpest tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Can it really be so hard to understand that the procuracies, by virtue of the special obligations entrusted to them, must be properly compensated?

A procurator on the staff of the Procuracy of the USSR who has worked honestly for 10-15 years and who performs the most serious work earns 650-750 rubles, whereas a newly hired NKVD staff member, a semiliterate youth, earns more than 1200-1500 rubles, enjoys all the benefits, receives a bonus, a uniform allowance, etc.

Where is the logic? For what is this wrongheaded policy followed?

Procurators cannot be kept in a state of semi-starvation for decades!

We ask you to think about this. We are completely convinced that all that has been described here is being concealed from the party's Central Committee — obviously it is more advantageous that way for someone.

The procurators of the Procuracy of the USSR.

October 28, 1939