



I Chose Freedom - The Personal And Political Life Of A Soviet Official

Victor Kravchenko

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I CHOSE FREEDOM The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official by VICTOR KRAVCHENKO
Jfevr Yorfc CHARLES SCRIBNERS SONS 1048 , 1946, mr VICTOR jPrfaxted IA tfe United States of tJkr
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NIGHT EVKBY MINUTE of the taxi ride between my rented roam and Union Station that Saturday night
seemed loaded with danger and witbf destiny. The very streets and darkened buildings seemed frowning and
hostile. In my seven months in the capital I had traveled that route dozens of times, light-heartedly, scarcely
noticing my surroundings. But this time everything was different tkh time I was running away. The
American family with whom I lived in Washington had been friendly and generous to the stranger under
their roof. When I fell ill they had watched over me with an easy unaffected solicitude. What had begun as a
mere financial arrangement had grown into a warm human relationship to which the barrier of language
added a fillip of excitement. I sensed that in being kind to one homesick Russian these good Americans were
ex pressing their gratitude to all Russians to the brave allies who were then rolling back the tide of German
conquest on a thousand-mile front. They gave me full personal credit for every Soviet victory. My rent was
mid for a week ahead. Yet I left the house that night without a word of final farewell. I merely said that if my
trip should keep me out of town beyond Tuesday, they had my permission to let the room. I wanted my hosts
to be honestly ignorant of my whereabouts and of my intention not to return, should there be any inquiries
from the Soviet Pur chasing Commission. For several days, at the Commission offices, I had simulated
headaches and general indisposition. Casually I had remarked that morning to a few colleagues that I had
better remain home for a rest that I might iiot come in on Monday. I was playing hard for an extra day of
grace before my absence would be discovered. After collecting my March salary-I insisted on straightening
out my expense vouchers for the last trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and the trip to Chicago before that. It
appeared that about thirty dollars were still due to me. The idea was to erase the slightest excuse for any
charges of financial irregularity to explain my flight. I also made sure that all my papers were in perfect
order, so that others could take up the work where I had left off. Later, when the news of my getaway was on
the front pages of the Washington and New York papers, some of the men and women at the Commission
must have recalled a peculiar warmth in my talks with them thai Saturday, a special pressure in my
handclasp when I said So long. They must have realtied that I was bidding them a final and wordless fare-
well. Never again, not even here in free America, would any of them dare to meet me. In the months of
working together some of these people had 2 CHOSE FREEDOM come close to me without saying much we
had understood one another Had I been able to part with them openly, emotionally, Russianly, some of the
weight that pressed on my spirits would assuredly have been lifted...

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