

# Leftists worldwide rally around Boris Kagarlitsky, call for liberation of all Russian anti-war political prisoners

Monday 8 April 2024, by [KAGARLITSKY Boris](#), [LEVY Andrea](#) (Date first published: 3 April 2024).

**Renowned Russian sociologist, dissident was jailed on February 13 for five years on trumped-up charges of “justifying terrorism”**

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*Below this article we have included Kagarlitsky’s most recent prison letter to his daughter in which he talks about Putin’s cynical use of the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.*

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Renowned Russian intellectual and dissident Boris Kagarlitsky has a new book coming out this month with Pluto Press. Titled [The Long Retreat: Strategies to Reverse the Decline of the Left](#), it tackles the thorny question of why the left has reached a historic weak point globally and what is to be done. To the dismay of his many friends and comrades the world over, Kagarlitsky won’t be celebrating the launch of the book with them, as he is currently confined to a Russian jail for his opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

He was initially arrested by the Federal Security Service (FSB) in July 2023 on the ludicrous charge of “justifying terrorism” for some offhand jocular remarks he made online nine months earlier about the explosion of a bomb by Ukrainian forces on a bridge in Crimea. “Unfortunately, Leviathan has no sense of humour,” Kagarlitsky quipped in an [article](#) written for *Portside* following his somewhat unexpected release six months later with a fine, an interdiction on teaching, and various restrictions on his freedom of expression. The prosecutors, for their part, quickly demonstrated their grim resolve to suppress the troublemaker. Arguing that Kagarlitsky’s punishment was “unjust due to its excessive leniency,” they filed an appeal before a Russian military court in February, falsely claiming that he had failed to cooperate with the court or pay the original fine. On February 13, 2024, the kangaroo court found him guilty and sentenced him to five years in a penal colony.

In the wake of the patently bogus judgement, family, friends and acquaintances in Russia and throughout the world are rallying, as they did following his previous arrest, and have launched an international solidarity campaign calling for Kagarlitsky’s liberation, along with that of all Russian political prisoners. One of the main tools of the campaign is a petition that has been translated into nearly 20 languages, including Russian and Ukrainian. The signatories are a virtual who’s who of the global left, including such well-known figures as former British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, author Naomi Klein, leader of La France Insoumise Jean-Luc Mélenchon, economist Yanis Varoufakis, and philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in addition to leaders and elected representatives of left and progressive parties, along with thousands of intellectuals and activists, North and South, from Australia to Argentina, the UK to South Africa, and Germany to Brazil, not to mention Moscow to Kyiv. The petition has garnered over 13,500 signatures in 45 countries since it was launched in mid-

March.

Here in Canada, such well known figures as Judy Rebick, Greg Albo and Sam Gindin have already lent their names, while in Québec the parliamentary leader of Québec Solidaire Gabriel Nadeau Dubois also signed the petition as did Jan Simpson, the national president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, representing over 60,000 workers.

The objective of the Boris Kagarlitsky International Solidarity Campaign is to appeal to left and democratic forces everywhere to demand a halt to Putin's drive to silence those voices in Russia who are not only opposing the war in Ukraine but also exposing the serious problems accumulating in Russia as a result of the war. As the campaign statement notes, "without international attention, Russia's anti-war political prisoners will be left alone to face a government that condemns them not only to imprisonment, but also to the prospect of death." Conditions both in Russian detention centres and penal colonies are substandard and represent a danger to the prisoners' health, as Kagarlitsky has already experienced during his previous stint in a prison in Syktyvkar in the Komi Republic.

## Dissent undeterred

Of course, this is not the first time Kagarlitsky has been arrested and jailed; it's not even the first time he was arrested with a new book on the horizon. As the editor of the samizdat journal *Levy Povorot* (*Left Turn*) from 1978 to 1982, he was arrested under Yuri Andropov's leadership for "anti-Soviet activities" just a few days after completing the manuscript for his book about Soviet intellectuals, which went on to be translated into English and published in 1988 under the title [\*The Thinking Reed\*](#). It garnered international acclaim and won the Deutscher Memorial Prize, awarded annually for outstanding writing in or about the Marxist tradition. The year spent in jail in 1982 failed to stifle either his commitment to justice and socialist democracy or his courage. He was arrested once again in 1993 for his opposition to Boris Yeltsin's coup and beaten by Yeltsin's security forces.

Some three decades later, Kagarlitsky has once again become a target of the Russian state. In 2021, he spent 10 days under administrative arrest for urging people to protest the fraud-ridden State Duma elections which delivered a big victory to the ruling United Russia party that Putin helped to found and that remains loyal to him. But it was Kagarlitsky's vocal condemnation of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine that provoked the real wrath of the regime. As the founder and editor of *Rabkor* (*Worker Correspondent*), a left-wing website and YouTube channel, he and the other members of the *Rabkor* team took a strong public stand against the war. On behalf of *Rabkor*, he was a signatory to a resolution adopted by the Russian "Anti-War Round Table of the Left Forces" that denounced the invasion as an expression of "the unhealthy foreign policy ambitions of a [narrow circle of individuals](#) in the leadership of the country, and also a way to divert attention away from the failures of the Russian government in domestic politics."

Kagarlitsky was initially punished by being branded a "foreign agent," a tactic deployed against scores of independent media outlets, journalists, artists, and domestic and foreign organizations of all sorts deemed inimical to the interests of the Kremlin. But he refused to be silenced and more severe reprisals were predictable.

Russian political scientist and sociologist Grigory Yudin is a member of the Boris Kagarlitsky international solidarity committee. He knows firsthand the brutality the regime reserves for dissidents. On February 24, 2022, he took part in a protest against the invasion of Ukraine and was beaten unconscious by police. And he observed in a [recent interview](#) that "the price of protest in Russia is getting higher and higher."

Asked to comment on the campaign in solidarity with Kagarlitsky, Yudin told me, “Boris is both an important thinker and a brave militant, who with his person exposes the cruelty of perhaps the most brutal neoliberal regime on the planet at the moment. Humiliated, stigmatized by the state as an ‘extremist’ and a ‘foreign agent’ (the Russian equivalent of ‘traitor’), condemned to five years in prison at age 65 and thrown into an overcrowded cell, he remains true to his principles and his beliefs.”

“Fighting for his freedom is an important opportunity for the global left in this terrible war that is raging in Europe and threatening to escalate,” Yudin continued. “If we manage to free Boris, we will have leverage to stop this war and shape the post-war order in the interests of the people, not the warmongering elites. This is clearly a case for uniting the global left, which remains shocked, fragmented and disoriented by this imperial war.”

It should be noted that while he has been a firm and courageous critic of the war, Kagarlitsky is not an uncontroversial figure on the left with respect to his evolving views on Russia-Ukraine relations. Many Ukrainian leftists, for instance, are wary of Kagarlitsky due to his earlier support for a Russian presence in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea, although they welcome his opposition to the ongoing full-scale invasion and recognize the importance of a Russian anti-war movement in thwarting Putin’s ambitions. Andrej Movchan is a case in point. In his [article](#) for *Open Democracy*, he calls for international solidarity with Kagarlitsky despite the latter’s previous support for Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and the pro-Russian separatist movements in Donbas, which Movchan recognizes proceeding from Kagarlitsky’s view that there were progressive ‘anti-imperialist’ elements at work there. Movchan goes on to acknowledge that “Kagarlitsky may have once supported sections of the Russian patriotic left who yearn for territorial expansion. But no other well-known leftist has done more to instill into thousands of Russians a simple thought: the Putin regime is criminal, the invasion of Ukraine is criminal, there is no justification for it, and it must be resisted.”

Kagarlitsky has critics as well among those who on the left who reproach him, among other complaints, for understating the role of the US and NATO in precipitating the current conflict.

Yet whatever differences of opinion with Kagarlitsky may persist in certain quarters, there is broad agreement across the spectrum of left opinion that he is a victim of the ruthless campaign of political repression unleashed by Vladimir Putin to quiet and quell opposition to the war—a campaign that is escalating as the Russian public’s appetite for the conflict slackens.

## **Mounting persecution of peace activists and Kremlin critics**

Of course, Kagarlitsky is far from alone in being jailed for thought and speech crimes. According to the Russian human rights NGO OVD-Info, between February 24, 2022 and January 22, 2024 there were [19,850 detentions for taking an anti-war stance](#). In 2023 OVD-Info also [reported an increase](#) in the number of prison sentences meted out to anti-war protestors as well as an increase in the average sentence for anti-war cases, from 36 months in 2022 to 77 months in 2023.

As a major channel of criticism of the war and, more generally, of Putin’s “neoliberal autocracy” (to borrow Kagarlitsky’s characterization), the left in Russia is being subjected to unprecedented repression. Many organizations have been shut down and activists have been sent to jail on a variety of spurious grounds.

As an editorial on the EuropeanLeft party website [states](#), it is “obvious that the criminal case against Boris Kagarlitsky is an attack on the entire left movement.” But as noted in a pamphlet published in Russian and French by a group of Russian political *émigrés* together with the editors of the *Tribune*

*des Travailleurs* in France, the mainstream media have focused almost exclusively on [Alexei Navalny](#) and various liberal critics of Putin's regime, essentially ignoring the numerous left-wing intellectuals and activists who have been subject to harsh repression.

They stress that "Any citizen claiming progressive political positions, be they activists, workers or trade unionists, is persecuted by Putin's regime, just as it persecutes certain bourgeois opposition activists and supporters of 'Western-style capitalism'" (my translation).

In addition to Kagarlitsky, the pamphlet profiles several other political prisoners such as the anarchist mathematician [Azat Miftakhov](#), who was charged with "hooliganism" for breaking a window at a local United Russia party office and given a six-year sentence which he served at a penal colony. Miftakhov was then re-arrested and charged with "justifying terrorism" for comments he allegedly made to fellow inmates. On March 28, 2024, he was imprisoned for another four years.

Another of the many persecuted dissidents is artist and musician [Aleksandra \(Sasha\) Skochilenko](#), who protested Russia's invasion of Ukraine on social media, through musical "Jams for Peace" and by replacing supermarket price tags with stickers containing information about what the Russian military was doing in Mariupol. Skochilenko was detained in April 2022 and charged, under article 207.3 of the Criminal Code, with the criminal offence of knowingly disseminating false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. She was sentenced to seven years in a penal colony.

Then there is [Darya Polyudova](#), founder of the Left Resistance movement, and a critic of the Kremlin who openly opposed the war with Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. She initially met with the repressive arm of the state as a result of her support for regional independence movements in 2014, when she was sentenced to two years in a penal colony for "public incitement to separatism." She was arrested again in 2020 this time for inciting separatism and "public justification of terrorism using the Internet." In May 2021 she was sentenced to six years in prison. Apparently this was not sufficient for the authorities; in 2021 the FSB charged her with "organizing an extremist community," and a year later she was condemned to nine years in a penal colony.

In an [interview](#) with *Green Left*, Kagarlitsky's daughter Ksenia reiterated what her father wrote in April 2023 ([in Canadian Dimension](#), as it happens): "If we want to stop political persecution in Russia and other countries of the world, we must fight for everyone."

The Boris Kagarlitsky international solidarity campaign aims to build so much support that it becomes impossible for politicians who are in dialogue with the Russian government to ignore it, which would bring pressure to bear for Kagarlitsky's liberation (his appeal is expected to be heard in early May). The campaign also seeks to draw attention to the plight of Russian political prisoners, the vast majority of whom are imprisoned on baseless charges.

Kagarlitsky himself was recently moved from the pre-trial detention centre in Moscow, where he shared a cell with 15 other men, to Detention Centre No.12 in Zelenograd. His first letter from that location, published by *Rabkor* and translated by Renfrey Clarke, testifies to his unflagging spirit and sense of irony. In it he turns his sociologist's lense on prison life. Another book may be in the offing. Hopefully the Boris Kagarlitsky international solidarity campaign will help ensure he finishes it as a free man.

*Everyone wishing to support Kagarlitsky by signing the petition can find it at [freeboris.info](#) and [change.org](#).*

*Andrea Levy is a coordinating editor at Canadian Dimension and a member of the Boris Kagarlitsky*

## **Boris's second letter to his daughter from prison**

Ksiusha, my dear, hello!

As always, I am immensely happy to receive your letter. And your news. Here, as you know, a new tension has arisen due to the terrible [terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall](#). The crime itself is terrible, but what is even more frightening is how cynically they try to use it for propaganda, diverting the conversation from the real criminals and trying to blame Ukraine, America, and for some reason, England for everything. Moreover, even the fact that there is absolutely no evidence pointing to Ukraine is presented as the main proof: since we have no evidence, it means the Ukrainians carefully planned everything, thus proving their cunningest.

This leads to even more horrible suspicions and fears, which I won't even formulate. But it is obvious that [Macron is right](#)—such behaviour is harmful to Russia. Even for the current authorities. The terrorist attack sparked a wave of sympathy and compassion for Russia. Any somewhat competent government would try to use this. But “our” side has started a disgusting propaganda campaign that immediately evokes disgust (I judge even by the people sitting here who haven't seen anything but television for a long time). In other words, the effect of sympathy for the authorities on an international scale is already being nullified. And what will be the internal consequences? I hope none. But we will understand this only in April. Even close to the end of the month. We need to wait for two to three weeks.

On a positive note: your photo is wonderful. It made an impression on the censor; she said you resemble me. Although I objected, saying, “much more beautiful.” Well, of course, and younger! In short, the photo is excellent.

You write that you have lost weight, and I, on the contrary, try not to gain weight. I've sorted out my food, but the neighbours are always trying to treat me to something. But I resist. And try not to overeat. But food is the main pleasure and entertainment here.

The question about the earthworm intrigued me. Of course, I would love to, but the question is, how would we communicate in that case, and how could we show mutual love? It is possible, of course, to come up with some ways of communication even with a worm!

But where did such a question come from? Is this some kind of test? By the way, today I filled out several tests for the prison psychologist at once. And as we went along, he was amazed. We finished, and he says, “Will you find your way back to the cell on your own?” I reply, “Of course, I will find it, but prisoners are not supposed to walk without escort!” He just forgot about it...

Keep writing, I eagerly await your letters!

Kisses,  
Dad

—Boris Kagarlitsky, March 2024

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**Andrea Levy**

**Boris Kagarlitsky**

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**P.S.**

Canadian Dimension

<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/leftists-worldwide-rally-around-boris-kagarlitsky-call-for-liberation-of-all-russian-anti-war-political-prisoners>