

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2008		58	Russia	<i>Memorial</i>

Announcement

Recently, Human Rights Watch issued a press release about the raid on Memorial (one of the world's most complete archives on Stalinist crimes) in Saint Petersburg on 4 December 2008. Although no campaign, this news is important enough to merit separate distribution. It is preceded by a NCH summary of the case.

NCH SUMMARY

On 4 December 2008, masked and armed men broke into the office of the Memorial Research and Information Center in St. Petersburg. They had a warrant signed by the Prosecutor's Office and included police, special forces, and members of the investigative committee of the Prosecutor's Office. They conducted a search of the office that lasted more than seven hours and seized eleven computer hard drives and other materials containing archives on Soviet repression collected since 1987. The confiscated archive included unique documents detailing the Soviet terror from 1917 to the 1960s. The search was apparently ordered in connection with an investigation against the local newspaper *Novy Petersburg* (New Petersburg) for publishing an "extremist" article in June 2007. However, Memorial director Irina Flige declared that Memorial had no relationship with the newspaper. She also said that the seizure might have been part of an official campaign to rehabilitate the Stalinist regime. The raid took place one day before Flige would attend a conference in Moscow about Stalin's place in Russian history.

[Sources: L. Harding, "British Scholar Rails at Police Seizure of Anti-Stalin Archive", *Observer* (7 December 2008); Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Police Raid Prominent Rights Group" (WWW-text; 4 December 2008); A. Rodriguez, "Russia Rewriting Josef Stalin's Legacy", *Chicago Tribune* (WWW-text; 17 December 2008).]

P.S. For further news about Memorial, see NCH *Annual Reports* 2001 and 2005-2006 on the NCH website; for other history-related matters in Russia, see NCH *Annual Reports* 1996-1998, 2001, 2004-2006, and 2008 on the NCH website.

Human Rights Watch

Russia: Police Raid Prominent Rights Group

End Attacks on Independent Civil Society

December 4, 2008

(Moscow, December 4, 2008) - The Russian government should immediately investigate a police raid on Memorial, a prominent human rights organization, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch also called on the government to ensure the speedy and safe return of all seized equipment and documents.

In the morning of December 4, 2008, seven masked men, armed with batons, broke into the office of the Memorial Research and Information Center in St. Petersburg, cutting the phone lines and barring the three staff members present from leaving the office. The men, who had a warrant signed by the Prosecutor's Office, included police, special forces and members of the investigative committee of the Prosecutor's Office. They conducted a search of the office that lasted more than seven hours and seized the organization's computer hard drives and other materials, including 20 years of archives on Soviet repression and gulags.

"This outrageous police raid on Memorial shows the poisonous climate for nongovernmental organizations in Russia," said Allison Gill, Moscow office director at Human Rights Watch. "This is an overt attempt by the Russian government to suppress independent civic activity and silence critical voices."

The men did not allow the staff members inside to make phone calls and blocked Memorial's lawyer from entering the premises. Memorial eventually learned that the search was ordered by the Prosecutor's Office in connection with an investigation against a St. Petersburg newspaper, *New Petersburg*, for publishing "extremist" articles. A Memorial staff member told Human Rights Watch that Memorial has no relationship with the newspaper and knows nothing about the case against it. Memorial fears that the authorities used the investigation as a pretext to close Memorial. Memorial's office serves as an informal gathering point for local activists and provides a forum for discussion and debate.

Human Rights Watch expressed concern that the hard drives and materials seized from Memorial, which include archives related to the Preservation Foundation, an initiative dedicated to architectural preservation in St. Petersburg, would not be returned or rendered unusable by the authorities.

"Memorial's archives on Soviet history are a national treasure. The authorities should take every possible step to protect the materials and return them quickly," said Gill.