

# Russian Supermarket Head on Trial After Accusing Siege Survivor of Theft

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An incident comes after an 81-year-old woman died at a police station in the nearby town of Kronstadt, after employees of another supermarket chain, Magnit, accused her of theft.

The trial of a St. Petersburg supermarket director who set off a chain of events that led to the death of an 81-year-old survivor of the siege of Leningrad is set to open Monday on charges of negligent homicide.

Olga Konyukhova, the director of a supermarket in the Magnit chain, is also accused of exceeding authority in the February incident, when she allegedly rejected the elderly customer's pleas to let her pay for some butter she seemed to have forgotten in her shopping cart, and instead summoned the police.

The 81-year-old woman, who had survived the Nazi siege of the city during World War II, died of an apparent heart attack shortly after being escorted to a police station.

Surveillance camera footage from the supermarket appeared to show that the shopper had forgotten about the packs of butter in her cart and offered to pay for them after a cashier pointed out the items, investigators said.

In a case that stoked a public outcry against the supermarket chain, the prosecution has stressed the apparent callousness of the store director's behavior, but provided little evidence showing that she should be held responsible for the woman's death in police custody.

“Konyukhova, having no information about the woman's intention to commit theft, and being aware that she was a person of an advanced age and could be suffering from chronic illnesses, did not offer her to pay for the butter, and illegally denied her an opportunity to pay,” Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said, news portal BaltInfo has reported.

He also accused the store director of bringing “additional emotional pressure” on the 81-year-old woman by preventing her from reaching her handbag and the groceries she had already paid for, and of ignoring the customer's shaking hands and stammering speech — signs of distress that could indicate a heart attack in an elderly person.

Konyukhova has been released to await trial after signing a pledge to not leave the city and to stay at her home address.

Following the Feb. 3 incident, swastikas were reportedly painted across the supermarket's facade while politicians called for a boycott and a federal lawmaker described the store as “stained with blood.”

Magnit, Russia's biggest food retailer, posted a 36 percent increase in its first-quarter net income, reaching 9.5 billion rubles (\$182 million), Reuters has reported.

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