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Fathers and Sons: A Kremlin-KGB Remake

By arresting family members of persecuted individuals, today's authorities openly declare themselves to be the direct successors of Stalin's repressive system.

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Ivan Zhdanov with father Yury. **Facebook / zhdanovivan**

The Soviet and Russian secret services have always used the dirtiest tricks possible against their opponents. These typically involve exploiting their victims' greatest vulnerability — close relatives. A perfect example is how, instead of jailing Boris Pasternak, the Soviet authorities made his mistress, Olga Ivinskaya, serve time, because they knew it would cause him even greater pain.

Today's leaders are punishing one of Alexei Navalny's key staffers, Ivan Zhdanov, in exactly the same way — by arresting his 66-year-old, retired father on trumped-up charges.

This is right in keeping with Soviet-style "justice," in which not only were parents made to pay for the "sins" of their children and vice versa, but also siblings and other relatives were punished for each other's "misdeeds."

Punishing several generations at once

This new rendition of the Kremlin-KGB *Fathers and Sons* saga is not about a generational conflict, but about how Russia's leaders take revenge against several generations at once — profaning the memory of past victims, blackmailing fathers by seizing their sons, and hurting children by arresting their fathers.

Such methods inflict greater suffering.

Related article: Top Navalny Ally Blames Kremlin for Father's Arrest

The authorities have shifted their tactics for the direct suppression of civil society from the use of police brutality and repressive laws to blackmail and psychological pressure. Those fighting civil activism today employ the same methods as their Soviet predecessors. And in true Soviet fashion, the Chechen authorities sometimes require their victims to repent publicly.

All these actions send a clear message to the public: "If you participate in anti-government actions, we will punish both you and your loved ones.

And if your children attend protest rallies, we'll haul you in for mistreating a minor under your care." If a son fights for the opposition, his father will be punished. In short, for every criminal statute, a perpetrator will be found, and vice versa. As Alexander Tvardovsky wrote in his banned anti-Stalinist poem "By Right of Memory," the authorities need a supply of such fathers and sons "to always be at hand in case of a shortage of class enemies."

Taking revenge and sowing fear has two purposes. It intimidates not only the relatives of those arrested, but also the wider public into obedience and silence.

It is a sort of hybrid civil war the state wages against its own citizens. The authorities have become openly and unabashedly cruel and unscrupulous, and this marks another stage in the decline of Russia's authoritarian political regime.

Stalin's direct successors

Speaking of the Stalinist system, the historian Denis Karagodin is conducting an investigation into the NKVD agent who executed his great-grandfather, and the son of that agent has filed a complaint with the police because he does not want his father — or by extension, himself — to be considered a murderer.

Another aspect of this "fathers and sons" issue is the fact that the Russian authorities defied a Constitutional Court ruling by refusing to return apartments in Russia's major cities to the children of Stalinist terror victims who had lived in them before they were repressed.

Related article: Russian Communist Unveils Stalin Statue on WWII Anniversary

By infringing on the rights of the children and grandchildren of persecuted individuals, today's authorities openly declare themselves to be the direct successors of Stalin's repressive system.

The crackdown against the Last Address project, a civic initiative to commemorate the victims of Soviet repression, demonizes not only its initiators, but also those who continue its work — a fact that officialdom has made no effort to conceal. Even the vice president of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs has joined the campaign against the memory of those who suffered repression. Government officials are doing the same, branding the Memorial Foundation — the unofficial guardian of the memory of Russia's repressive past — as a foreign agent.

In one case, Golos voting rights expert Vasily Weissenberg published an incriminating article about the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district election commission chairman, after which not he, but his young son received threats.

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