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Russian Teacher Forced Out Over Reciting Poems By Soviet 'Enemies of the People'

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Serafima Saprykina. **Serafima Saprykina / facebook**

A St. Petersburg high-school teacher said she was forced to quit for reciting the work of poets who had been declared Soviet "enemies of the people" to her students.

Serafima Saprykina said her secondary school's director reprimanded her at an emergency meeting in December for reciting Daniil Kharms and Alexander Vvedensky's works to her 10th-grade students.

The director "said these people were deservedly captured by the NKVD and tortured for their 'crimes'," Saprykina wrote in a Facebook post Sunday, referring to the Soviet secret police.

Kharms and Vvedensky were imprisoned twice in 1931 and 1941 on accusations of anti-Soviet actions. Both absurdist poets were rehabilitated in the 1960s.

Saprykina said her attempts to bring up the poets' rehabilitation were dismissed at the

emergency meeting.

She added that the vice principal had approved the lesson and expressed “delight” at the idea of reciting Kharms and Vvedensky’s poems.

Still, Saprykina said she was threatened with dismissal due to “loss of trust” if she did not resign on her own and was reluctant to share her story out of fear.

“[But] if we don’t call evil by its name, then the new [19]37 is here,” Saprykina wrote, referring to the period known as the Great Terror under Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

St. Petersburg authorities denied Saprykina's account, saying no one forbade her from reciting Kharms' or Vvedensky's poetry and that she quit “of her own free will.”

Local opposition deputy Boris Vishnevsky said Monday he would urge city education officials to open a probe into the incident.

Russia’s Education Ministry later said that it will look into Saprykina’s dismissal “in close detail,” calling for her “full reinstatement.”

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