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Serge Schmemmann

## **The Power of the Russian State vs. a Librarian**

### ***Сили російської держави проти бібліотекаря***

*Є щось особливо Оруелівське в тому, що бібліотекаря звинуватили в злочинах, скоєних на ґрунті ненависті, через те, що книги, які знаходилися під її опікою, не є співзвучними урядовій пропаганді. Саме це, по суті, зробив російський суд, давши чотири роки умовно Наталії Шаріній тому, що в московській бібліотеці української літератури, яку вона раніше очолювала, нібито була література, що не відповідала російській офіційній версії того, що відбувається в Україні. Велика частина книг, захоплених в ході рейду в бібліотеці в 2015 році, знаходилися в спеціальному сховищі і не були доступні публіці, а книга, яку держава назвала найшкідливішою, за словами співробітників бібліотеки, підкинула поліція. На думку автора, завдання цього судового процесу – відмовити Україні в праві на культурну унікальність і показати, що російська держава не потерпить ніяких викликів офіційній брехні, згідно з якою Україна захоплена фашистами, якими маніпулює Захід, щоб очорнити російську культуру. Журналіст вважає, що саме цю версію запропонувала в ході судових дебатів прокурор Людмила Баландіна, яка сказала також, що в обов'язки бібліотекаря входить фільтрація нових книг і знищення антиросійських.*

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/opinion/sunday/the-power-of-the-russian-state-vs-a-librarian.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/opinion/sunday/the-power-of-the-russian-state-vs-a-librarian.html?_r=0)

There is something particularly Orwellian about accusing a librarian of hate crimes because books under her care don't jibe with government propaganda. That, in essence, is what a Russian court did in giving to Natalia Sharina a four-year suspended sentence because the Moscow Library of Ukrainian Literature, which she formerly headed, purportedly carried literature that didn't match Russia's official version of what's happening in Ukraine.

No matter that most of the books seized in the raid on the library in 2015 and cited by the prosecution were in special storage and not available to the public, or that, according to the library staff, the book deemed most offensive by the state was planted there by the police. The case was not about inciting "interethnic enmity and hatred," nor was it about the spurious charges of embezzlement that were leveled against Mrs. Sharina.

It was about denying Ukraine's claim to a cultural uniqueness, and even more about making clear that the state would brook no challenge to its official lies about Ukraine being in the grips of fascists manipulated by the West to denigrate Russian culture. That version of Russian-Ukrainian affairs was, in fact, how the prosecutor, Lyudmila Balandina, opened her oral arguments, leaving no doubt about the political nature of the trial. It was the librarian's duty, she argued, to filter new books and to destroy anti-Russian ones.

Mrs. Sharina's eminently reasonable response was an emphatic no: "I am absolutely not guilty of anything. Nobody gave a library director the right, moreover the responsibility, to censor legally published books."

Furthermore, she said, she never "disseminated" any hostile ideas, as the state claimed she did, but maintained a library founded in 1989. Of the books listed by the prosecution as "degrading" to the Russian people, she said, only one was actually accessible to readers, a children's magazine called Barvinok. There, a court-appointed "expert" found the "extremist" contention — one shared by much

of the rest of the world — that Russia, and not only separatists, was involved in the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

But in Vladimir Putin's Russia, rights, responsibilities and the law have fallen prey to the old Soviet notion that any deviation from the position or the lies of the state is liable to be prosecuted under vague anti-extremism legislation.

The obvious motive behind the trial is to intimidate critics of Russia's annexation of Crimea and of its continued meddling in eastern Ukraine. That in itself is reprehensible. But to do so by accusing an innocent librarian of extremism is beneath contempt.