A Tribute to Galina Starovoitova

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So much can be said about Galina Starovoitova. She was one of my best friends, someone I knew personally for more than four years. As a consulting editor of *Demokratizatsiya*, she was also a colleague. After her election to the Duma, she once apologized—with her usual modesty—for being less involved with the journal. I laughed, "Galina, you are the most involved—after all, you keep alive the subject we study!"

This issue of *Demokratizatsiya* and the next one are dedicated to her, although all issues of the journal attest to her legacy. In this brief farewell to Galina, I want to convey just one of the qualities that made her a towering figure in this century as well as great human being: her selfless readiness to fight for victims and to crusade against their tormentors. Among those victims were Armenians, Jews, other small and displaced nationalities, Moscow teenagers, Gorbachev after he lost power, and the victims of the KGB. For that quality, her passionate belief, she died.

Much about the world's reaction to her death is unfair. Why was there no public grief as at the death of Princess Diana of Great Britain? Galina did far more for humanity. Biographies or documentaries about Stalin, Hitler, or Mao never fail to attract wide attention. But the names of those who bravely destroyed the legacies of dictators are not household words. Power never corrupted Galina or estranged her from her former friends, despite her dizzying successes in 1989–91.

Starovoitova's relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev illustrates her principles and her compassion. Gorbachev was increasingly under fire after mid-1989 for his timidity in implementing reforms. He perceived the democratic movement of which Starovoitova became a leader as antagonistic and excessively belligerent because it prodded him. After Andrei Sakharov's death in December 1989, Galina, Father Gleb Yakunin, and Lev Ponomarev became co-chairs of the Democratic Russia Movement, which included among others Boris Yeltsin, Gavriil Popov, and Sergei Stankevich. Starovoitova's democrats (although playing Luther to Gorbachev's Pope) never lost all hope that Gorbachev would break with the

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nomenklatura and the party and implement more aggressive reforms. Gorbachev was unwilling, or unable, to do so. In the end, the warnings of the democrats proved correct: Gorbachev was betrayed by those he had trusted the most.

Starovoitova recalled visiting Gorbachev for a long talk in December 1991, just a few days before his presidency fell, along with the red flag over the Kremlin. Few people went to see him in those days; his former admirers were flocking to the victorious Boris Yeltsin. She told him, "You should have sided with us democrats when you had the chance, everything would be different today." She added, "So where are your beloved Lukyanov, Pugo, Yanaev?" (By then they were in prison.) She recalled that Gorbachev lowered his head and nodded in approval.

Galina never lost respect nor admiration for Gorbachev. She was one of the few Russians I know that willingly gave him credit for his historic role. She challenged him when he was in power but never kicked him when he was down. On the contrary, she recently lobbied for him to become foreign minister.

Starovoitova also had a high opinion of the Gorbachev reformers, especially Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Vadim Bakatin, whom she once called "a highly principled man." She often used the example of Yakovlev to argue against more stringent alternatives to her proposed law to ban collaborators with the communist regime and the KGB from serving in Russia's new institutions. She said the law should not ban those who had served the Communist Party but played positive roles in the democratic reforms.

Starovoitova was a crusader against corruption, warning early on that fellow Soviet deputies were voting for Gorbachev's less-enlightened proposals so they might receive perks. An incident in March 1996, when I had arranged for her to talk at the Russian center at Harvard, brought home to me her uncompromising honesty. On the way, she asked to stop at her bank to withdraw some funds that remained there from teaching at Brown University a year earlier. "I really need that money" she emphasized, withdrawing eighty dollars. I joked with her that if Chernomyrdin had insisted on stopping at a bank in Boston, the amount would have been slightly different.

As with Gorbachev, however, Galina never lost all faith in Chernomyrdin; she believed that his mistakes were more a result of personal weakness and lack of resolve. A few months before the 1996 Russian presidential elections she wrote an article, which I helped edit, on the need to form a "dream team" government in Russia. She proposed that Yeltsin step down and that Chernomyrdin run for president and appoint Grigory Yavlinsky as prime minister, Alexander Lebed as defense minister, Svyatoslav Fyodorov as economics minister, and Gorbachev as foreign minister. At the time, she was a candidate for president of Russia, and opinion polls indicated she would take 8 percent of the vote. She made it clear that she was willing to withdraw her candidacy in favor of such a government. In the end, the Supreme Count annulled her candidacy, under pressure from Yeltsin, as the chairman of the court later informed her. Yeltsin's ratings then were in single digits, and few predicted that he could win an election.

That incident is one of many that demonstrate that Galina was not power hungry but eager to use her influence for the betterment of Russia, even if others re-

ceived the rewards. Starovoitova was a unifier in the notoriously divided Russian democratic movement, willing to sacrifice power and prestige just to achieve that goal.

Her lack of bitterness when her movement, Democratic Russia, was falling apart amid internal squabbles and factionalism reflected that same attitude. "When your main goal is to end the Communist Party's monopoly on power and bring democracy to Russia, what do you expect when this is achieved?" she sighed in resignation. That quality is rare, for people who have had power often change their principles and their goals to retain it.

Galina loved the West, and was unabashedly pro-American and an Anglophile. It is sadly amusing to see many a Soviet apparatchik evolve from bitter anti-Americanism during the cold war to fashionable pro-American rhetoric between 1989 and 1993, and then return to their "Russia-has-interests-of-its-own" defiance of the United States and the West. In contrast, Galina was consistent and changed little with the times.

Galina was a staunch friend of smaller nationalities that were the victims of history, especially Armenians and Jews. Most of the friends in Boston, New York, Washington, and Providence with whom she stayed during visits to the United States were Armenian and Jewish intelligentsia and former dissidents. She and Sakharov spoke out for Armenia in 1988 on the eve of the conflict with Azerbaijan, an act that made her instantly popular in Armenia. She owed her seat in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies to a district in Armenia. "Armenians have had such a tragic history and have been so unfortunate geographically. They also feel abandoned by the world, which turns a blind eye when they suffer. They tend to be very grateful when somebody from the outside sympathizes and speaks out for them," she once told me. It has been widely noted that her assassination came only days after she denounced the anti-Semitic remarks of Communist deputy Albert Makashev and the failure of the Duma to censure him. One of Galina's last projects was a book exploring the right of ethnic minorities in repressive states to have self-determination.

She was also popular with the young. She once intervened on behalf of a group of teenagers whose discotheque had been shut down by the police. When it was reopened, they hung a portrait of her on the wall.

I once asked her if she were afraid. "When you know your cause is right and just, you are not afraid; you feel a force field around you that protects you." Although her enemies were numerous, Galina had ceased being a threat to them many years earlier. As Anatoly Chubais said, her enemies were mainly Communists and gangsters. We may, however, add another all too familiar one—the KGB, both the institution and the individuals who compose it.

Galina was a leading crusaders against the KGB and its continued role in the new Russia. In 1993, she joined the organizing committee for the conference "KGB: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," which was the brainchild of the gulag survivor and glasnost pioneer Sergei Grigoryants. The conference aimed to encourage public debate on the KGB, which had escaped any meaningful reforms under Yeltsin. Grigoryants received several threats to stop the conference; his son

Timofei was murdered at the entrance of his apartment. Starovoitova had drafted a law banning those who had collaborated with the totalitarian regime from holding high-level appointments in the new Russia (a lustration or cleansing bill). Those countries that adopted similar laws—the Czech Republic, Estonia, former East Germany, and to a lesser extent, Hungary—have fared the best politically. Starovoitova knew that ex-communists and the KGB had the tools and the wherewithal to hijack Russia's fragile democratic institutions. And she was correct.

She did not introduce her bill, but her intent caused anxiety and commotion and made her a target of unbridled slander. What surprised Galina was the following incident, which she told me in detail: In a 1997 Duma debate, the Communist chairman Seleznyev illegally attempted to reintroduce a Communist-drafted bill that already had failed twice. He made his move when most of the reform-minded deputies, those aligned with Russia's Democratic Choice and Yabloko, had gone home for the night. Most of the remaining deputies were from the Communist, Agrarian, Liberal-Democrat, and Our Home Is Russia parties. After trying in vain to stop Seleznyev from breaking the rules, Galina decided to introduce her lustration bill, "just to upset them." She thought hers would be the only favorable vote. To her surprise more than fifty delegates voted with her, mostly those from Our Home Is Russia and Zhirinovsky's party. "It was a shock to the Communists; they were humbled by that experience. Nobody thought they were in such a vulnerable position—even after the radical democrats had gone home for the night." Perhaps her bill should be considered again with a full quorum in the Duma.

No words can do justice to Galina Starovoitova: It is impossible adequately to recount the role she played in history; her achievements defy the imagination. I have tried to convey here the extent to which she dedicated her life to bringing comfort and justice to the weak and defenseless while remaining a friend and being completely natural, never conceited, never unkind.

You did so much for Russia and for humanity, Galina. Now it is our task to carry the torch and to fight so that your legacy never dies.