

## The Barghoorn Affair - November 1963

Gary Aamodt

On Tuesday morning, November 12, 1963, Yale students and faculty awoke to read in the New York Times that a Yale professor of political science, Frederick C. Barghoorn, had been arrested on Monday by Soviet authorities in Moscow on espionage charges. He was on a short trip to the Soviet Union during a fall sabbatical leave. Barghoorn was well known in the University and to Yale Russian Chorus members as an expert on Soviet politics and society, and many YRC singers had taken his courses and read his books. He was one of a small number of experts on Soviet affairs at Yale for whom members of the Chorus had great respect. Barghoorn's interest in the Soviet Union began while serving in the US Embassy in Moscow during the last years of the war and on into 1947. At the time of his detention he was in his early 50s, an affable and respected scholar, and was a great supporter of and friend to the Russian Chorus. Chorus members quickly telephoned each other that morning to spread the news and to call a meeting in order to put together some sort of reaction aimed at protesting Barghoorn's detention and at working for his release.

John Kennedy was then the US President (although he had less than 2 weeks left to live), and Nikita Khrushchev was First Secretary of the Party and Chairman of the Presidium (he had less than a year left in power). Relations with the USSR were becoming relatively "normal", despite a few rough patches in the early years of Kennedy's presidency, including the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. Various arms treaties were being negotiated, as well as the renewal of the cultural exchange agreement that the YRC had benefitted from in touring the USSR three times from 1958 to 1960. US farmers were sending wheat to the USSR. However, a few months before Barghoorn's detention, a Soviet spy had been arrested, and earlier there had been a few others. There was, therefore, the possibility that the Soviets were looking for bargaining chips to negotiate the release of their spies, a situation in which Barghoorn was simply a target of opportunity.

The Yale administration was slow and cautious in its initial reaction for several reasons. Former President Griswold had died in April of that year, and his appointed successor, Kingman Brewster, who was Provost of the University, had not yet been installed and was away on a trip to Italy. The Secretary of the University was away on a year's leave of absence. The University administration had various contacts and friends in government, but, in the absence of full information about the case and lacking certain key decision-makers, the administration issued only short statements regretting the arrest and expressing confidence that the case would be handled appropriately by the government.

Yale faculty members were also rather slow to react; the incident was shocking and unprecedented and no one knew how best to proceed, deferring mostly to the University administration and the government to handle it, with some even claiming that action by the faculty and/or students might jeopardize efforts under way in the State Department. However, a few of Barghoorn's colleagues in the Political Science Department and the Russian Studies program pushed for stronger, more decisive action, which initially mainly took the form of telephone calls and telegrams to colleagues in other universities

and to professional associations, urging strong concerted action to denounce the arrest and the attack on academic freedom.

By Wednesday, a Yale Committee for Barghoorn had been formed, consisting of a few of Barghoorn's colleagues in Political Science and Russian Studies, a few members of the Yale administration and members of the Yale Russian Chorus, who had been rallying students to protest Barghoorn's detention and calling for strong action on the part of the University and the wider community of scholars in the country. The nucleus of that Committee was formed by David Martin, who was the assistant to Yale's Provost; Robert Fischelis, who was Dean of Morse College and a bass in the Chorus; and Gary Aamodt, who was a graduate student in philosophy, a Chorus tenor, and who served as chair of the Committee.

The Russian Chorus served as the operational nerve center, coordinating actions, preparing materials, contacting students and faculty at Yale and other universities, and raising money (in some cases from its own small bank account) for telegrams, newspaper ads, telephone calls, posters and for the mimeographing of news releases and statements. One member of the Chorus made his room in Morse College completely available for small meetings, strategy sessions, telephoning, mimeo-copying and so forth. Members of the Chorus put in 18 hour days working for the campaign, much to the neglect of their studies, but the faculty showed understanding.

A mass meeting was organized on Wednesday evening in the Law School Auditorium, where members of the Committee, including some members of the Russian Chorus, faculty colleagues of Prof. Barghoorn and the University Chaplain, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, spoke forcefully, denouncing the Soviet attack on academic freedom and demanding that the University and the government take firm action to demand Barghoorn's release. Telegrams of support from prominent academics and colleagues of Barghoorn's at other universities were also read out. The Russian Chorus announced joint plans with the Yale Glee Club to give a concert in Woolsey Hall on Monday evening in support of Barghoorn and to raise money to keep the campaign going.

The State Department and the University administration, which had been surprised by the strength of the student, faculty and public reactions to Barghoorn's detention and had initially discouraged a "noisy" campaign to protest the arrest and to pressure the Soviets to release Barghoorn, were by this

**Students, Faculty Protest Barghoorn Arrest  
At Overflow Rally In Law School Auditorium**



**Resolution Is Drafted,  
To Be Circulated,  
Sent to USSR**  
by Zick Rubin

Frederick C. Barghoorn's associates and students rallied last night to protest the Yale professor's arrest in the Soviet Union on an espionage charge.

The spontaneous rally developed after the Soviet government announced the arrest to the US embassy in Moscow Tuesday.

The arrest of the 52-year-old expert on Russian affairs, which is thought to have taken place within the last week, was denounced as unfounded, and as a blow to any program of scholarly exchange with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Barghoorn, a member of the Political Science Department, is being held incommunicado. Soviet officials have refused to provide any details concerning the charges against him.

Graduate student F. SETH SINGLETON (r.) reads telegram at last night's protest rally. Listening (l. to r.) are the Rev. WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN Jr., GARY AAMODT, FIRUZ KAZEMZADEH, DENIS MICKIEWICZ, and ELL EN MICKIEWICZ. (Photo by M.H. Smith)

time coming around to supporting the campaign. The government found its hand strengthened in dealing with the Soviet Embassy and Soviet counterparts by the emerging, strong public reaction. Some Yale faculty and administrators began to see the campaign as an excellent lesson in civics and responsible citizenship in a democracy and as being among Yale's finest hours.

Pressure on the US government from many quarters, especially the press, which received the materials that the Committee was disseminating, was mounting fast. On Thursday morning President Kennedy gave a press conference (his last), in which he emphasized quite forcefully that Professor Barghoorn was not a spy nor on any kind of intelligence mission and demanded Prof. Barghoorn's prompt release. He also ruled out any exchange of detainees and said that the future of cultural relations between the two countries had been badly threatened by the Soviet action. Interestingly, the Soviet press carried that statement, which suggests that opinion in the Soviet government was also swinging in favor of reducing tension by releasing Barghoorn.

Efforts continued on Thursday and Friday, and then, on Saturday, the gloom resulting from Yale's football team's loss to Princeton was buoyed by word of Barghoorn's release. The Russian Chorus concert/rally in Woolsey Hall on Monday evening became a joyous "Welcome Home" concert. When President-elect Kingman Brewster and professor Barghoorn came on stage, an enthusiastic audience of 2500, including members of the University community, the Mayor of New Haven, the University Chaplain and all members of the Committee, greeted them with a thunderous ovation and cheered themselves hoarse.

A few days later, Barghoorn described for the press the events that had led to his detention on Monday November 11. On walking out of his hotel in Moscow, he had been accosted by someone he didn't know. That person had said something rather incoherent to him and had given him some papers. Two minutes later he was arrested by agents waiting in a car by the curb.

Time magazine had planned to feature the Barghoorn story on its cover for the next week's edition, but various factors, most particularly the assassination of President Kennedy on the following Friday (November 22), forced a last minute change in



plans. Discussion of the Barghoorn affair in the press and by the public was then completely eclipsed by the shock and drama of the Kennedy assassination, the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald and the shooting of Oswald by Jack Ruby in the Dallas jail.

Had the Yale Committee for Barghoorn and the Russian Chorus not agitated vigorously for government action to get Barghoorn released, which pushed Kennedy to give his decisive press statement, it is quite probable that Barghoorn would have languished in his Soviet prison much longer: the Johnson administration, during the difficult transition after the tragedy of the assassination, certainly had other pressing matters to absorb its attention.