

## Freda Utley Prize for Advancing Liberty

February 2010

The Atlas Economic Research Foundation, Washington DC, announced on Monday, 1 February 2010, that it had awarded the [2010 Freda Utley Prize for Advancing Liberty](#) to the FMF. Named for the late [Freda Utley](#), an outspoken writer and commentator against totalitarian regimes, the \$10,000 prize rewards the efforts of think tanks in difficult parts of the world that are most effective in disseminating the ideas of freedom to new audiences.

In a biographical portrait of Freda Utley, entitled *Crusader for Truth and Freedom*, Professor DA Farnie of Manchester University said of her, "Aspiring to liberate mankind from immemorial oppression, she sought to usher in, through political activity, a new era of human freedom." In June, 1927, as vice-president of the University Labour Federation she visited Russia, and on her return she joined the British Communist Party. She said, "To me it seemed that Russia had unlocked the gates of Paradise to mankind."

In 1928, Freda married Russian citizen and economist, Arcadi Berdichevsky, and in 1930, they emigrated to the USSR. She worked in various senior government positions related to the research she had done earlier on the British and Japanese textile industries, and in 1932, she became a senior scientific worker at the Institute of World Economy and Politics of the Academy of Sciences. Soon after moving to Moscow, she became disillusioned with the Soviet regime but remained silent about her concerns throughout her years in 'the Hell of Communist tyranny'. On 11 April 1936, Arcadi Berdichevsky was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. Ten days later, fearing that their young son would be prohibited from leaving, Freda left the USSR "with my political beliefs and my personal life alike shattered". She was never to see Arcadi again.

All requests for information about her husband were met with silence. In 1940, having given up hope that her husband was still alive, Freda Utley published *The Dream We Lost in 1940*, describing life under communism and how the system really worked. In 1967, 31 years after his arrest, the US ambassador to Moscow managed to establish from the Soviet Foreign Minister that Arcadi had died in Komi in 1938, Freda assumed of hunger and cold like all the others who died in the Gulag.

Jon Basil Utley, the son who was born in Moscow in 1934 and smuggled out of Russia, now lives in the US where his mother lived and worked from 1939 until her death in 1978. It was Jon who finally established what had happened to his father. He visited Russia and was able to report on his findings in an article, *Vorkuta to Perm: Russia's Concentration-Camp Museums and My Father's Story*, published in *The Freeman* in 2005.

It turned out that Arcadi had been accused of the "crime" of being a Trotskyist and sentenced to five years in a labour camp. Later documents from the camp revealed that he had also been condemned as one of the three leaders for leading a hunger strike and "for provoking massive discontent among the prisoners". Arcadi Berdichevsky was executed with 16 others on 30 March 1938 at the "Brick Quarry," an execution site first mentioned in Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. He was posthumously "rehabilitated" in 1961 by the Supreme Court of Komi under the 1955 law of rehabilitation put in by Khrushchev.

Freda Utley's book *Odyssey of a Liberal: Memoirs* contains the following poignant passage: "It was a passion for the emancipation of mankind, not the blueprint of a planned society nor any mystical yearning to merge myself in a fellowship absolving me of personal responsibility, which both led me into the Communist fold, and caused me to leave it as soon as I learned that it meant submission to the most total tyranny which mankind has ever experienced."

It is with admiration that the Free Market Foundation accepts this prize, which was established by a son who was cruelly deprived of a father for reasons that the Communist state admitted were invalid, to honour his late mother, an indefatigable crusader for truth. Freda Utley's story is inspiring. It gives

courage to those who seek the truth of a political, legal and economic dispensation that relies totally on voluntary interaction and rejects authoritarian governance.

The Free Market Foundation was established in 1975 as a counter to the national socialist ideas upon which apartheid was based. It now faces the challenge of communist/socialist ideas that are gaining political ground. Throughout, the Foundation promoted and continues to promote ideas that bring peace and prosperity wherever they are implemented: the rule of law and economic and civil liberties characterised by personal choice, personal responsibility, voluntary exchange and protection of persons and their property.