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Britain's secret shame

When Count Nikolai Tolstoy got hit with a \$3-million libel judgment last Nov. 30, he, his friends and even his opponents were sure the figure would be reduced on appeal.

After all, the approximately \$1 million a jury awarded to Sonia Sutcliffe, ex-wife of Britain's Yorkshire Ripper, against a newspaper which claimed she was selling her story, was reduced by 90 per cent after an appeal. Most jury judgments are.

Tolstoy, direct descendant of the famous author, is no Yorkshire Ripper. In fact, he is a man who radiates integrity. Even those who think he is somewhat obsessive in his convictions generally agree that he's a man of honor, moral courage and trust — and perhaps innocence, verging on naivete.

On a personal note, as one who knows Tolstoy and is familiar with the theme he espouses, I don't think he is obsessed — just passionate to see justice done and history corrected.

For close to 20 years Tolstoy has sought to unravel the mystery of forced repatriation — the infamous policy orchestrated by Britain at the end of the Second World War to forcibly send every manner of individual back to the Soviet Union and the mercies of Stalin. The policy resulted in perhaps three million victims.

Using rifle butts and bayonets, British soldiers forced refugees, PoWs, White Russians and Cossacks into cattle cars to be transported back. Most were killed. Many committed suicide.

The policy was also used to send some 70,000 people back to Tito in Yugoslavia, where they were executed on the spot — some with the complicity of British officers.

To many, forced repatriation is the most shameful policy ever implemented by Britain in its long and checkered history. Solzhenitsyn called it the war's "last secret." Even Churchill omitted reference to it in his writings.

In three books — *Victims of Yalta*, *Stalin's Secret War* and *The Minister and the Massacres*, Tolstoy has explored the policy. Each book probes deeper than the last and digs up more facts — leading to the libel suit based on a pamphlet Tolstoy wrote identifying Lord Aldington as the main one who saw that the policy was carried out in Yugoslavia.

Lord Aldington, now retired, is the former chairman of Sun

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Alliance insurance group, former warden of Winchester College and former deputy chairman of the Conservative party. During the war he was Brig. Toby Low, chief of staff of Gen. Keightley's V Corps in Austria, which delivered 70,000 men, women and children to Tito — and death.

Lord Aldington (whose case was helped financially by Sun Alliance) sought to have the appeal blocked unless Tolstoy paid some \$360,000 as security for Aldington's costs. The registrar dismissed the attempt, on grounds that the right to appeal is a vital part of British law.

But three High Court judges have overruled the registrar, insisting Tolstoy provide security for costs, else no appeal.

As it was, Tolstoy was without a lawyer and was conducting his own appeal, since all his assets were frozen.

So it seems Lord Aldington has won again.

Tolstoy will be forced to declare bankruptcy.

This is tragic for his wife and four daughters. A Georgina Tolstoy Family Fund has been organized to raise enough money to buy Tolstoy's half of their sprawling 18th-century family home in Oxfordshire for his wife.

Tolstoy has recently been to Yugoslavia and Moscow, and since the demise of communism in East Europe has acquired information that was hitherto secret and bears on the case.

Lord Aldington claims that he left Austria a couple of days before the policy was implemented. Now Tolstoy has unearthed a hand-written letter from Brig. Low to Anthony Eden which seems to confirm Tolstoy's allegations that Aldington was in Austria when the victims were turned over.

Tolstoy has ensured that "forced repatriation" is now a part of the language, although he's also become a victim. Those who feel strongly can contact the Georgina Tolstoy Family Fund, 10 Barley Mow Passage, London W4 4PH, England.