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Russian dissident faces trial over child abuse images

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A Russian dissident is to face trial after denying possessing and making thousands of indecent photographs of children.

Vladimir Bukovsky, 72, who has missed previous hearings owing to ill health, appeared at Cambridge crown court on Monday.

Sitting in a wheelchair and following proceedings through a hearing loop, Bukovsky spoke to confirm his name and plead not guilty to five counts of making indecent images of children, five of possessing indecent images of children and one of possessing a prohibited image of a child.

The offences are alleged to have happened on or before 28 October last year and involved more than 20,000 still and video images.

The judge Gareth Hawkesworth released Bukovsky on bail and adjourned the case to 16 May.

Bukovsky, an author and activist who became well-known internationally as a vocal critic of the Soviet regime, returned to the UK from Germany this year to face the charges. He had been receiving private medical treatment abroad.

His barrister, Laura Collier, told the court that he was seriously ill having undergone heart surgery in May.

She said: "He was hospitalised for four months and had three of the four valves of his heart replaced. His ability to concentrate and focus is incredibly limited. The only time he has left his house has been to come to court."

Bukovsky spent 12 years in Soviet prisons, forced-labour camps and psychiatric hospitals, which were used by the authorities to incarcerate political dissidents and submit them to compulsory treatment to "cure" their beliefs.

He first fell foul of the Soviet authorities in 1959 when he was expelled from his school in Moscow for creating an unauthorised magazine.

Bukovsky was arrested in the 1960s while part of a group of young activists who held public readings of banned poetry and organised demonstrations against the heavy-handed tactics of the authorities.

In 1971 he smuggled to the west 150 pages of documents detailing the abuse of psychiatric institutions for political reasons in the Soviet Union. The revelations sparked an international outcry, and Bukovsky was arrested for spreading anti-Soviet propaganda.

He was released by the Soviet government in 1976 in exchange for the Chilean communist party leader Luis Corvalán, but was banished from his homeland.

He moved to Britain soon after and has lived in Cambridge ever since. He is a senior fellow at the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute, according to its [website](#).