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Was this 'teddy bear' really a mole?



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WASHINGTON—Oleg Tumanov, the staunchly anti-Communist chief editor of the U.S.-run broadcast operation, Radio Liberty, vanished in Munich last week. His friends are waiting for him to turn up dead, murdered by the KGB. His enemies expect him to show up at a Moscow press conference—as a KGB agent.

Tumanov, 42, is "a cuddly teddy bear," who jumped off a Soviet Navy vessel in the Mediterranean Sea 21 years ago and swam six miles to shore just to escape communism. He had worked at Radio Liberty's Munich headquarters for the past 20 years, rising to a post in which he checked and cleared all scripts before they were broadcast to the Soviet Union.

When he suddenly cleared out his apartment, his bank account, his stamp collection and his cameras Feb. 26, the Bavarian police sealed up his apartment. His friends said he was broke, in debt, drinking heavily and disappointed in love.

Some of his colleagues also raised the suspicion that he was a mole who had risen to the key editorial position at one of America's most important propaganda outlets to the Soviet Union—and had re-defected.

Everybody knew there was a mole at Radio Liberty—maybe more than one. From time to time, the Soviet satirical magazine "Krokodil" runs sketches about the intrigues and love affairs at the station, which is manned largely by Soviet émigrés.

"The 'Krokodil' articles were clumsy—but they were accurate," a station employe said. "We knew somebody here was giving them information."

If Tumanov was a mole, he did more damage than just spreading gossip. In August 1984, the station broadcast a commentary in which the entire rise of communism in Russia was blamed on a Jewish assassin, Dmitry Bogrov, who shot Count Pyotr Stolypin in 1911.

If not for this dastardly deed by a "cosmopolitan (Stalinist jargon for

'Jew') with nothing Russian in his character," the broadcast said, Stolypin might have initiated reforms that would have saved Russia from Bolshevism. The broadcast was condemned by the station's Broadcast Analysis Division as "anti-Semitic and the most offensive program aired by the Russian service in 10 years."

Tumanov was the editor who put it on the air, station staff members say.

A Jewish employe of the station, Vadim Belotserkovsky, complained that the broadcast "perfectly complemented" the Soviet Union's own anti-Jewish propaganda and risked undermining Radio Liberty's credibility. When Belotserkovsky made his complaints public, he was fired.

Until last December, Boris Shragin, a Russian exile now living in Queens, produced a Radio Liberty program called "Democracy in Action." James Critchlow, former overseer of Radio Liberty's programming, described Shragin's series as an "apolitical, hard-hitting, straightforward" show that worried the Kremlin because it successfully rebutted articles appearing in the official Soviet press.

In December, Tumanov succeeded in having Shragin removed as producer of the series.

Tumanov's friends agree that he may have defected—but insist he could not have been a mole. "He was a very balanced, responsible person—not the sort of person to be a spy," said an acquaintance who visited him every summer. "He was very anti-Communist."

Anti-Communist behavior doesn't persuade some skeptics at the State Department. "They had a Pole over there at Radio Free Europe (Radio Liberty's sister station) who wore a 'Kill a Commie for Christ' button right until the day he re-defected and denounced the station," one official said.

"If history repeats itself, Tumanov is going to turn up at a press conference in Moscow saying the station is run by the CIA (as it once was)," a former official predicted.

Until he does turn up, we can only wait.

THE FBI SAYS Tumanov is not their concern because he's not a U.S. citizen or, technically, a government employe. The State Department security office says he's not under its jurisdiction. The CIA might be in-

terested, just out of curiosity, but it has no police powers.

Meanwhile, Radio Liberty officials are looking back at Tumanov's career to see what other damage he might have done—and what he might do if he does surface as the mole who undermined Radio Liberty.