

The Sherlock Holmes of the Revolution

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL
22 SEPT 93

CONFIDENTIAL
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

How a self-appointed counterintelligence expert fought the Tsar's political police on behalf of the Russian revolutionaries abroad.

Rita T. Kronenhitter¹

Vladimir Lvovich Burtzev, active chiefly as a revolutionary propagandist in Petersburg and abroad after the failure of the 1905 uprising, had been a leading terrorist twenty and more years earlier. Now, though venerated by the younger generation of insurgents for his past achievements and appreciated for his present propaganda services, he was considered too meek and gentle to mix into current terrorist plotting. He was never a member of any of the numerous revolutionary committees nor admitted to the inner councils. He was above all not privy to the dead secrecy of assassination conspiracies.

He developed a genius for counterintelligence investigation, however, that was to overcome this isolation and raise him again to a central position among the revolutionaries. He had the perspective of decades of subversive work. He pondered the failures of revolutionary conspiracies in the early 1880's, the betrayals of his own and other carefully planned operations, and the treacheries inspired by the police among prisoners and Siberian exiles. He had learned much of Okhrana practices the hard way, from the numerous interrogations to which he and his comrades were subjected in Russia. Later, permanently settled in Paris, he was to start keeping notes, organizing in folders information

on past and current episodes and maintaining his own dossiers on fellow revolutionaries as well as Okhrana and police officials. He needed such files in his work as journalist and propaganda writer, but they would also provide a basis for his first intelligence investigations.

Whiffs of Treachery

In 1905 an unknown, veiled woman delivered a letter to a member of the underground at Petersburg which claimed that the Okhrana had two spies in the Socialist Revolutionaries' Combat Unit, a certain T., ex-convict, and the engineer Azev, a Jew recently arrived from abroad. Since Evno Azev was actually the top leader of the Combat Unit and the party's chief organizer of terror, the letter was dismissed by the revolutionaries as obviously an Okhrana trick. Azev himself, however, recognized the ex-convict T. as Tatarov, whom he knew to be another Okhrana penetration. He was anxious to deflect the threat to his own position and so urged an inquiry. Tatarov, interrogated by a commission, admitted nothing that would lead to proof of his betrayal, but he contradicted himself enough to increase the suspicion against him. He was suspended from the party and finally, on Azev's motion, shot in his home at Kiev.

Burtzev studied the Tatarov case. He realized that it would be preposterous for the Central Committee to prefer charges against Azev; on the other hand, Azev's furious insistence that Tatarov be killed struck him as excessive. There were ample indications in new denunciations and in the failure of planned terroristic acts that there was still, with Tatarov dead, a traitor in the party. Studying the failures, Burtzev noted that almost as a rule at assassination attempts, whether successful or not, Azev was never on the scene. He was the only person witting and involved in the projects of all teams; yet when arrests sooner or later hit each of them, he always succeeded in evading the police.

To give voice to any doubt about Azev, however, would be equivalent to sacrilege, an insult to the party and its romantic terrorists. To the great majority of the members he was its great hero. Burtzev knew that any statement of his suspicions would be considered slanderous, perhaps a deliberate calumny sponsored by the Okhrana.

In 1908 an agent of the Warsaw Okhrana who had decided to defect, Mikhail Bakai, approached Burtzev in Petersburg in his position as editor of the revolutionary journal *Byloe* (The Past). He offered a mass of information about the Okhrana and its Warsaw office that convinced Burtzev of his bona fides. Burtzev talked him into staying in place a little longer, until he had collected more information on the identities of secret agents. This gamble almost failed; soon thereafter Bakai was arrested and sent to Siberia. But he escaped and came again to Burtzev. Among the new information he had acquired was the identity of the penetration agent who had reported his intention to defect and so caused his arrest. His name was Raskin.

The revolutionaries did not know that Raskin was the Okhrana's name for Azev; still, this was a pointer for Burtzev. Only a few of the top revolutionary leaders had been told of Bakai's defection in place, and of these only Azev had been in Warsaw at the time. Then one day in Petersburg, at a time when the police were arresting revolutionaries right and left, Burtzev saw Azev riding in an open cab. How could Azev, leader of the Combat Unit, ride around the capital in broad daylight? The hypothesis that Raskin and Azev were one and the same person was inescapable.

Hot Pursuit

Soon thereafter Burtzev moved to Paris and started a full-time investigation. He collected further evidence pointing to a traitor at the top of the party, and he was determined to prove that the traitor was Azev. He worked partly by the process of elimination, clearing one leader after another of suspicion until only Azev remained. Even though he was still without concrete proofs he began to voice suspicion openly. But no party leader believed him; Azev continued to direct the party's terrorist activities.

When a party conference opened in London in August 1908, Burtzev wrote to a friend attending it a letter in which he accused Azev of treachery. The letter came to the knowledge of the Central Committee, which decided to take action—against Burtzev. Regardless of how well meant they were, these libels had to stop. Some wanted to arraign him

for trial before the underground tribunal; others thought that a frank talk with him might be sufficient. Boris Savinkov, Azev's assistant, was chosen to talk to the misguided old fellow. Boris met with Vladimir Lvovich and told him in confidence what Azev's real role had been in various Combat Unit projects, revealing operational information that was entirely new to Burtzev. This briefing actually only added further circumstantial evidence that strengthened the case against Azev.

Realizing that he would have to have something more than circumstantial evidence, Burtzev executed a masterful operation. He learned that A. A. Lopukhin, dismissed director of the Okhrana, was in Germany. He had met him in Petersburg on several occasions and guessed that he was now probably disgruntled with the Okhrana and might be willing to talk. He contrived to run into Lopukhin, completely "by accident," on a train from Berlin to Cologne. The old revolutionary showed his embarrassment at the impropriety of imposing his company on a former director of the Okhrana. His gentle excuses and congenial indecision broke the ice, and Lopukhin invited him to share his compartment. Their long conversation eventually turned to the subject of provocateurs used, in spite of the official ban on them, by the Okhrana. Burtzev brought up Raskin as an example, but Lopukhin said he had never heard of him. Only just before they reached Cologne, with more prompting and after some hesitation, he revealed that the only provocateur he ever knew about was a certain engineer named Azev.

Burtzev rushed back to Paris and prepared an open letter, set in type, for members of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. He sent a galley proof to the Central Committee. Without naming Lopukhin as the source—he had promised not to—he claimed proof positive that Okhrana agent Raskin and the chief of the Combat Unit were one and the same person.

Disgrace and Triumph

Now the Central Committee had to take formal measures. It appointed three of the most popular revolutionaries as judges—Prince Kropotkin, Vera Figner, and G. A. Lopatin—to try not Azev but Burtzev, for his unwarranted accusations. All the leaders participated, most of them attacking the accuser energetically and more convincingly than he could

reply. His evidence appeared only circumstantial, based mostly on police rumors. Vera Figner went so far as to suggest that he should commit suicide. In this predicament he felt obliged to break his promise to Lopukhin; he told in detail about their meeting on the train.

Burtzev was exonerated, but some of the leaders were still skeptical: Lopukhin's statement could have been a police tactic to embarrass and confuse the revolutionaries. Prince Kropotkin decided that a further investigation should be undertaken, and Central Committee member Andrei Argunov was sent to Petersburg to verify Lopukhin's statement. Meanwhile Azev himself learned what had happened and hurried to Petersburg to get General A. V. Gerasimov, his case officer, to have the charge repudiated. So when Argunov visited Lopukhin, the latter not only confirmed what he had told Burtzev but also revealed that both Azev and General Gerasimov had put pressure on him to retract.

Burtzev's long fight against handicaps ended on 5 January 1909, when the majority of the Central Committee voted an immediate death sentence. A minority, however, which still hoped that Azev might somehow clear himself, won a postponement of the execution and thus gave him a chance to escape.

The Azev case was only the beginning of a flood of exposures. Bakai had brought the names or aliases of thirty-odd agents connected with the Okhrana's Warsaw branch. Moreover, an Okhrana headquarters staff officer, Leonid Menshchikov, had also defected just before Bakai. Although he had only the code names and fragmentary information on the activities of penetration agents, he provided leads that Burtzev patiently pursued until in June of 1909 he could announce to the world that the celebrated socialite Arkadiy Harting, who as head of the Okhrana abroad was chiefly responsible for its prestige in Western Europe, was actually a miserable little provocateur and since 1890 a fugitive from French justice for his part in a terrorist plot. Paris Okhrana never recovered fully from this blow.

Thus Burtzev, once looked upon as an obnoxious meddler, a disgruntled has-been making irresponsible accusations, became the heroic "Sherlock Holmes of the Russian Revolution" and chief adversary of the Okhrana as counterintelligence officer first for the Social Revolutionaries and their Combat Unit, then for the Leninist Social Democrats, the Anarcho-Communists, and other groups. His triumphant operations would before long begin to turn sour, but in the meantime they had their

day.

The Opposition Enlisted

After his permanent move to Paris in 1908, Burtzev maintained a residence at 116 rue de la Glaciere until October 1914. From the beginning this apartment served also as his editorial office, first for the weekly *Byloe*, then for *Budushchee* (The Future). It was thus here that he met party leaders, members of various committees, and the general public and kept his library and intelligence files. As his intelligence activities expanded, however, he rented several other offices and also made operational use of the quarters of his principal assistants, initially Mikhail Bakai and the lawyer and journalist Valerian Agafonov.

Burtzev's triumph had been due partly to Agafonov and a split among Socialist Revolutionaries. The party's Central Committee had been formed in Paris under the leadership of a few exiled revolutionaries of considerable wealth such as Viktor Chernov and Mark Natanson. In frequent conflict with these leaders were a number of professional people, lawyers and journalists in exile, most of them struggling for their livelihood. These, like Burtzev, considered the leaders too lax and complacent about the possibility of Okhrana penetrations. In 1908 they were organized as an "Opposition Group" of about a hundred members by Agafonov, who started publishing their small journal, *Revolutsionnaia Mysl* (Revolutionary Thought). Agafonov was assisted by Gnatovsky and Yudelevsky.

Burtzev joined the Group at once and published in the new journal an article, entitled "Black Book of the Russian Liberation Movement," concerning exposed Okhrana agent Mechislav Kensitski and others accused of being traitors to the revolution; this was the beginning of his campaign against penetrations. More importantly, he thus acquired the leaders of the opposition as his voluntary assistants and agents, who gathered frequently in secret meetings and brought him information on the doings and contacts of all the active revolutionaries.

Okhrana chief Harting was, until his own exposure, fully informed of these developments and the progress of Burtzev's debriefing of defectors Menshchikov and Bakai. He had a penetration who was a

member of the Opposition Group and so in constant touch with Burtzev and Agafonov. This agent now reported further that the Group, instead of searching in toto for spies and traitors, was forming a smaller special unit named the "Group of the Activist Minority" to watch closely the party members suspected of treason. Agafonov and Ankel Yudelevsky headed this select body and reported to Burtzev daily.

Secret Police Organized

Bakai, a shrewd and fanatical man who had very personal rather than ideological reasons for wanting to clobber the Okhrana, was selected for a key job in Burtzev's service. Lodging was found for him in a semi-deserted house whose remaining occupants, including the concierge, were all Socialists. The location at 7 rue du Montsouris, a dead-end street, was such that any surveillance of the premises by the Okhrana or the French *Sûreté* would be immediately noticed by the occupants. Paris Okhrana could therefore not comply with headquarters' insistence that it watch the place, according to a dispatch it sent to Petersburg. Here Bakai, with the help of Nikolai Sofronski, established what was first reported as his *Liga Politsii* (Police League) but later referred to as the "Revolutionary Police Department."

Bakai's Liga was a covert arm for Burtzev, who apparently did not trust his own office to be free of Okhrana agents (as it actually never was). The Liga was so completely conspiratorial that: even important members of the party were not given its address. Its task was to collect intelligence on the Okhrana and its agents and to investigate clandestinely the life of every member of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, his income, associations, and loyalty to the cause. Harting expressed to headquarters his prescient apprehension about the Liga's activities and urged that all measures be taken to expel Bakai and Burtzev, as well as Agafonov and other "Activist Minority" leaders, from France. He argued that neither in England nor in Switzerland could such revolutionary counterintelligence efforts cause as much damage as in France.



Vladimir Lvovich Burtzev, from an Okhrana 'Man Wanted' bulletin.

In Okhrana terminology the task of Agafonov's Activist Minority was essentially internal, penetration of the Okhrana's penetrations, while Bakai's Liga was largely external, doing surveillance and detective-type investigations. Both units reported directly to Burtzev. Both of them, along with Burtzev's own office on the rue de la Glaciere, at first depended for support on the not large and not affluent Opposition Group. The funds were meager, but the agents were for the most part avid volunteers, often with moderate incomes of their own.

Prosperity: French Agents

The exposure of Evno Azev first impressed on the party leaders the need for a strong counterintelligence establishment to clear their ranks of traitors, and the Harting scandal that followed close on its heels put them solidly behind Vladimir Lvovich. His counterintelligence research had driven their most feared and hated enemy from Paris, leaving the Okhrana office there demoralized and without a chief. His propaganda campaign in Harting's wake filled much of the European press and swayed public opinion. He was behind the parliamentary interpellations that threatened the imperial service with expulsion from France and other countries.

Money flowed in freely for a time, first from the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, then from other revolutionary groups in Europe and in North America. These funds made it possible for Burtzev to expand the service in several ways. He himself could make operational tours in Europe and one to the United States. He was able to pay the agents in

Bakai's Liga and to cover their travel expenses, even on detective assignments to Belgium, England, and Italy. He set up another, separate external service. He had recognized what the Paris Okhrana office had discovered a generation before, that Russians were poorly qualified to tail fellow Russians in France. Regardless of how well they spoke French, they were too readily recognized to be used for surveillance. French agents were available, but they had to be paid regular salaries. Now he could begin to hire some.

The first Frenchman Burtzev hired was Maurice Leroy. Already a detective with years of experience, Leroy had been hired by the Paris Okhrana as one of its principal external agents and entrusted over a half dozen years with many intelligence assignments in France, Germany, and Switzerland. He had worked as a leader of surveillance teams and so knew personally most of the Okhrana's external agents in those countries. He had been dismissed in 1908 because of friction with other principal agents and also on account of his dissipated life and misuse of the Okhrana's money. He was probably Burtzev's only French agent with some motivation beside mere salary, for he wanted to avenge himself, first against Henri Bint and Bittard-Monin, the Okhrana's principal external agents, then against the imperial service in general for firing him.

For Burtzev's emerging intelligence service Leroy was a veritable windfall. He was a mature operator, and he knew all the tricks and methods of the Okhrana's external teams and their liaison contacts. He knew by name and even address the agents in France and in other countries. From his accounts of his past work Burtzev was able to deduce the pattern of Okhrana surveillance targets. Although he could produce no information on the identities of penetration agents, his voluminous reports on his external tasks provided certain leads even in that direction.

Expanded Services

After several weeks of debriefing, Burtzev designated Leroy in April 1909 the leader of a team of four surveillance agents—a Frenchman named Gandon whom Leroy himself recommended and three young Russians

fluent in French, Klepikov, Dolinin, and Komorsky. The job of this team, at the time referred to as "Leroy's Brigade," was almost entirely surveillance and detective investigation (*filature*). Burtzev saw to it that Leroy's work was coordinated with that of Bakai's Liga. The latter undertook the more aggressive investigations, such as searching the premises of suspected Russians, intercepting mail by bribing landlords, checking on contacts among highlevel revolutionaries, arresting and interrogating suspects. (One female agent named Ovsianikova in the Liga had a task of internal nature, circulating among the leaders of the party and reporting on their talks and contacts. She joined Burtzev and Bakai on a trip to the Italian Riviera to visit certain well-to-do Socialist Revolutionaries and made observations on their loyalty and support of the revolutionary cause.) Leroy's people, on the other hand, engaged mostly in street surveillance, following suspects, watching their domiciles, and the like.

In a number of operations during 1909 Burtzev arranged for the two external units, or at least their leaders, to work together. When it was learned that Harting was living incognito somewhere in Belgium, Burtzev quickly worked out a plan to locate him and if possible bring him clandestinely back to France, where the police would be alerted to arrest him. Burtzev thought this course would be of greatest propaganda value for the revolutionaries, but if kidnaping and delivery to France were impossible, they could carry out in Belgium the death sentence of their underground tribunal. Bakai and Leroy spent some three months of late 1909 in Belgium with their agents, Bakai investigating at Verviers, Leroy at Liege. They were confident of eventual success, but Harting had been informed of their assignment even before they left Paris.

Burtzev's service underwent continuous growth up to 1911. Leroy, in charge of recruiting and handling French agents, became his first deputy. In spite of continuous penetration by the Okhrana he did effective work, in 1913 forcing the adversary to dissolve its external service completely. He hired a number of its dismissed French agents, but most of these were doubled back by the Okhrana. Bakai's Liga was eliminated in 1911; Bakai quarreled with Burtzev over credit for the exposures they both contributed to. Agafonov's "Group of the Activist Minority" somehow lost its identity and is not mentioned after 1910, but Agafonov himself continued active and the number of internal agents working among the revolutionary groups increased.

Some Operations: Kuryansky

Burtzev was a most aggressive operator. He did not wait for leads to put him on the track of traitors; he created situations to produce the leads. Early in April of 1912, for example, Paris Okhrana received two letters, one addressed to the ambassador and the other to the consul general, from unknown persons offering their services as agents. Not suspecting that both were written by Burtzev's service, the Okhrana wrote back giving the two applicants appointments at different times and places. It even gave one a second appointment in response to a plea that the first reply had arrived too late. Neither of the two ever showed up.

But two of the addresses proposed for the meetings were, as Burtzev had suspected, used also for the mailed reports of penetration agents. His only purpose in the fake applications had been to obtain such addresses. His surveillance men now went to work and intercepted the mail for them, which gave him the code names of two Okhrana agents, Karpo and Kodak.

Leroy was able to determine that Kodak, who had a Paris address, was Leiba Poznansky, just recently recruited by the Okhrana. But Karpo's letters showed a London return address. Burtzev's men borrowed several of them and copied the contents before returning them to the post office for delivery. (The Okhrana noted the delay in their receipt but failed to take warning.)

When Burtzev thought he had learned enough about Karpo from his correspondence, he sent a telegram to the London address, inviting him to come to the railroad station to meet a certain train. The agent, true name Gersh Kuryansky, came to this meeting. Burtzev approached him and explained that Petersburg had designated him his new case officer. He asked Kuryansky about his operation and any recently obtained information, and he set the following day for another meeting at his lodging. Kuryansky, suspicious of this new case officer, immediately moved to different quarters. Burtzev, finding him gone, merely returned to Paris.

Burtzev could not in this instance, as he did in many others, publicly announce the exposure without compromising his mail intercept practices. But he depended on the revolutionary groups in which Kuryansky and Poznansky worked as Okhrana agents to proceed with

exposure and liquidation. An Okhrana agent in Burtzev's service had learned about his trip on the day he arrived in London, too late to alert Kuryansky. Kuryansky was dismissed with three months' pay and left England, but soon thereafter the revolutionaries found him in France and carried out the death sentence of their underground tribunal.

The Smolyansky Case

Burtzev could not disregard the judgments of Mark Natanson, who as a member of the Central Committee was the channel for the funds he required. Although he often forced Natanson to yield to him—even in some cases where his own intelligence was incorrect—Natanson's independent investigations sometimes complicated his efforts. Natanson was practical and rational in his approach, whereas Burtzev, relying heavily on his analysis of recorded data, was impulsive and too sure of his own intuition.

One case in which Burtzev was completely wrong was that of a revolutionary activist named Smolyansky. In falsely accusing him of being an Okhrana agent, he built his case entirely on circumstantial evidence. This included the suspect's intercepted mail and letters from accusers, anonymous and signed. His income was unexplained, and his movements were suspicious. One of his purloined writings was about the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, and Burtzev saw this as clearly the draft for an agent report. Then Burtzev received a report that a brother of Smolyansky's was a police official in Russia. He regarded the evidence as sufficient to warrant exposing the man as an agent.

Natanson objected. He had made an extensive investigation himself, and the results were quite contrary to the allegations in Burtzev's brief. He argued that the Smolyanskys were Jews and so could not be employed as police officials anywhere in Russia. Smolyansky was well versed in the affairs of the party, but his way of life and his activities among the émigrés precluded the possibility of his being a police agent. Burtzev then renewed his investigations and gathered still more evidence to support his accusation. He won in the end by appealing to the comrades not to trust anyone. They had trusted people in the past who proved to be traitors, he argued, and that must not occur again.

Tsipin

On the other hand, Burtzev was right and Natanson wrong about an Okhrana agent named Tsipin, who lived lavishly with his wife in a Paris suburb. Natanson's queries in Petersburg seemed to confirm Tsipin's loyalty to the cause. The reports from Russia said that he had been helpful to the party in the capital even before he joined and that he had since distinguished himself as a trustworthy activist. He was described as the son of a well-to-do merchant, who should therefore have money enough to live comfortably abroad.

Burtzev was not satisfied with Natanson's findings. He sought help from the wife of the Socialist Revolutionary leader Viktor Lebedev, pen name Voronov, who lived in the same suburb as the Tsipins. When the two women were visiting one day, Mme. Tsipin displayed a number of picture postcards she and her husband had received from Petersburg. Mme. Lebedev was interested in more than the pictures; she was curious about the names of the writers. She asked questions about them for which Mme. Tsipin had no ready answers. During further chatting, Mme. Lebedev wondered whether her friend couldn't keep her husband from his careless squandering of money; this turned the talk to incomes. Mme. Lebedev, protesting that it was none of her business, nevertheless pointed out discrepancies for which Mme. Tsipin could give no logical explanation. A full account of the questions and answers went to Burtzev, who in the meantime had gathered further information that added to his doubts.

Burtzev's demand for a direct questioning of Tsipin was approved by Natanson, provided, however, that it should take the form of a friendly conversation. Lebedev and Stepan Sletov, both on good terms with the suspect, were entrusted with the disguised probing; it was hoped that they would turn up some lead for further investigation. But Tsipin, as if sensing the purpose of the talks, had a ready answer for everything. This increased suspicion but provided no proof on the basis of which he could be denounced as a police agent. In a secret meeting it was therefore decided that he should not be permitted access to any gatherings of the party; the revolutionaries should break all contact with him. The case was terminated on 24 January 1913 with an

announcement of Tsipin's suicide. He was said to have shot himself on the train between Paris and Versailles.

Tatiana Tsetlin

Burtzev's exposure of Okhrana agent Tatiana Tsetlin, pseudonym Maria Tsikhotskaia, was preceded by a long investigation of the circumstances leading to failures in the conspiracies in which she participated. She had joined the Okhrana at Petersburg in 1907 and been placed as a penetration agent in the Socialist Revolutionaries' Combat Unit. The Petersburg police soon arrested most members of that unit but not Tatiana. She went to Geneva and joined another Combat Unit, which assigned her in the fall of 1908 to a team being organized by a Paris comrade, Josif Minor, to go to Petersburg and kill the Tsar. Minor left for Russia ahead of the others in order to make advance preparations; he was arrested upon arrival.

Tatiana remained in Paris associated with Boris Savinkov, the new leader of the Combat Unit, who formed a team with her and two others to begin by killing General Gerasimov of the Gendarmes and an Okhrana headquarters official named Dobroskokov. This was in March 1909. Dobroskokov, it happened, was a good friend of Tatiana's. Only two months before that date he had sent her a package of books through the cover address of an agent named Kershner. She now sent a wire to Petersburg asking him to come to Paris without delay because his life was in danger. Dobroskokov did so, arriving in Paris on Good Friday. The only ones who knew about his trip were General Gerasimov and his assistant in Petersburg and agent Kershner in Paris.

Burtzev had been watching Tatiana. He had studied the circumstances of her unhindered departure from Petersburg in 1907 after most of her comrades were arrested. He had compiled notes on Minor's arrest at the end of a trip which only she and two or three others knew about. He now learned of Dobroskokov's surprise journey just after being chosen as the victim of an assassination plan known only to Tatiana's team. He quickly organized an exceptionally large surveillance team to cover Dobroskokov and his contacts in Paris. As Dobroskokov stepped off the train he immediately noticed three revolutionary agents and even

recognized one of them; but he and Kershner, who met him, could detect no surveillance. When Tatiana came to visit him the following day, however, it became obvious that the revolutionaries had followed her. On her return home she found a telegram from Savinkov asking her to come on 13 April to the apartment of Sinkovsky, a member of her terrorist team. When she did so she was received by ten terrorists and Savinkov, who held a pistol on her.

Revolutionary Justice

The manner of Tatiana's arrest, interrogation, and trial by the underground tribunal is typical of the procedures used in cases of accused traitors. Savinkov ordered her to raise her arms and kept the pistol at her temple while she was being searched. He took from her all her money and told her that 500 rubles found in her apartment had also been confiscated as belonging to the party because it came from the Russian government. Sinkovsky, also a suspect, was being held in an adjoining room.

Tatiana had been under suspicion and investigation, she learned, for half a year, since the fall of 1908. The revolutionaries were familiar with the quarters of Dobroskokov at Petersburg; they had investigated there. They had also penetrated a safe house and learned there the code names of both Tatiana and Sinkovsky. They knew the true name of agent Kershner and the fact that Tatiana had received books through him from Petersburg.

Tatiana and Sinkovsky in the adjoining room were held for five days, watched by up to seven or eight armed members of the Combat Unit. On the second morning there arrived five members of the revolutionary tribunal and a recording secretary. The salient figure at the trial, not acting as one of the judges, was Burtzev with his intelligence records and incriminating papers picked up in the search of Tatiana's quarters, including a number of notes in Dobroskokov's handwriting.

After Burtzev's statement of the case, the tribunal began a long cross examination. Tatiana denied nothing. She declared that she had served the Okhrana but insisted that Sinkovsky had never been a police agent. She admitted acting as a secret agent for two years and made no effort

to embellish her position before the court. The tribunal decided that she was an "unrepenting provocateur" and sentenced both her and Sinkovsky to death.

The two prisoners were kept in the apartment waiting to be killed. The guards were changed constantly, at times seven, never fewer than three, all armed. Altogether, Tatiana estimated, some thirty people came and left the building. The landlord's attention was attracted by the great commotion. On 19 April, without explanation, both prisoners were told the death sentence was commuted. The revolutionaries had apparently decided it would be too dangerous to carry out the execution: too many people knew about the trial and the concierge had seen too much; the liquidation could be done later, away from Paris. The prisoners were told that they were expelled from the party but would have to report all changes of address. Both were released.

Tatiana was given back 40 francs of her money. She took a train to Germany. Three armed revolutionaries accompanied her, but she succeeded in escaping from them. She returned to Russia and told the Okhrana this story.

Burtzev as Interrogator

Burtzev himself, in contrast to the others, refrained from pistol threats and abusive language when interrogating. In the case of agent Aleksandr Maas, for instance, he had piled up ample evidence of treason. But in a series of interrogations after his accusation and before the final sitting of the tribunal he, the accuser, acted more gently than even Maas's friends who were serving as judges. Talking like a kindly old professor, he began by apologizing to Maas that the interrogation had to be held because of some reports received from Petersburg. But behind this apparently timid handling was a systematic strategy to prove that the man was lying. Burtzev encouraged Maas to develop a fictitious story about his income. The story became so extensive and elaborate as to provide many facets subject to factual checking, and the traitor was caught in his own fiction.

We have seen Burtzev's ingenuity in eliciting information from the unwilling Okhrana ex-director Lopukhin. In another case, when an

underground tribunal had decided to dispatch a team to kill Okhrana penetration Zinaida Zhuchenko, Burtzev first rushed to her apartment for a talk. Assuring her that he would save her life, he gently developed a lengthy interrogation, avoiding arguments, giving advice, and astutely probing into her past activities. She did not believe his assurances, but she could not refuse to answer his kindly and considerate questions. She gave him the story of her long service for the Okhrana, trying nevertheless to reveal nothing that could give clues to the service's current operations.

CI Hybris

After Burtzev's triumph in exposing Azev and Harting, no revolutionary group was able to refuse his services or to ignore his warnings and directives. The central committees had to accept him in their councils and consult him on the security of projected operations and the loyalty of participating activists. Thus he acquired a peculiar authority over revolutionary operations and the top party leaders. He was frequently able to tell them to change or drop their operational plans.

After Natanson and Chernov, for example, had in 1913 approved a project to dispatch Zinamar Kisin with a team to Petersburg to murder Minister of Education Kaso, Burtzev warned them that the conspiracy might have been penetrated by the Okhrana. When they wanted to go ahead with the operation despite his warnings, he threatened to expose them as provocateurs if anything should go wrong. They had to drop the plan. We have seen how in the Smolyansky case Burtzev was entirely wrong, yet Natanson and the other top leaders could not contradict him. He had only to remind them, "For five years I worked on Azev and proved him to be an agent, but the comrades refused to listen," and the central committees were compelled to follow his dicta.

His authoritarian attitude led to a gradual loss of support from the Socialist Revolutionaries and other groups of political exiles. He became chronically short of the funds required to maintain his expanded services. Bakai, after he broke with him, wrote him a public letter in which he charged him with squandering money:

Despite abundant income you have found yourself financially embarrassed at all times. And you have driven to a financially critical position all, including myself, who had the misfortune of having had dealings with you.

Burtzev may have been a poor financial manager; certainly he was more secretive with regard to funds than any other operational matter. The Okhrana's penetration agents learned and reported virtually every operational plan and action undertaken by his service, but they were never able to render a comprehensive report on where his money came from and how it was spent. Toward the end, at least, it seems clear that his subsidies simply fell off.

The negative side of Burtzev's activities came in for ever sharper criticism. Some of the revolutionary comrades saw in him an evil spirit doing more damage than good to the revolution. His fanatical drive to uncover Okhrana penetration agents at home and abroad created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion among the rank and file. His callous accusations of treason often turned out to be based on insufficient information and hasty assumptions. Two of the Russians in the original "Leroy Brigade," for example, were wrongly accused and committed suicide.

Then some whom Burtzev brought to trial by the underground tribunals cleared themselves as innocent, occasionally even when he was right, and he was obliged to recant with public apology. Sometimes his intemperate charges and subsequent retractions actually helped Okhrana agents, for example Emil Brontman and his mistress Eropkina, to establish themselves more firmly than ever in the revolutionary councils. At the same time accusations against innocents compelled many to desert the movement.

The Fall

Opposition to Burtzev increased particularly in the first months of 1914. Rumors were spread to show him full of naivete or senile. He was called an old autocrat who conjured up suspects by intuition, without factual

intelligence information and proof. He was charged with an obsession for exposing police agents regardless of how much he hurt the revolutionary movement.

With a new series of errors in exposing Okhrana agents the criticism came to a head in mid-1914, and Burtzev lost all financial support from the revolutionary groups. His teams of French external agents disintegrated because their salaries were not paid, and his wide circle of Russian collaborators gradually deserted him. By the time the war broke out in August he was actually destitute, without support from anywhere and thus without a service. He returned to Russia, escaping a throng of creditors to face in the imperial courts the charges of sedition against him. He made assertions that he did not want to oppose a government allied with the democratic West in a war against German militarism; but the true cause for his return appears to have been his loss of supporters among the revolutionaries and his consequent bankruptcy. There had been times when Vladimir Lvovich had been wanted dead or alive by the Tsarist regime. Returning to Petrograd in wartime, however, he found the authorities unexpectedly lenient. A free man even before the first revolution broke out, he went back to newspaper work in 1917, publishing *Obshchee Delo* (Common Cause). He now became an ardent critic of Bolshevism. Despite his many past services for Lenin's party, therefore, he found it healthiest to return to exile soon after the October Revolution. In Paris he continued his *Obshchee Delo* for several years. His death came in 1942 at the age of 80.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1 Based, except for the story of Evno Azef's exposure, for which secondary sources like Agafonov and Nikolaevsky were used, principally on the files of the Okhrana's Paris station which are preserved in the Hoover Institution at Stanford. For earlier *Studies* articles from this source see the author's "The Okhrana's Female Agents," IX 2 p. 25 ff and IX 3 p. 59 ff, "Okhrana Agent Dolin," X 2 p. 57 ff, "Paris Okhrana 1885-1905," X 3 p. 55 ff, and "The Illustrious Career of Arkadiy Harting," XI 1 p. 71 ff.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
~~NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

Posted: May 08, 2007 08:14 AM