

**The Okhrana: The Russian
Department of Police. A
Bibliography by Edward
Ellis Smith. Book review by
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THE OKHRANA: The Russian Department of Police. A Bibliography by *Edward Ellis Smith*. (The Hoover Institution Bibliographical Series XXXIII. Stanford University. 1967. 280 pp. \$10.00.)

The Russian imperial secret service, the Okhrana, is the only major security establishment of the twentieth century about which a comprehensive bibliography, including material from its own files and interrogations of its leaders, could possibly appear as an open publication. It went out of existence in 1917, when the provisional regime took over and the revolutionary mobs destroyed most of the centrally and provincially kept records. The Bolsheviks promptly established their own Cheka, but in no way as a continuation of the Okhrana. Instead of safeguarding the secrets of the predecessor agency, the Cheka of the Soviets publicized and exploited them to serve their purposes.

Despite the voluminous Soviet writings about the Okhrana, however, nothing has as yet come out of the USSR in the form of bibliography on this important agency of the old regime. The present volume coming from the Hoover Institution is therefore unique, perhaps the only publication of the kind in the West. It is also logical that such a book was prepared at the Hoover Institution, well-known as the most comprehensive repository of the Okhrana materials. Its holdings include the nearly intact archive of the Paris headquarters, which duplicated the records kept at the home office in Petrograd, as well as voluminous data on international intelligence operations which were not as fully recorded at the capital.

The author points out in his introduction that "no general work exists encompassing the Russian security-intelligence organizations for the period from 1881 to 1917," the Okhrana's span of life. Various authors have written about it, but "narrowness of treatment and bias mark most works on the Okhrana," so that the resulting tracts on the subject are notably subjective. He is entirely correct in this respect, and his own analysis of the titles and contents does not entirely escape the taint of the partiality of the authors.

Some of the writings discuss the Okhrana's antecedents with centuries-old origins, dating back to Ivan the Terrible and his Oprichnina, and follow stages of evolution as landmarked in imperial decrees and

statutes. For an understanding of the Okhrana, and the subsequent Soviet security establishments, such historic factors and mores underlying the whole system of Russian counterintelligence and counterespionage, past and present, are of cardinal significance. The Okhrana, as sponsored by the imperial decrees, and as described by some of its former top officials in exile, was an essentially humane agency for the preservation of law and order. Its task was to safeguard the existing regime and specifically to neutralize or eliminate the elements that threatened it: the anarchists (nihilists), assassins, revolutionaries, and other political troublemakers. In contrast, the writers on the revolutionary side universally dubbed it as a tyrannical and brutal police state within the state. Their flood of propaganda precluded any objective writing about it at home or abroad.

No matter how wild the accusations or distortions, the Okhrana itself, or the government behind it, could not and would not commit itself in its defense. Because of the imperative secrecy about the agency, it could not reveal facts. It consistently chose not to deny any accusations. It could not make public that it was perennially understaffed, with an average of a few dozen officers and employees in each major city and province, while propaganda had raised the figure into tens of thousands of officials and spies in every gubernia. It chose not to explain that the Okhrana was not in charge of the gendarmes and the city police, or that the prison administration and the Siberian exile camps were in no way under its control. The Okhrana was essentially an investigative agency targeting at subversives at home and abroad and using any available methods to penetrate their groups and control their activities. Its plans and operations could never be publicly confirmed or denied even when the adverse propaganda contained elements of truth. As a result, the literature about the Okhrana has remained to this date essentially one-sided, all *contra*, with only an occasional morsel of *pro* and, therefore, hardly anything objective in-between.

Smith's Okhrana bibliography epitomizes this situation. He has a total of 909 entries of books, pamphlets, articles, compendiums of reminiscences, some isolated rosters of police and Okhrana personnel, circulars, and the like. Over two-thirds of the bibliography refers to newspaper articles and editorials which, in turn, are almost exclusively from the revolutionary and post-revolutionary Communist and other leftist press. Although the writers of articles draw on reminiscences or post-revolutionary discoveries of certain Okhrana acts, bias is seldom concealed. The post-revolutionary, officially approved writer, likewise,

could not depict the old security service as anything but a beastly conspiracy against the Russian nation. Also included are the works of two Okhrana defectors, Leonid Menshchikov and Mikhail Bakai. Smith describes them as valuable in illustrating modus operandi, but these authors were disputed by other revolutionary writers as incorrect. Smith considers Valerian Agafonov's book *Zagranichnaia Okhranka* (Okhrana Abroad - Kniga, Petrograd, 1918) as probably the best available work on the Paris Okhrana. He analyzes it chapter by chapter. Agafonov served as a member of the commission sent to Paris by Kerensky's regime to investigate Okhrana archives. As a revolutionary (Agafonov was once engaged in BurtzeVs counterintelligence), he wrote about the Okhrana only what was acceptable to the new rulers. For instance, he was fully informed about Paris Okhrana's counterintelligence operations against Germany after August 1914, yet his book made no mention of that substantial achievement against the enemy at war. Works like Agafonov's, praised by the compiler of the *Bibliography*, should instead be marked as partisan and overly subjective.

The major part of the present compilation is given the general title of "Operational Methodology" which, in turn, is subdivided by subheadings on "Internal Security" and "Operations Against Revolutionaries" and "Other Organizations and Movements," at home and abroad. A professional counterintelligence analyst would no doubt use a different approach. The titles under "Internal Security" are a mixture of writings that could be classified under other chapters. Some are treatises on government policy and regulations; others, articles on individuals and their experiences with Czarist authorities; but none add up to a definitive description of how the internal security service was organized and how it functioned. The longest chapter, on "Operations Against Revolutionaries," is perplexing. It contains an analysis of 217 titles, but these deal almost exclusively with reminiscences about arrests, police brutality, life in prisons, court trials and exiles in Siberia. The Okhrana, although a special section within the Department of Gendarmes, could have played only a secondary, if any, role in making arrests and trying or exiling people; by law it was not a punitive agency. This section also refers to one interesting pamphlet containing instructions on how the revolutionaries are to behave in interrogations. These instructions, published in 1900, are in no way different from current day guidebooks for subversives caught by the authorities.

The chapter heading "Intelligence Against Other Nations" is especially unfortunate since none of the writings included under it are concerned

with this subject. Only works dealing with Russian revolutionists abroad are listed. The Okhrana's operations were limited in peacetime to the pursuit of Russian revolutionaries, anarchists, and other troublemakers. This was the assurance the Czarist government gave to thirteen other nations which in the decade before World War I signed a pact to cooperate in such pursuits. Russia strictly adhered to this pact as long as there was no war. In the conflict with Japan, however, the Okhrana in Paris placed a strong team of operatives into Belgium who succeeded in intercepting and decoding messages of the Japanese military attaché there. That complex operation was fully described by Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov, the staff officer in charge. A copy of his notes is among the Okhrana files at the Hoover Institution.

Okhrana officials abroad themselves protested against Okhrana operations against other nations. For example, the archive at the Hoover Institution contains a set of dispatches to the home office objecting to an indirect assignment for gathering intelligence on the Austro-Hungarian navy and the ports of Trieste, Fiume and the Dalmatian coast. Bound by law, the Okhrana staff abroad refused to comply with such requests in time of peace.

With the outbreak of World War I, the Paris Okhrana soon converted its activities to counterintelligence and counterespionage tasks against Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. Some ingenious operations were mounted, and the Okhrana records at the Institution give a comprehensive account of the methods of handling the respective double agents, of the network stretching into a third country (Switzerland to Germany), of disinformation to confuse the enemy, and the like. Assuming that Mr. Smith had access to the Okhrana files, one would ask why that material is omitted from his *Bibliography*.

Other data at the Hoover Institution should not have been omitted. The archive contains reams of printed regulations and circulars from the home office dealing with the *agentura* structure, its functions and legal restrictions. Folders of circular letters show how various officials and agents were dismissed from the *agentura* because they failed to comply with regulations. Other printed materials, some of which are in the Okhrana archive and others of which may be available in libraries elsewhere, deal with statutes and imperial decrees regulating internal security agencies. A bibliographer cannot disregard that phase of literature, for that would look as if he had adopted the slogans of the revolutionists forever proclaiming that the Okhrana officialdom

disregarded its own laws. Mr. Smith included only N. T. Volkov's compilation *Zakony politzii* (Police Laws), but that work, published in 1901, was superseded by volumes of other legislation, much more pertinent to the Okhrana structure and tasks.

Still other materials, some well-known, could have been included. The Duma's stenographic records of the sessions discussing Okhrana scandals merit inclusion in this bibliography. From the standpoint of operations abroad, the Okhrana recruitment of foreign agents, organization of teams, liaison with foreign services, penetration of post offices of host countries, live surveillance, and other such topics were occasionally on the agenda of the parliaments in Paris and Rome. As a result of interpellations, the press of the two countries was able to disclose the names and activities of most of the Okhrana agents in France and Italy who were nationals of the two countries. The parliamentary debates often went into such details from agent revelations that mention in this bibliography would seem appropriate.

In his introduction, Mr. Smith set the question of how it happened that perhaps the first and best modern security-intelligence agency, at the height of its efficiency, failed in its mission to protect tsarism. He refers to historians who blamed it upon Russia's military defeats in World War I. That, no doubt, was the paramount cause, but the implied Okhrana efficiency or strength to combat the underground no longer existed in 1914-1917. The efforts of the *agentura* at home and abroad at that time were turned away from the revolutionists. Mr. Smith's bibliography does not show this, but the fact stands out that all major Okhrana agent assets abroad and most of its operators, especially after 1915, were harnessed to the Allied war effort. The Okhrana archive attests to that fully. It contains accounts of how three or four staff members operating from all Allied capitals mounted a double agent network to mislead the German general staff, as illustrated by the case of agent Dolin. It includes reams of materials which show daily liaison on counterespionage with the Allied Command in Paris and coordination with the British through an Okhrana outpost at Newcastle, England. Several key men among the Okhrana detectives were converted into deep cover agents, as for instance Henri Bint and his team, for third country espionage operations, for example from Switzerland into Germany, and the Jollivet family of Okhrana agents, and other minor operatives.

These shortcomings do not diminish the worth of Mr. Smith's book in a

broader sense. To say the least, it shows how the revolutionary writers distorted the true picture of the Okhrana and how and why the few apologists for it failed so utterly. It should be of greater value to the historian than to the intelligencer, to the sociologist rather than the student of law enforcement. And the intelligence official, too, in this broader sense, should find the book worthwhile for reference.

With few exceptions, the book is properly and well indexed, and has a glossary of terms and a roster of periodicals consulted. The notations on each volume are adequate. Nuisances are the endless recurrence of typographical errors, mistakes in dates, too casual translations of Russian titles into English, and unexplained abbreviations. These may be considered as minor faults, but more consistency in transliterating proper names would normally be expected in an academic publication.

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