

ORLOV

Undated

(not Feldman)
Dear Harold,

As you suggested, during our discussion about the assassination of Trotsky a month ago, I have read Handbook of Intelligence and Guerilla Warfare by Alexander Orlov (University of Michigan Press, 1963) who died in 1973 in his seventy-eight^F year. I read the Handbook attentively but found nothing in it bearing directly on the assassination of Trotsky. Moreover, the Handbook, which purports to be essentially a revised version of one Orlov wrote for the NKVD some twenty years before when he was a high Stalinist state-security officer, omits entirely the Soviet-intelligence "line" or NKVD function of assassination of "traitors" and "enemies." Also omitted is the "line" of penetration of friendly governments and both friendly and hostile revolutionary movements; no reference is made to the Kremlin conflict with Maoist China. "Guerilla operations" are conducted by the Soviet security agency, the Handbook avers, "only in war time and in semiwar situations," as in the Russ^O-Polish War of 1920 and the Civil War in Spain in 1936-39! Added point accrues to these lacunae by realization much of the omitted material had been published when the Handbook appeared: in 1953 in a series of articles by Orlov in Life magazine, which appeared later in book form under the title, The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes; in another article by Orlov in Life on April 23, 1956; and in 1962 by release by the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Law of testimony by Orlov in 1955. His testimony before the same subcommittee ^{/in 1957} was included in a "Committee Print" of August 1973, titled The Legacy of Alexander Orlov. A strange performance!

Equally strange is Orlov's account of his career. While a Soviet diplomatic adviser to the Spanish republican government during the civil war of 1936-39 and the blood^l purges in the Soviet Union, and after directing guerilla operations behind Franco's lines and supervising the negotiated removal to the Soviet Union, "for safekeeping," of the entire gold reserve of Spain, about half a billion dollars or more, Orlov said he had good reasons to think he was slated for extermination, like thousand^s of his colleagues, and decamped to the United States in the summer of 1938. Here he went into hiding for fifteen years and surfaced in 1953, the year in which Stalin died and the cold war raged.

It would be a pleasure to allow Orlov to rest in peace were it not for his ghostly connection with the assassination of Trotsky. How strange it is that "as soon as I came to the United States and arranged my personal affairs, I wrote two letters, one to Trotsky in Mexico, and the other, a copy to his wife, also in Mexico, warning them about that agent provocateur who was planted in their midst, and warning Trotsky to be on guard against that man" who was Trotsky's son's close collaborator in the Paris center of the Fourth International (Testimony in 1957; Legacy, p36). Why he should have done so he did not explain. Nor was he asked. Remarkably, apart from a later unsuccessful effort to reach Trotsky by telephone, from California, Orlov reported no other political activity until he began naming "a number of spies" to the FBI.

That the letter exists we know. Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's biographer, found it "among Trotsky's papers (in the 'open' section of the Archives)" at Harvard, "early in 1950, and copied it in extenso. Since then Alexander Orlov, a former GPU officer, has claimed authorship of this letter" (The Prophet Outcast, 1963, p409). But everything about this letter is strange. Deutscher's comment is made in a

footnote as though it was an afterthought. He seems to have had reservations about the letter's authorship; he wrote only that Orlov "claimed" authorship; he did not say whether he thought the claim genuine or false; and he did not reproduce the letter.

The Senate Subcommittee published a "Transcribed copy" of the letter as Exhibit No. 426 in its transcript of the committee hearing held on February 14, 1957 (Legacy, pp37-38), having obtained it not from Trotsky's Archives where Deutscher found it, but from Orlov who gave the committee "a copy...in executive session...the photostat of my carbon copy, and...a translation... (Legacy, p36). The transcript of that hearing is barren of effort to authenticate Orlov's documentation and his authorship, and, therefore, did not dispose of the possibility Orlov's copy was made from the original in the Trotsky Archives at some time between its deposit there and Orlov's appearance before the Subcommittee in 1955 and again in 1957.

Deutscher made no comment on the correspondence or between or divergences in the original and the Orlov copy.

Another problem relates to signature. When he testified in 1955 Orlov said, "I signed that letter by the name of Stein" (Legacy, p19). The third paragraph from the end of the Subcommittee copy of the letter begins with the statement, "I am not signing this letter and I am not giving my address because I am afraid that the Stalinists might intercept and read this letter at the post office in Mexico" (Legacy, p38). The letter, Orlov said, was posted in Philadelphia; is it not significant Orlov expressed no fear of Stalinist interference with the mails in the United States?

The Subcommittee copy is unsigned. Lila Dallin (Lola Estrine) testi-

fied before the Subcommittee in 1956 and related that when she visited Trotsky "in the summer of 1939" he showed her an "unsigned letter from a man who told him that the closest friend of his son... is an agent of the NKVD" (The Mind Of An Assassin, Isaac Don Levine, 1959; p56).

The penultimate paragraph of the Subcommittee copy of the letter asked Trotsky to "publish a notice in the newspaper Socialist Appeal in New York that the editorial office has received the letter from Stein; please have the notice appear in the newspaper for January and February" (Legacy, p38). No explanation was given in the Subcommittee copy and in the hearing for the suggestion the letter should have been forwarded to New York from Mexico. Perhaps the underlying thought was - the letter should not be found among Mr Trotsky's papers after he was killed.

Trotsky responded to the letter, as requested, and demanded the writer present himself to his followers in New York; "I insist, Mr. Stein, I insist that you go immediately to the editorial offices of the Socialist Appeal and talk to Comrade Martin" (Mind of An Assassin, pp55-56). Orlov's version of Trotsky's response includes the phrase "about it" between "talk" and "to" (Legacy, p19). Orlov called Trotsky's response "frantic" (Legacy, p19).

Nevertheless, Orlov told the Subcommittee, he did not comply with Trotsky's demand: "I surely didn't go there, because that man Martin might also have been a Soviet provocateur or something like that. I don't know. I didn't go there. That was all" (Legacy, p19).

Later in the hearing, however, while Orlov was responding, at times heatedly, to statements made previously to the Subcommittee by David Dallin, Mrs. Orlov, who was present, asked her husband: "If in the

newspaper was written that you should go and talk to Mr. Martin, I believe if Mr. Martin is not dead, he had certain instructions from Trotsky that some man will come and tell you about some danger to my life, please interview him. I believe this Martin is not dead. You may ask hi.ⁿ Listen, had you instructions from Trotsky to speak on behalf of this letter with certain man who reported this, that ~~is~~ is a piece of evidence."

To which Orlov replied: "In connection with this I would like to add one thing. I did go to the editorial offices of the Trotsky newspaper, the Socialist Appeal, to take a look who that Martin was. I went there -" (to his wife) - "I didn't tell you so you wouldn't be afraid for my life." And Mrs. Orlov commented: "It was dangerous." Orlov responded: "I asked what is Comrade Martin? Somebody showed me that man. I saw a swarthy fellow who looked to me more like a Hungarian. I just took a look ^a at him and after I saw him I didn't enter his room. I didn't talk to him. I went away" (Legacy, pp 29-30).

The comic dialogue continued until Orlov reversed roles with the Subcommittee and requested permission "to ask one question, if it is possible without a record." The transcript reads: "Chairman East-ⁿlad. Off the record. (Discussion off the record)" (Legacy, p30). When the Eastland cast went public again the contradiction in Orlov's testimony was ignored.

Another strange feature of the letter is use of the name Stein. Why Stein? Was the name, an obvious complement of the letter's opening sentence - "I am a Jew who came from Russia" - intended to arouse Trotsky's sympathetic interest, disarm his habitual critical skepticism, or/and, somehow, suggest the true identity of the writer? Perhaps none of these. But is it mere coincidence that Stein was identified by Orlov as "a capable NKVD officer...assistant chief of", albeit in 1956,

the department preparing the first Moscow trials" who "one day" came upon a neat file/ⁱⁿ which the deputy director of the czarist secret police, Vissarionov, had kept what appeared to be papers intended for his eyes only?" And that "leafing through them, Stein came upon a questionnaire with a small photo of Stalin as a young man attached to it," became "suspicious," and "realized "The file... concerned Stalin...not Stalin the revolutionary but Stalin the agent provocateur who had worked assiduously for czarist secret police." Stein, according to Orlov, took his file to high ranking NKVD and party officials who took it to Tukhachevsky and other Red Army leaders who decided on a coup d'etat in the Kremlin to get rid of Stalin without disturbing the country.

All this was told to Orlov, he wrote in 1956, in Life magazine, while in hospital in Paris in January 1937, by his cousin Katsnelson, "a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU and acting deputy chief of the NKVD in the Ukraine." Six months later, while riding from France to Barcelona, Orlov learned the denouement of the plot whose intended victim got wind of it, probably through betrayal, arrested the conspirators, had them summarily shot, and initiated a sweeping blood purge of Red Army officers. "It became known later that Stein...shot himself." Almost twenty years later, other military men and their allies, in possession of photocopies of the Stalin file forced Khrushchev et al to launch the policy of deStalinization (Legacy, pl39 et seq.).

Orlov of, This/spy thriller, a precursor/and possible model for Hugh McDonald's equally sensational Appointment in Dallas, the Final Solution to the Assassination of JFK, and as facile in sophistical rationalization as the warning letter to Trotsky, impressed Eastland ^{and} his parliamentary cretinous associates but was demolished by Roy McVicker in his monumental catalogue of Stalinist abominations, Let History Judge, 1971,

p316 et seq. For example: "At the height of the repression, Orlov decided not to return to the USSR. Until 1953 he made no excuses, but after Stalin's death he published a series of articles, later incorporated in a book, The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes, ...In these publications Stalin was accused of killing Kirov and organizing mass repression, but there was no mention of his working for the tsarist police. Then, in the 1956 article, Orlov tried to explain the mass repression by Stalin's fear of being exposed as a former police spy. In February, 1937, when Orlov was in a French clinic...."

Medvedev recapitulated Orlov's story of Stalin, when he called Shtain, and sequel and concluded: "In fact, Orlov's allegations do not withstand even superficial criticism. Kats'nelson, to begin with, was neither a member nor a candidate member of the Central Committee in 1937. The 'conspirators' Orlov names were not arrested all at once but over a long period of time...As for the many photocopies that were allegedly made of the 'Vissarionov', ^{file} not one is extant, although many of the 'conspirators' could easily have sent them to friends abroad. We know the details of the arrests of the military leaders and these facts are utterly incompatible with the existence of a widespread conspiracy to kill Stalin. It is also improbable that no one had searched the archives of the tsarist secret police before 1937. Also many of the Ukrainian officials who were close to Kosior and Iakir...were not arrested. Orlov is even wrong in his account of Krushchev's speech to the XIXth Party Congress. Krushchev said nothing in that speech about the case of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other generals, who were rehabilitated only in 1957. There are many more such distortions and errors in Orlov's article...It is obvious, in short

that Orlov's 1956 article is a clumsy fabrication.

And Medvedev went on to examine the rumors and accounts, in the Soviet Union and abroad, of Stalin's alleged czarist police service. Although Medvedev thought "Stalin was a typical provocateur" and "In his struggle for power provocation was his favorite weapon" which he used "with great skill," he found a "lack of credibility" in the allegations, and noted, "The few such documents that have been unearthed in the archives have not confirmed the story of Stalin's connections with the czarist secret police."

In other words, Orlov, more likely than not, was, at least to begin with, a spurious defector. It is relevant to note: "The fourth line of Soviet intelligence is so-called Misinformation," wrote Handbeck after Orlov. "The Soviet government is interested not only in obtaining information about the policies and impending moves of foreign governments, but also in misinforming and misleading the governments of foreign countries" (pp20-21). When president Kennedy was assassinated in the same year in which the Handbeck was born, the Soviet government expressed apprehension to the American government the plot and murder would be attributed to the Kremlin and it promptly denounced Oswald as a Trotskyist. Soon thereafter Lieutenant Colonel Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko, Deputy Chief of the Tourist Department, Second Chief Directorate of the Committee for State Security, defected to the United States where, on February 26 and 27 and on March 3, 1964 he "advised" the FBI, which informed the Warren Commission, "he was familiar with the visit of Lee Harvey Oswald to the Soviet Union in 1959 and supervised the handling of the KGB file on Oswald...the KGB had no current interest in him...(Oswald) was not regarded by the KGB as being completely normal mentally nor...very intelligent...(and) no Soviet intelligence agency would consider using him..." (Reports of FBI Special

Agents Taylor, Walter, and Poptanich of 2/26/64; the same and Ghes-
eling of 3/5/64; and Warren Commission Counsel Memorandum of 6/2/64;
all in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

If Orlov was a spurious defector and still an NKVD agent he was also,
very likely, as he claimed, author of the warning letter to Trotsky.
And the letter, consequently, acquires significance as a calculated
element in the developing plot to kill Trotsky. The letter warned
Trotsky against the provocateur "Mark" whose physical description was
exact but who, as we know now, was not involved directly in the assass-
ination; and against "agents provocateurs from Spain under the guise
of Spanish Trotskyists" (Legacy, p38); but not against assassins
on the scene, for example, Siquero who, Orlov must have known, "was
the most prominent figure in the band of Spanish and Mexican commu-
nists who were active in the conspiracy to liquidate Trotsky" (Mind
of An Assassin, p63) and who led the murder raid against Trotsky on
May 24, 1940. In sum, denunciation of the provocateur in Europe was
a deceptive sacrifice of an agent whose further usefulness to the NKVD
was imperiled by persistent suspicion regarding him among leading
European Trotskyists.

In all probability Trotsky read the letter correctly. Two points in
particular must have impressed him at once. The letter was implausi-
bly plausible. Every obvious question about its genuineness seems
to have been anticipated and met with candor and reason. Neverthe-
less the letter does not convince and telegraphs its NKVD source.
Moreover, Trotsky received the letter less than a month after the
arrival of letters from Naring Sneevliet and Victor Serge, from Eu-
rope, who were certain Trotsky's son's close collaborator in Paris
was a Stalinist agent; and a communication from the accused whom he
had advised in a letter on December 2, 1938, formally addressed to the
editors of the Bulletin, to "at once challenge his accusers to lay

their charges before a competent commission" (Prophet, p408), all of which, Trotsky had to consider, was known by the author of the warning letter. Hence his insistence ^{that} "Mr. Stein" come forward. And if ghosts can be induced to tell the truth, Orlov's would probably confirm that is how his counterintelligence brain understood Trotsky's response to his scheming ploy.

Trotsky doubted the letter's "trustworthiness," Deutscher wrote, on two grounds: "apparent lack of response on the correspondent's part" to the request he discuss his letter in person in New York, and the "strange form of his warning" (Prophet, p409). "Nevertheless," Deutscher wrote, "a small commission was formed at Coyocacan to investigate the matter" (Prophet, p409). Unfortunately, Deutscher's account does not identify the individuals who constituted the commission, describe the material they considered, and relate the extent and nature of their deliberations; depriving the reader of opportunity to judge what consideration was given by the commission to the dangerous implications of the three accusatory letters; what political analysis Trotsky made of the affair; on what the finding of "no substance in the charges" (Prophet, p409) was based; and to what degree, if any, that outcome was influenced by considerations of morale.

Revealing concern with morale in the Trotskyist movement was prominent in Orlov's mind while testifying in 1955. In rebutting Dallin's statement Trotsky regarded the warning letter - which closed with "Respectfully, your friend" - as an NKVD "hoax," Orlov exclaimed, "That is not true because Trotsky's frantic appeal to me in the newspaper... However, maybe out of political tactics Trotsky had to pretend maybe that he didn't believe it... In order to keep up the morale of these Trotskyites who surrounded Trotsky, Trotsky probably told them, "I don't believe it," but he did believe it." (Legacy p29). ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

A typical police-spy calculation!

Deutscher's account is on a loftier plane but ^{does} not do justice to Trotsky of whom his wife wrote, in describing his "part in the conduct of the investigation of the case of May 21," 1940, "He attached the proper significance to every single thing and wove them all into a single whole" (Father and Son, Natalia Sedova Trotsky in Leon Trotsky, The Man and His Work, p42). Deutscher related only that "Trotsky wondered whether the denunciation was not a G.P.U. hoax, designed to discredit the man who appeared to be the most efficient and devoted of his assistants...was thoroughly versed in Soviet affairs and edited the Bulletin...[Trotsky] knew all too well what a curse stool-pigeons were in an organization," and "also knew that constant suspicion and witch-hunting could be even worse" (Prophet, p409). But Trotsky's biographer did not say whether these views constituted the whole of Trotsky's thinking on the problem of the three accusatory letters; and did not reproduce and analyze them, thereby failing to lay Orlov's ghost.

So much for Orlov and his letter, at least for the present. Other ambiguities and problems in the assassination of Trotsky clamor for resolution. When I complete the necessary reading and rereading I would like to continue our discussion about the attack of May 21, 1940, and especially the role of Sheldon Harts and its significance. Ideas are beginning to crystallize and I think it will be possible to say the investigation^s of the Trotsky and Kennedy assassinations intersect in the Socialist Workers Party.

Fraternally,

