

Nosenko case

...What Nosenko Is Now Going Through Is Revealed by Another Who Defected

By Peter Deriabin

FEAR OF PUBLICITY

The recent defection of Soviet intelligence officer Yuri I. Nosenko has again focused the attention of the world on the subject of defectors from communism. As a former Soviet intelligence officer, now a United States citizen, and a resident of the United States for the last ten years, I naturally have more than a passing interest in such events. I vicariously relive each new defection as each one takes me back to the time, almost exactly 10 years ago, when I made my own final, irrevocable decision to reject communism, the Soviet system and the Soviet way of life. I remember so well that feeling of deep loneliness which accompanied the decision to leave all that I knew and embrace the unknown. It was some comfort that the unknown West had, at least been explored by me somewhat during my stay in Vienna. I knew that it might hold hardship for me in the future, but it could hold no horrors comparable to those I was leaving.

Yet I was leaving much that was good and much which I loved. This knowledge only made me more bitterly hate the inhuman regime which had made it impossible for me to retain both my heritage and my self-respect.

I think that Nosenko must be experiencing similar feelings. Even now I vividly remember, in the weeks following my own defection, how I was alternately depressed and elated; now filled with a tremendous drive to unburden myself, to cleanse myself of the filth which had forced me to break away, now lethargic, disinterested, overcome by "weilschmerz."

The most difficult transition of all was to realize the freedom with which Americans criticize themselves and their institutions. In the controlled state society of the Soviet Union, criticism is either an undercurrent, dangerous to express, or it is used as a device of the regime—either official self-criticism designed to relieve tension in a sensitive area or the sort of provocation intended to ferret out "troublesome" people. Suspicion within the highest levels of the Soviet state is intense, and half your waking hours are spent speculating on the real motives behind relatively simple acts: you begin to worry about the inflection of casual greetings. So it was deeply unsettling, to me, at first, to hear the normal comments of Americans about everything from the Presidency to the price of eggs. At first, trying to fit American outspokenness into the norms of Soviet society, I brooded about "provocations" or "counter-propaganda." It took me almost a year to realize the differences between a society where free speech is taken for granted and the statist society which I had left. I would venture to say that the experience of a free speech society is the most difficult adjustment any Soviet defector must make.

I recall that I had an almost pathological fear of publicity, which even now, in retrospect, is difficult to explain. My only experience with press media was in the Soviet Union, where the press is the official voice of the government and the Communist party. As naive as it may sound, I could not be convinced that American press comments on my defection did not reflect official U. S. government reaction to my defection. But with the passage of the last 10 years I have come to a better understanding of Western democracy and to appreciate the true meaning of the expression "free press." I think it safe to say that the life blood of Western newspapers is current news. The defection of a Soviet citizen, and particularly of a Soviet intelligence officer, is "hot news," and as soon as it happens, there is pressure to get something about it into print.

But unfortunately the time of the greatest pressure, or desire, if you will, on the part of news media for information about a defector and his defection, coincides exactly with the time of the greatest resistance to the release of any news on the part of the defector himself and on the part of the defector's Western friends who are harboring him. Lacking factual information, and under pressure to produce copy, our enterprising reporters will often take whatever skimpy facts they can unearth, and embellish them by indulging in fanciful, unrealistic and sometimes actually harmful speculation regarding the motivation and value of such defectors.

Certainly Nosenko's immediate value to the American counter-intelligence services will be great. However, his long-range value to the West is infinitely greater and longer-lasting. Essentially Nosenko as a Soviet intelligence officer personifies the elite of the Soviet Union. As an intelligence officer, he was first a political realist who, due to his privileged access to information and right to travel abroad, best understood conditions as they really were in the Soviet Union without the gloss put on them by the Soviet propaganda machine.

As a member of the KGB, which is the primary instrument for implementing Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" policy abroad, he best understood the inherent hypocrisy of

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Soviet foreign policy. As he was a Communist party member, he experienced the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the ruling political party in the Soviet Union. As a member of the KGB, charged with maintaining the iron-fisted subjugation of his own people, he was not deceived by "Potemkin Villages" and other fancy showplaces erected to deceive and delude the foreign tourists who make the "borscht circuit" tour through the USSR.

Nosenko probably was daily confronted with and revolted by the Soviet government's need to suppress the impatience and frustration of its own people, rankling under 46 years of broken promises. He doubtless often wondered how long Khrushchev could distract the attention of his citizens from these broken promises with saber-rattling and denunciations of alleged capitalist encirclement of the USSR. But finally Nosenko and a growing segment of Soviet society came to realize the simple fact that the Soviet system simply does not work. It cannot even feed its own citizens!

Thus, in welcoming Yuri I. Nosenko to our shores, let us think of him as a window in the false front, a hole in the facade, which will permit us a view of the reality behind the wall of Soviet propaganda. The reality which he, as a member of the Soviet elite, can reveal to us, is never seen and seldom appreciated by Westerners.

THE RED APPARATUS

Our Kremlinologists might also learn from Nosenko that the Soviet phenomenon cannot be intelligently studied or understood without a thorough understanding of the Soviet security and espionage apparatus. For it is this punitive apparatus which makes up an inordinate portion of Soviet official bureaucracy and is directly and solely responsible for the continued existence of the Communist system in Russia. It is this punitive-espionage and subversive apparatus which is most directly charged with the implementation of Khrushchev's foreign policy abroad.

In this regard I would be derelict if I did not note that in the more than 70 countries outside the Communist bloc where the USSR has official diplomatic representation, more than 65 per cent of the alleged "diplomats" are actually Soviet intelligence officers. In addition to these staff intelligence officers, another 25 per cent of the officially accredited Soviet diplomats are "co-opted," or forced to collaborate in the conduct of espionage or subversion operations. This leaves a very small percentage of those accredited who actually are bona-fide diplomats.

In fact even I was surprised to learn recently that I can recognize and identify at least 20 Soviet ambassadors now serving outside the USSR as former colleagues who, when I knew them, were experienced staff officers of the Soviet intelligence service. Five such ambassadors now serve in Latin America. They are Bazarov in Mexico, Fomin in

Brazil, Striganov in Uruguay, Nikolay Aleksarev in Argentina, and Alexander Alekseyev in Cuba. No doubt Nosenko will know others.

I am convinced that we should not view Nosenko's defection as a spectacular or unique incident of the Cold War, but rather as a viable symptom of a more deep-seated and serious disease which is epidemic within the Soviet body politic. For Nosenko's defection is certainly not an isolated case. Only recently we learned of the case of Col. Oleg Penkovsky, who was executed for working for Western intelligence services inside the Soviet Union for over three years. Who was Col. Penkovsky?

TOP STRATA OF SOCIETY

First, he was a senior Soviet military intelligence officer. To any present or former Soviet citizens, this simple statement of fact conveys a world of information about the status in Soviet society of Col. Penkovsky. It places him unmistakably among the chosen few near the top of the pyramid. Second, he was the son-in-law of a prominent Soviet general, who had been a member of the Moscow Military Council during World War II and who was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Thus, his marriage pulled him higher up the pyramid, into contact with the actual ruling class of the Soviet Union. Finally, he was the close family friend and protégé of the Soviet marshal in charge of tactical rockets for the entire Soviet army. Thus, by virtue of his profession, his marriage, and his friendships, he was confirmed and reconfirmed as a member of the privileged elite which occupies the top strata of Soviet society.

Yuri Nosenko, too, unquestionably belonged to the highest levels, the "creme de la creme," of Soviet society. He was a respected member of the sacrosanct punitive organ—the KGB—which even polices the Soviet ruling class.

Now, ironically, the Soviet system, which for years has labored to obliterate individuality, conscience, religion and morality, is suddenly haunted by the specter of a super ruling class revolted by its own excesses.

It is vital to our national security and possibly even to our national survival that we leave the welcome mat out for future defectors. There should never be any question as to their motives or value to the Free World.

I expect that Nosenko's transition will not always go smoothly nor will it be complete—as no transition can be. While adjusting to this new and unbelievably free society, Nosenko can be comforted by the fact that he is not alone. There have been over 150 defectors from the USSR in recent years. I personally know many other defectors from the Soviet security services who, like me, have made the transition and are living happy and productive lives as American citizens.

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PETER DERIABIN, defector, speaking. The author of this exclusive article was a major in Vienna for Soviet State Security (KGB) when he defected to the West in February of 1954. Now, 10 years later, Deriabin writes about the changes that have taken place in his life, about the things he left behind and the things that took their place. He lives somewhere in the United States, is a writer and scholar of political science, and has attended American universities. The picture at right shows him in profile, his face hidden in shadows. Of course, it is still a shadowy life he leads, but the editor who discussed this article with him described Deriabin as "very well adjusted." Oddly, Deriabin held almost the same job in Vienna that Yuri Nosenko, the recently defected Soviet officer, held in Geneva. Both were in charge of surveillance for large Soviet missions.

MAR 1 1964