

The Okhrana and the Cheka: Continuity and Change

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## ABSTRACT

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The Okhrana and the Cheka: Continuity and Change

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The most notorious aspect of the Soviet Union was its culture of secret policing that, through a series of state security agencies, carried out mass arrests, deportations, and executions. Since the collapse of the socialist state and the opening of the Soviet archives, the historical community has only begun to understand the full extent of crimes committed at the hands of the Cheka, and its successors, the OGPU, NKVD, and KGB. Yet, after tracing this repression to its origins, historical evidence indicates that Imperial Russia first cultivated this culture of secret policing and introduced many of the policing techniques the Bolsheviks later implement and further perfected. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Okhrana – the Tsarist secret police – developed into a highly effective political police force which was, by and large, quite successful in penetrating underground revolutionary organizations, including Lenin’s Bolshevik party. The imperial political police cultivated a new tradecraft that influenced the later Soviet apparatuses in cryptanalysis, signals intelligence, external surveillance, and *agent provocateurs*. Though known Russian historians, including Richard Pipes and Orlando Figes, have paid tribute to this influence and included a wider historical context in their works, the general historiography remains mute on the topic. This thesis looks to fill this significant gap by investigating the major continuities between the Tsarist Okhrana and the Soviet Cheka.

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## INTRODUCTION

In late October 1957, the Hoover Institution at Stanford University announced the opening of an enormous and quite extensive collection of police records from the Okhrana, the notorious political police under the Russian Tsar that operated until 1917. Secretly sealed for more than three decades in storage, the collection of police files and documents originated from the Okhrana's Paris office, a small workforce located in the basement of the Russian embassy and tasked with keeping tabs on revolutionaries abroad. It took the Institution more than five years to fully organize and catalogue the entire Okhrana collection, which had been packaged in sixteen 500-pound crates and sent to the United States in 1926.<sup>1</sup> By the time the Institution finished the Okhrana archive, it contained more than 200 boxes filled with more than 97,000 documents, roughly 164,000 identification cards, 287 scrapbooks (most of which are full of revolutionary publications), and close to ten linear feet of photographs.<sup>2</sup>

This enormous collection came to the Hoover Institution through a bizarre, yet daring, journey. When the Tsarist regime fell in early 1917, the Imperial ambassador to France, Basil Maklakov, sealed the Okhrana materials in the basement and waited for further instructions from the Provisional Government. Almost immediately after taking power, the Provisional Government appointed an investigative committee to examine the Okhrana documents, both within the Russian borders and at the Paris outpost. The Provisional Government committee interrogated known Okhrana agents and spies, which the transcripts have since been published in the seven-volume *Padenie Tsarkogo Rezhima*

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<sup>1</sup> "Czarist Dossiers on Reds Opened: West Coast Center Shows Secret Police Records Spirited to the United States in '26," *New York Times* (Special), 30 October 1957.

<sup>2</sup> "Archive of the Imperial Russian Secret Police: A Guidebook," Okhrana Records, Hoover Institution Archives, p. 7.

compilation. However, the committee sent to investigate the Paris office only had the files compiled by Maklakov to investigate. Though no documentation exists eluding to the committee's findings, archivist at the Hoover Institution believed that the members of the Provisional Government were primarily concerned with uncovering officers in the field and active *agent provocateurs*.<sup>3</sup>

When the Provisional Government fell to the Bolsheviks in late 1917, Maklakov, still in Paris, decided to seal the Okhrana documents once and for all. Knowing the value of the records, and taking full advantage of the confusion in Moscow, Maklakov arranged for the documents to be sent to the United States following the end of the First World War. Maklakov contacted Christian Herter, an American diplomat assisting Herbert Hoover in distributing relief aid to post-World War I Europe, to help with the transportation and customs clearance of the massive crates to Stanford University. Fearing retribution from the new Russian government and its already notorious secret police, Maklakov told the Bolsheviks in 1925 that he had burned the documents after the Romanov dynasty fell, which, by all accounts, the Bolsheviks believed.<sup>4</sup> Maklakov and the Hoover Institution signed a contract ensuring that archivists would not open the massive crates until three months after his death, which occurred in Switzerland in 1957.

The Hoover Institute's assistant director, Professor Witold Sworakowski, considered the Okhrana records the "mother load of knowledge" and that the files held valuable information on the state of Imperial Russia in its final decades and held clues to the events leading up to the February Revolution. More importantly, because they were

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<sup>3</sup> "Archive of the Imperial Russian Secret Police: A Guidebook," Okhrana Records, Hoover Institution Archives, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Sworakowski commented that, "All the evidence we have been able to find indicates that the Reds accepted Maklakoff's statement that he had burned the papers – in fact, were relieved to think that they had been destroyed – and therefore are unaware that this material exists and is now open." Quoted in: "Czarist Dossiers on Reds Opened," *New York Times*, 30 October 1957.

police files, the collection also contained documents on the major revolutionaries who contributed to the Bolshevik Revolution, including Stalin, Molotov, and Trotskii. The value of the Okhrana records when first opened was deemed immeasurable, as Professor Sworakowski commented in an interview that the collection was “the only Russian police archive of any magnitude accessible to scholars outside of the Soviet Union.”<sup>5</sup>

As students, scholars, and historians flocked to the newly opened archives, so too did the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>6</sup> The initial team of archivists hired by the Hoover Institution to organize and catalogue the enormous collection included two CIA members, who had the first opportunity to fully examine the material. One of the first researchers to enter the public archives was Rita Kronenbitter, an undercover CIA agent-posed-historian, who relied on the archives to write six articles initially published (and classified) in the *Studies of Intelligence* journal, a journal published by the CIA for counterintelligence studies.<sup>7</sup> Though the articles examine and detail the operations of the Paris office, the articles do a poor job of analyzing the effectiveness of the Tsarist secret police, and invite a greater investigation into this wing of the Okhrana.

The story of the Okhrana archives and its journey to the Hoover Institution is intriguing by itself, but the CIA’s interest in files revealed their importance to the entire intelligence community, especially during the height of the Cold War. These Okhrana records were the first Russian police files opened to western scholar and, although they

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<sup>5</sup> “Czarist Dossiers on Reds Opened,” *New York Times*, 30 October 1957.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Fischer, *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police* (United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), pp. 2-4.

<sup>7</sup> These articles have since been declassified as part of the CIA’s “openness” policy and are open for public review. Copies of these articles were printed in Ben Fischer’s *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police*. They can also be found on the CIA’s website. See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/okhrana-the-paris-operations-of-the-russian-imperial-police/5474-1.html>. (Accessed on 12 September 2013).



detailed operations of the Tsarist secret police, the CIA clearly believed that they held vital information on the culture, history, and perhaps tradecraft of the more modern, and far more intimidating, Soviet policing apparatuses. The perceived connection the CIA saw between the Okhrana and the later Soviet organizations, then, invites a historical investigation into the continuities and changes between Imperial and Soviet secret policing. What similarities existed between the first Soviet policing apparatus and its Tsarist predecessor? What were the major changes? How influential was the Okhrana on the operational efficiency of the Cheka, and what parallels can be drawn between the tradecraft used by the different policing forces? These are the questions that this thesis will investigate.

The Okhrana was not Russia's first attempt at establishing a political policing force; in fact, secret policing history in the country dates back to the ruthless rule of Ivan the Terrible, who established in the *Oprichnina* in 1565. The *Oprichniks*, the title of those in the police force, were directly controlled by to Ivan, who encouraged these devotees to use any means to oust political enemies. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century establishment of a secret police in Russia, every Tsar to have ruled since relied on special agents to seek out political threats to the throne. Peter the Great, for example, employed the *Preobrazhenskii Prikaz*, an administrative office that oversaw the Preobrazhenskii and Semenovskii regiments. Led by Peter's lifelong friend, Prince Romondanovskii, the *Preobrazhenskii Prikaz* aided Peter's attempts to eliminate threats in his political struggle against his sister, Sofia. Catherine the Great also relied on a security organization, the

Secret Expedition, to monitor political wrongdoings committed by citizens during her reign.<sup>8</sup>

Even though Russia has a long history of political policing, the Okhrana was most influenced by its direct predecessor, the *Tretiye Otdeleniye*, or Third Section. Created by Nicholas I in response to the Dekabrist Revolt of 1825, the Third Section was Russia's first comprehensive secret policing force. The Third Section's first task involved uncovering the source of the Dekabrist Revolt, who was involved, and how to prevent a popular upheaval from taking place again. Thus, the Third Section's tactics involved visible repression through mass arrests, detention, and expulsion, but hardly dabbled into intelligence-gathering techniques. For the most part, the Third Section remained in charge of tracking public opinion, and engaged in censoring publications and perusing letters.<sup>9</sup>

During the 55 years of its existence, the Third Section had many shortcomings for a secret policing force. Police officers wore easily recognizable uniforms, making them all but useless while investigating suspected individuals. The Third Section also failed to adapt to the changing revolutionary movement. Shifting away from open revolts, revolutionary organizations went underground and focused on sabotage, terror, and assassination. Most notably, the revolutionary organization *Narodnaia Volia*, or the People's Will, proved to be a capable foe of the Third Section, who had trouble combatting the underground organization. In March 1881, the Third Section failed to

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<sup>8</sup> For a more complete historical view of Russian secret policing, see Richard Deacon, *A History of the Russian Secret Service* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1972); and Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Charles A. Rudd and Sergei A. Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsar's Secret Police* (Montreal, London, and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), pp. 20-21.

prevent the assassination of Tsar Alexander II at the hands of the *Narodnaia Volia*, and in doing so, sealed its own fate as a policing organization.

The Okhrana succeeded the Third Section as Russia's political policing force in 1882. The word 'okhrana' is derived from the Russian verb 'okhranyat', meaning to protect or to guard. The name specifically referred to the special sections or protection sections (okhrannye otdelniya) that were created within the police department and subordinate to the Minister of the Interior (MVD), but had the specific task of investigating political crimes. From its very inception, the Okhrana attempted to focus on what the Third Section neglected to combat: small, underground revolutionary organizations that protested through terror and assassinations. Though it ultimately failed in safeguarding the Tsarist regime, throughout its establishment, the Okhrana evolved into a highly elite force very capable of infiltrating underground organizations and pioneered many modern policing methods.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis will examine these techniques and tactics the Okhrana established and assess the influence of the Tsarist secret police was on the creation of secreting policing under the Bolsheviks. Currently, there is a significant gap in the historiography on the subject. The few detailed works on the Okhrana include Fredric Zuckerman's *The Tsarist Secret Police in Russian Society* and Jonathan Daly's two-book series on the creation, evolution, and dissolution of the Okhrana. There are also few substantial works on the creation and operations of the Cheka, though George Leggett's *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* is an outstanding resource. However, these works refer only to

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<sup>10</sup> For a good article on the successes and failures of the Okhrana, see: Iain Lauchlan, "Secret Policing in Late Imperial Russia," in Ian Thatcher (ed.), *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

their perspective organizations, with little investigation into the continuities between the two police forces. For the few sources that discuss both the Okhrana and Cheka, the two are typically juxtaposed, with the contrasts highlighted, but a true investigation into the continuities has yet to fully develop.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore those parallels between the two policing apparatuses that have so far been overlooked.

This thesis will first investigate the adaptation of methods the Okhrana used to infiltrate and uncover revolutionary organizations, which the Okhrana proved highly effective. Through these techniques, the Okhrana demonstrated itself extremely capable of gathering an enormous amount of data, especially considering the relatively small size of the organization. The Tsarist secret police excelled particularly in four specific

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<sup>11</sup> Many general histories of Russia during this specific time period do not acknowledge the Okhrana's influences of the Cheka. Most notably, Ronald Hingley's *The Russian Secret Police: Muscovite, Imperial Russian and Soviet Political Security Operations* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970) mentions no continuities between the two organizations.

In his article, Iain Lauchlan argues that although the Okhrana influenced the establishment of the Cheka, including the similarities between the training manuals and carryover of certain personnel, that, in comparison to other institutions, the Cheka actually inherited a very small number of individuals from its Tsarist predecessor. Moreover, the systematic use of torture and execution by the Cheka exclusively provides a case of discontinuity between the Tsarist and Soviet state. See: Lauchlan, "Secret Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 12.

Orlando Figes notes, briefly, the influences the Okhrana had on the Cheka based on the memoirs of Oleg Kalugin, an ex-KGB member, but immediately contrasts the two organizations and emphasizes the terror and repression seen under the Cheka. See: Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution* (United States: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 646; and Oleg Kalugin, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 35.

In his monumental work on the time period, Richard Pipes provides a decent but simplistic argument for the continuities between the Okhrana and the Cheka. He most emphasized that one main reason why the new Bolshevik leaders established a secret police so early on related to the fact that most of the leaders had been prisoners of the old regime: "All of them had been shadowed, searched, arrested, kept in jail and sentenced to exile by the political police of the imperial government. They had battled with the censorship. They had had to contend with *agents provocateurs* planted in their midst. They knew the system intimately, from the inside, which meant that they also knew its shortcomings and loopholes... So it was not in the least surprising that almost the instant they took power, the Bolsheviks began to put together the pieces of the imperial proto-police apparatus which the short-lived and democratic Provisional Government had dismantled." See: Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 317.

Due to availability of sources, Christopher Andrew gives a brief description into the continuities between the Tsarist and Soviet secret policing forces based on the information he received from Vasili Mitrokhin, an archivist for the KGB who copied massive amounts of documents in the archives and smuggled them to Great Britain in 1992. See: Christopher Andrews and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: The Penguin Press, 1999), pp. 30-31. Andrews also worked with KGB defector Oleg Gordievsky to publish *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*. In the work, Andrews also acknowledges the continuities, especially highlighting the importance of cryptology. See: Christopher Andrews and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (United States: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1990), pp. 17-64.

techniques for intelligence gathering. First, the Okhrana developed an exceptional cryptology team for mail interception and decoding. Working in the infamous ‘black offices’, Okhrana agents collected information on revolutionaries and thwarted terrorists attacks through perustration, and managed to stay ahead of revolutionaries attempts to deceive the police through deceptive codes and even invisible ink.<sup>12</sup> The Okhrana also gained an incredible volume of data through interrogating arrested suspects. Perhaps Moscow’s Police Chief, Sergei Zubatov, was the Okhrana’s most successful interrogator. Rather than intimidation and threats, Zubatov played the role of a psychiatrist; he displayed sympathy for those who got involved in the revolutionary movement to protest the deplorable working and livings conditions and convinced them that revolutionary activity would not improve their situations. In many cases, Zubatov even persuaded the suspects to turn on the revolutionary movement and work as an informant for the police as well.<sup>13</sup>

The Okhrana gathered most of its intelligence through the so-called ‘external agency’ and ‘internal agency’. Agents who served in the ‘external agency’ watched and shadowed revolutionary suspects, usually while disguised as street vendors, doormen, or cab-drivers.<sup>14</sup> External agents also kept notes on any interactions the subject had and followed up stake-outs by interviewing the revolutionaries’ neighbors and acquaintances. The use of external agents, and the extreme magnitude of information that they retrieved,

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<sup>12</sup> A. T. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret Police* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 93-95.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah Schneiderman, *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism: The Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 51-54. Zubatov also offered the arrested revolutionaries the book *The Labor Movements in Western Europe* by S. N. Prokopovich, which argued against radical tactics within the labor movement. See: “Dva dokumentov, otnosyachikhsya k istorii zubatovshchiny,” *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, Vol. 19 (1926), pp. 210-211.

<sup>14</sup> Okhrana external agents used a wide variety of other disguises for surveillance. See. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 42.

contributed greatly to the massive volume of intelligence the Okhrana had, though, as one can surely guess, much of what was reported was rather useless day-to-day information. The final, and perhaps most infamous, technique that the Okhrana used to gather intelligence was the ‘internal agency’ which relied heavily on undercover agents and *agent provocateurs*. Internal agents and *provocateurs* were often assigned to work with each other to penetrate the same revolutionary organization, typically to ensure that the *provocateur* transmitted accurate information back to Okhrana headquarters. The *provocateur* incited an organization into a public illegal act, only to be prevented at the last moment by the police force.

Aside from examining more in-depth these techniques the Okhrana perfected, this thesis will examine how the Bolshevik revolutionaries interacted with the Okhrana, and how those interactions somewhat inspired the Bolshevik leaders once in power. The Bolsheviks were quite aware of these four techniques, especially the Okhrana’s ability to penetrate revolutionary organizations through the ‘internal agency’; Okhrana agents and *agent provocateurs* had penetrated the highest level of Bolshevik leadership, including Lenin’s close friend and colleague Roman Malinovskii. And, due to its extensive network of external and internal agents, the Okhrana collected so much intelligence on the Bolsheviks that the police’s archives yielded one of the best and most comprehensive records of the history of Lenin’s party prior to 1917.<sup>15</sup>

When the Bolsheviks took control in 1917, the establishment of the Cheka was almost immediate, indicating that the leaders recognized the usefulness of a small elite organization tasked with combatting political enemies and movements. Once through the

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<sup>15</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. XXIV.

turmoil of the Civil War, the Cheka inherited the same four techniques that the Okhrana had perfected: the Soviet agency employed *agent provocateurs* and relied on undercover agents for gathering information; the organization also had external agents tasked with shadowing suspected individuals.<sup>16</sup> The Cheka, and subsequent agencies, developed an elite cryptology department, used in mail perustration. The Okhrana highly influenced the Soviet's code-breaking expertise, as the Cheka recruited the Tsarist police's top cryptologist, I. A. Zybin. And, obviously, the Soviet secret police exploited interrogations to gather information on suspected political enemies and perceived threats.

However, though continuities among the Imperial and Soviet secret policing do exist, the changes between the Okhrana and the Cheka are striking and well noted; nonetheless, they must be addressed as a part of this thesis. The Cheka's use of torture, the number of executions, and the radicalization of Chekists inexplicably put the Soviet police force into a completely different league than that of the Okhrana. During its operations, the Okhrana gained a reputation as a brutal, repressive, all-seeing police force. The last Tsarist Chief of Police, A. T. Vassilyev, commented that:

Much that was mysterious, enigmatical, and dreadful was associated in the mind of the Russian people with the term Police Department. For great sections of the population this office signified frankly a phantom of terror, of which the most improbable tales were told. Many people seriously believed that in the Police Department the unhappy victims of the Ochrana were dropped through a hole in the floor into the cellar, and there tortured.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The commonalities between the 'external agency' of the Okhrana and the Cheka will, perhaps, be the biggest focus in this thesis. Hidden within the Okhrana records at the Hoover Institute is directive sent to the Paris Office detailing instructions for external agents on observation and surveillance. The directive reads as a training manual for first-year recruits. When juxtaposing this manual against the "Instructions for External Surveillance" in *The Official K.G.B. Handbook*, which was published in 1992, the two are near identical. See: "Instruktsiia no. 298," Hoover Institution, Okhrana Records, Box 41, Folder VIF; and *The Official K.G.B. Handbook* (London: Industrial Information Index, 1992), pp. 22-40.

<sup>17</sup> Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 37.

As great as the Okhrana's reputation may have inflated to, however, its repressiveness never equaled that of the Cheka or later apparatuses. Okhrana agents, for example, did not determine or carry out execution orders, nor did they engage in systematic torture; in contrast, the Cheka's brutality is often exemplified in its actions during the 'Red Terror', during which five hundred perceived enemies were executed in just one day.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to expose and examine the gap in historical literature on the continuities between the Okhrana and the early Soviet policing apparatuses. With such a broad topic, the sources used are also wide-ranging, though I have been confined to only those sources available in the United States. I relied heavily on relevant documents in the Okhrana Records in the Hoover Institute, those published in the *Krasnyi Arkhiv: Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, and those available in the Mitrokhin Archive online. I also utilized the available published memoirs, most notably those of A. T. Vassilyev, V. F. Dzhunkovskii, A. V. Gerasimov, M. Ia. Latsis and the published interrogation transcripts of former Okhrana members compiled in *Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima*. In addition to the secondary sources already listed, I also utilized relevant biographies, including Ann Giefman's *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* and Jeremiah Schneiderman's *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism: The Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia*, complemented by the works of Orlando Figes, Richard Pipes, and Christopher Andrews that provided contextual information.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 39; Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 316.



## CHAPTER 1: POLITICAL POLICING IN TSARIST RUSSIA

In all its operations it was a question of police action pure and simple: the Okhrana's job was to discover the evil-doers.

-A. T. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, 1930, p. 39

In any society, the role of the security police is to safeguard the existing regime from subversive opposition. The definition of subversion, and the state's response to such opposition, however, differed from country to country. In Western Europe and the United States, for example, citizens achieved social and political change through parliamentary and congressional institutions; individuals discontent with living and working conditions had avenues to voice their opinions and directly took part in the process of social, economic, and political change. The Imperial Russian state, however, regarded the avocation of political change, and certainly the mobilization for such a demand, as a prohibitive act condemned by law; the monarchy and its absolute authority were sacrosanct, and the state employed a political police force to suppress public opposition to the autocracy. In this sense, the Tsarist secret police, known collectively as the Okhrana, embodied the anachronism and backwardness of the late Imperial regime. Yet, paradoxically, the political police that operated under Tsarist rule represented a technologically advanced police force that innovated many modern policing techniques and tactics in intelligence gathering. Through strict reforms at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Okhrana developed a new tradecraft that perfected the art of external surveillance, penetrated opposition organizations, and developed an elite cryptanalysis department. Though the Okhrana ultimately failed in safeguarding the Tsarist regime, it evolved into a professional force capable of infiltrating the revolutionary underground and, for the most part, holding it at bay.

Although the Okhrana achieved great success up to 1917, it came from humble beginnings. Lev Tikhomirov, a one time revolutionary turned monarchist, wrote that the Imperial Russian security services in the 1870s was “weak and disorganized and it would be hard to imagine a more worthless security police force.”<sup>1</sup> The description given, though rather critical, was quite accurate and the revolutionary movement had surpassed the abilities and sophistication of the services that constituted the *Tretiye Otdeleniye*, or Third Section, the Okhrana’s direct predecessor. At the time, the majority of radical groups moved away from small, public displays of dissidence at universities and aimed their efforts at incorporating broader sects of society, including the peasantry and lower class workers. This movement, however, highlighted the Third Section’s weaknesses, as the organization responded with greater political repression, mass arrests, and deportations, which only furthered the revolutionary cause. Those who avoided persecution and remained dedicated to the cause went underground and turned to subversion, sabotage, and terror.<sup>2</sup>

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, advancements in technology granted the new underground revolutionary movement an upper hand against the imperial government. Radicals traveled greater distances by way of railroad, and innovations in the printing press allowed for revolutionary propaganda to spread throughout major cities. The invention of dynamite, however, gave the revolutionaries the greatest

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Tikhomirov was a one time revolutionary and executive member of the *Narodnaia Volia*. After becoming disenchanted with the revolutionary organization, Tikhomirov became one of Russia’s leading conservative thinkers and writers, publishing many works on monarchism. Quoted in Jonathan Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia 1866-1905* (United States: Northern Illinois Press, 1998), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22; Iain Lauchlan, “Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honor of R. B. McKean*, ed. Ian Thatcher (England: Manchester United Press, 2005), p. 46.

advantage in terrorizing government officials and society in general.<sup>3</sup> Yet, at the same time, the security services had not evolved much since the creation of the Third Section in 1826; more importantly, the security police failed to develop methods of surveillance or cultivate a new tradecraft capable of combating the revolutionary movement. The disparity between the revolutionary movement and the secret police ultimately culminated in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by a crude bomb thrown by a member of *Narodnaia Volia*, or People's Will, a left-wing terrorist organization.

Following the assassination of his father, Tsar Alexander III ordered for the reorganization of Russia's police forces and subsequent creation of political security bureaus, the *okhrannye otelniya*, in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Warsaw.<sup>4</sup> These bureaus, collectively known as the Okhrana, differed from its predecessor as they were formed within the police department and subordinate to the Minister of the Interior (MVD); the Special Corps of Gendarmes and the regular police, however, remained the eyes and ears of the political police.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the police reforms, Tsar Alexander also passed security legislation that granted the state and police a wider range of authority during social upheavals. It allowed regular police to arrest and detain any suspect for up to seven days and authorized the Interior Minister to transfer extreme political cases to military courts.<sup>6</sup> These changes made indicated that the government desired to form a modern police force capable of infiltrating the small, underground organizations that

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<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Rudd and Sergei Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsar's Secret Police* (United States: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> The St. Petersburg Security Bureau had been established prior to the assassination of Alexander II, with the creation of the other two following. The reorganization of the security service brought all three bureaus under the jurisdiction of the police department.

<sup>5</sup> D. C. B. Lieven, "The Security Police, Civil Rights, and the Fate of the Russian Empire," in *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 236-237.

<sup>6</sup> For a more complete picture on the emergency security laws passed in 1881, see: Jonathan Daly, "On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review* Vol. 54, No. 3 (1995), pp. 602-629.

constituted the new revolutionary movement. As a known archconservative, Alexander's move to strengthen the internal police apparatus was, by no means, a surprise. Russia's political landscape differed greatly from the parliamentary institutions in other European countries; while the tsarist regime tolerated scholarly debate on economic and social issues, any political discussion that advocated socialism or limiting the monarchy's absolute power was a punishable offense.<sup>7</sup>

Even with the new addition and reorganization, Russia's security services still faced an enormous challenge; the revolutionary movement against the tsarist regime was unlike any other opposition against western governments. Moreover, fighting against the growing movement, and in charge of patrolling the empire, by 1900 the entire police force in Russia did not exceed 50,000 officers, with no more than 1,000 assigned to the political police departments.<sup>8</sup> For the enormous size of Russian Empire, the relatively small police force tasked with patrolling the territory consistently complained of being overburdened, understaffed, and under paid. Even with its small size, the Okhrana received a relatively large portion of the police force's budget to carryout its work. The French ambassador stationed in St. Petersburg recorded that the state granted the secret police a budget of 3.5 million rubles for operational work plus an additional 400,000 ruble budget for press propaganda purposes.<sup>9</sup> Recent research in the MVD archives reveals that the Okhrana never surpassed 10 per cent of that of the entire police force; though seemingly small, however, that 10 per cent of the police budget was allotted to a

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<sup>7</sup> Lieven, "The Security Police, Civil Rights, and the Fate of the Russian Empire," p. 238.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in: Neil Weissman, "Regular Police in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914," *Russian Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January, 1985), p. 47; Iain Lauchlan, "The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 44; and A. T. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret police* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Paleologue, *An Ambassador's Memoirs, Volume I* (London: Hutchinson Company, 1923), p. 243.

portion only one-fiftieth its entire size.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Minister of the Interior established an emergency fund amounting to 10 million rubles to cover unforeseen situations.<sup>11</sup> Because of the relatively large funds granted to the Okhrana, the remaining branches of the police department, especially in the countryside, depended heavily on the political police for information and support.

In addition to the bureaus in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw, the Okhrana also included a Paris-based office, the Foreign Agency, which kept eyes and ears on Russian émigrés and exiled revolutionaries. Ironically, Russia's internal policy towards revolutionaries instigated the necessity of a foreign Okhrana office: banishing exiles abroad gave devoted radicals a forum to organize, plan, and print revolutionary material in absence of Okhrana repression. The Foreign Agency, established in 1885 and operational until 1917, mirrored, for the most part, the techniques implemented by the Central Agency, including secret informants and *agent provocateurs*. It had amassed a sizable collection of information cards on individuals that rivaled even that of the home office, and relied just as heavily on provocative methods as the Central Agency. Though intended to compliment the Okhrana's domestic efforts, limited personnel severely restricted the Foreign Agency's operations abroad. To compensate, the Paris office developed a working relationship with the French secret services, which helped hunt down Russian dissidents in France.<sup>12</sup> Throughout its 32 years of operation, the Paris office employed no more than one thousand agents altogether, including local hires for

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<sup>10</sup> Lauchlan, "The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Paleologue, *An Ambassador's Memoir, Volume I*, p. 243.

<sup>12</sup> This alliance in secret police, contrastingly, was not present during the Soviet era. See: Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: From the Dreyfus Affair, to the Gulf War* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), pp. 24-25.

external surveillance.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of its limitations, the Paris office allowed the Okhrana to continue its war on revolutionaries far beyond Imperial boarders.<sup>14</sup>

When the Okhrana first started to combat *Narodnia Volia*, it maintained many characteristics from the Third Section. Like its predecessor, the Okhrana leaders recruited new agents from the Gendarmes forces, accustomed to very rigid, militaristic tactics. Revolutionaries easily recognized Gendarme officers, since they wore mandatory dark blue uniforms while on patrol.<sup>15</sup> It also continued to gather most of its intelligence through denunciations and mass arrests. These sweeping mass arrests usually occurred at night and were referred to as ‘liquidations’ because of the efficiency. Famed explorer and writer George Kennan illustrated to the outside world these ‘liquidation’ arrests; nicknamed a ‘mousetrap’, the Okhrana set up these ambushes at apartments determined to be meeting places for revolutionary organizations. A small team of Okhrana agents, ranging from four to six, entered the residence and hid in the suspected apartment. Anybody who knocked on the door to the apartment was allowed to enter, after which the awaiting agents promptly arrested them. During a ‘mousetrap’, Okhrana agents arrested and interrogated every person who came across the trap, regardless of identity or social standing. According to Kennan, even if “the Czar himself, in the uniform of the Preobrazhenski Guards, should visit incognito a house in which a trap had been set, he

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<sup>13</sup> Ben Fischer, *The Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police* (United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> The Paris office faced its greatest challenge during World War I, when efforts shifted away from tracking revolutionaries and towards hunting German spies. Documents at the Hoover Institute show the catalogued reports on suspected spies from enemy countries, though their main focus directed at German espionage. By the end of 1914, the Foreign Agency amassed over 200 biographical cards on suspected agents from the Central Powers; by 1917, the card index had grown to more than 400. See: “Dispatches, Drafts, Raw Reports, and Various Notes on Agents of Germany, Austria, and Turkey Working Against Russia and her Allies,” 1914-1917, Index Number VIIIb, Folder 3, Okhrana Files, Hoover Institute, California.

<sup>15</sup> The Gendarmes uniforms “made them overt symbols of the regime, positive ones to be sure from their own point of view, but like lightning rods for opposition sentiment, they drew themselves much public animosity.” See: Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 59.

would be arrested promptly and sent to the nearest precinct station-house for identification.”<sup>16</sup> The mousetrap could last for a number of days, and though tiring work for the agents, by the end the Okhrana could quite possibly arrested the majority of a revolutionary branch.

Kennan wrote a number of critical pieces on the Imperial Russian secret police, including a two-volume publication on political exiles in Siberia, and his works highly influenced international opinion on the tsarist regime. Though considered an expert, his biases against the Russian state sometimes superseded an accurate portrayal of the revolutionary conflict.<sup>17</sup> For example, Kennan described the situation in the 1890s as a “strange spectacle” that resembled “something like a dual between the mightiest power on earth armed with all the attributes of authority on one side, and an insignificant gang of discharged telegraph operators, half-educated seminaries, high-school boys, and university students, miserable little Jews and loose women on the other.”<sup>18</sup> This description of revolutionary Russia, while humorous, was inaccurate; just before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the opposition movement in Russia was a formidable force, one that succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II not ten years prior to Kennan’s remarks. The early Okhrana successfully eliminated *Narodnaia Volia* as a threat, yet a robust labor movement and growing student opposition created new recruiting opportunities for underground revolutionary parties. The Okhrana needed to develop a new tradecraft, one as covert as the opposition, to combat the emerging threats.

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<sup>16</sup> The explorer and writer George Kennan was a distant relative to the later diplomat for whose name is most well known. George Kennan, “Russian Mousetraps,” *The Century Magazine* Vol. 83 (March, 1912), p. 745.

<sup>17</sup> When Kennan first set on his adventures he initially felt more sympathetic for the imperial state. However, after touring the Siberian camps and interacting with political prisoners, Kennan’s opinions changed. Perhaps no writer better influenced international opinion on the Tsarist state than Kennan and his publications greatly contributed to international criticism aimed at the Russian government. Kennan’s opinions will be later discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in W. B. Walsh, *Russia and the Soviet Union* (United States: University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 395.

The security forces underwent the necessary reforms primarily under the direction of Moscow Okhrana Bureau Chief Sergei Zubatov, who served the secret police from 1889 until his expulsion from the service in 1903. During his teenage years at the Moscow Gymnasium, Zubatov had himself taken apart of the revolutionary movement, though grew dissatisfied with the violent direction the revolutionary movement took.<sup>19</sup> In 1885, Zubatov turned against the student movement and offered his services to the Okhrana as an informant; within five year, he joined the political police ranks as a permanent, and indispensable, officer. Zubatov's service for the police highly influenced his outlook on the war between revolutionaries and the regime, to which he became a staunch supporter of monarchism. However, his time with revolutionary society also left an impression on the young officer; throughout his police career, Zubatov remained adamant that if the government did not implement drastic social reforms, the revolutionary movement would continue to grow. Although Zubatov's background seemed questionable, his first-hand knowledge of the opposition movement, and therefore his understanding of the incredible challenge the security police faced, allowed Zubatov to put forward effective policies to truly combat the revolutionary underground.

Zubatov believed that open and public repression against the political opposition would never fully eradicate the underground movement; it would, however, delegitimize the Tsarist government and create martyrs of fallen revolutionaries. Rather than continuing antiquated techniques, Zubatov implemented reforms that transformed the secret police force. First and foremost, the Moscow Okhrana Bureau established a new

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<sup>19</sup> Zubatov, it appeared, despised those revolutionaries who primarily acted out through terror, and leaned more towards writers such as D. I. Pisarev, who emphasized social and cultural change rather than violent acts of opposition. See: Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, pp. 72-74; Jeremiah Schneiderman, *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism: The Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 49-53.



cadet training school that trained new recruits in surveillance tactics and educated them in political doctrine and revolutionary belief. Zubatov took the education of the new recruits seriously; if Okhrana officials did not understand individual attraction to the revolutionary movement, they would be unable to combat the growing opposition. He demanded that recruits no longer be drawn from the ranks of the Gendarme forces, but rather from the same societal backgrounds that the revolutionaries came from, including students, factory workers, and members of the societal elite. The increased level of education and intelligence among the Okhrana personnel allowed for a combative match against the liberal revolutionaries and, in a way, became a source of pride for the security police. In his testimony for the Provisional Government's Investigating Commission in 1917, Okhrana officer M. S. Komissarov boasted that having "intelligent people" and "university and graduates" singly handedly gave the security police the upper hand against the liberal revolutionary movement.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the new training requirements, the Moscow Okhrana Bureau also authorized and employed a mobile police brigade that could be deployed to combat revolutionary activity wherever it occurred. The creation of the brigade followed mass famine and subsequent popular uprisings in 1891; the situation in rural Russia attracted revolutionaries who used the hungry peasants to further their cause. The detachable unit employed approximately thirty trained agents and primarily targeted illegal printing press, tracked the distribution of revolutionary literature, and on occasion followed suspected revolutionaries in small villages. The brigade extended the Moscow Okhrana's

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<sup>20</sup> "Komissarov's Testimony Before the Extraordinary Investigating Commission of the Provisional Government," in *Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima: Vol. 3*, ed. Pavel Eliseevich Shchegolev (Leningrad, 1925), p. 145.

authority from Siberia to Ukraine to the Baltic regions, making it a highly effective tool against subversion.<sup>21</sup>

The Okhrana carried out multiple minor reforms to increase its efficiency at identifying and tracking those revolutionaries who consistently moved throughout the empire to avoid detection. First, the security police implemented an internal passport system, which required any visitor staying in town for more than three days to register with local officials. To help with identification, the Okhrana relied on cutting edge technology to assist in their fight against the revolutionary movement. Compared to the other European systems, the Russian security police first utilized early fingerprinting techniques, photographic identification, telephone taps, bugs, bulletproof vests, code-breaking, and tear gas.<sup>22</sup> The Okhrana also strengthened its position by centralizing gathered intelligence in Moscow. Secretaries collected the material, filed the information, and issued lists and reports to top Okhrana officials to keep them up-to-date on evolving opposition movement and the parties' leaders. In addition to those issued to the police, Okhrana secretaries also prepared reports bi-weekly for the Minister of the Interior and the Tsar himself.<sup>23</sup>

Through these security police reforms, the Okhrana developed into an effective and technically advanced political policing force. By the height of its enforcement, the Okhrana implemented four primary methods for intelligence gathering. First, the Okhrana gathered information through interrogations of arrested revolutionaries. Police interrogators fostered new interrogation techniques and resembled more as therapists,

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<sup>21</sup> Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>22</sup> Lauchlan, "Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Chief Vassilyev referred to these reports as the *Journal of the Ochrana*. See: Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 95.

offering warm food and drink to the offenders while attempting to understand what motives drove the suspect to join the movement. In this environment, skilled investigators not only extracted information on the underground, but in some cases even converted the suspect to work for the security police as informants. Zubatov was particularly skilled at this technique; during interrogations, he routinely engaged the arrestee in philosophical debates on political and social reform, arguing that only the Imperial government could implement true change to better the workers' lives. According to letter found and published by the Soviet government, Zubatov often offered prisoners S. N. Prokopovich's book *The Labor Movement in Western Europe*, which argued against using radical revolutionary tactics to bring about better working and living conditions.<sup>24</sup>

The second way the Okhrana gathered information on the revolutionary movement was perustration, or intercepting mail sent to and from suspects, through government established 'black offices' (*chernye kabinety*). The censorship of letters, however, was not a new practice in Imperial Russia. In his memoirs, Okhrana Chief Vassilyev defended the act by supplying examples of mail censorship under Empress Elizabeth's in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the reign of Nicholas I in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The black offices that operated under Okhrana supervision conducted business in the back rooms of the major post offices, and, although the offices employed a small staff (only twenty clerks in 1884), each worker was a skilled cryptologist and polyglot.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup> "Dva dokumentov, otnoyashchikhsya k istorii zubatovshchiny," *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, Vol. 19 (Moscow, 1926), p. 210-211.

<sup>25</sup> Black offices operated in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Odessa, Kiev, Kharkov, Riga, Vilna, Tomsk, and Tiflis. See: Vassilyev, *The Okhrana*, p. 92; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (United States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), p. 26. Temporary offices opened in Kazan in 1889 and in Nizhnii Novgorod in 1894. The government had planned to open permanent offices in

Okhrana agents opened flagged letters with steam or with a thin, round tool that forced opened the sealed envelope flap. To conceal illegal writings, revolutionaries encoded messages, wrote only in foreign languages, and even used invisible ink to pass along messages without police protection. Black office agents, however, countered each of these attempts and stayed ahead of revolutionaries in this sphere.<sup>26</sup> Once the contents were read, agents copied the entire letter, returned the original to its envelope, and sent the copies to headquarters. The importance of perustration for intelligence gathering is demonstrated by the number of copies sent to headquarters: in 1882, black office workers opened 38,000 letters and made 3,600 copies for review; that number increased to 5,431 copies in 1900, 8,642 in 1904, 10,182 in 1905, and 14,221 in 1907.<sup>27</sup> In addition to gathering intelligence on revolutionaries or their meeting place, the practice of perustration hindered the ability of organization's members to communicate between one another and allowed the government to monitor public opinion on the state.

The third and fourth methods the Okhrana used for intelligence gathering were much more scandalous than the first two mentioned and were accomplished through the 'external' and 'internal' agencies. The external agency involved plain-clothed surveillants (*filery*) who observed the movements of suspected revolutionaries and reported their findings back to headquarters. The systematic development and

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Siberia, the Volga region, and in border cities, but financial restrictions prohibited implementation. See: Rudd and Stepanov, *Fontanka 16*, p. 72. Some of the black office clerks knew between fifteen and twenty foreign language. See: Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Revolutionaries' use of invisible proved to be an exceptional challenge for the Okhrana to counter. To reveal the hidden message meant destruction of the document, or at least evidence that the secret police engaged in perustration. Thus, black office agents revealed the original message, and forged a new, identical copy returned to the regular mail circulation. Thus, in addition to being skilled cryptologist and polyglots, agents working in the black offices also had to be forgery experts.

<sup>27</sup> After reviewing the copied letters, senior Okhrana officials filed them into the "archive of secret information obtained by censorship." Statistics quoted in Rudd and Stepanov, *Fontanka 16*, p. 75 and Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 42.

sophistication of the external agency started in the 1880s at Moscow Security Bureau, since public surveillance was previously left to visible Gendarmes officers. The security bureau appointed Okhrana agent Evstratii Mednikov, a man of peasant origins and one overlooked in the historiography of the Okhrana, to train and lead those officers that comprised the external agency. Although Mednikov was not highly educated, he possessed ‘street smarts’ and a practical mind for building an external surveillance team. Okhrana Chief Vassilyev described Mednikov as “in no sense a man of exceptional education, but he possessed a marvelous talent for the organization of the secret service...and the men who served under him in the Moscow Ochrana developed, thanks to his excellent guidance, into real experts in their departments.”<sup>28</sup> Under the guidance of Mednikov, and at times Zubatov as well, the external agency evolved into an impressive network of spies, which included surveillants disguised as porters, doorkeepers, caretakers, newspaper sellers, railway officials, and cab drivers.<sup>29</sup>

As the external agency gradually developed, so to did the intensity of training each agent received, typically lasting two years. According to the Okhrana training manual, the *filery* committed to memory the entire city plan, including, “the streets, police stations, passing yards, restaurants, pubs, public gardens...departure and arrival times of trains, parking places for cabbies and fees, training institutions, public and private agencies, and the officials in these various agencies.”<sup>30</sup> In addition, external agents developed an expertise in physiognomy, as each case required them to memorize photographs of suspects to identify them in public; moreover, if during observation the

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<sup>28</sup> Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 50-51

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> “Instruktsiia no. 298,” Okhrana Records, Hoover Institution Archives, Box 41, Folder VIF, p. 14

suspect met with anyone else, the agents reported their precise appearance, including facial structures, eye color, hair color and length, approximate height and weight, and physical build.<sup>31</sup> Those agents assigned as porters, railway officials, and cab drivers were also experts at their undercover job as well, knowing each professions' specific customs and vocabulary to grant further credibility to their disguises.

In written memoirs, many Okhrana agents credited the external agency for providing the political police with enough information to prevent several criminal acts, including attempts made on the lives of high government officials.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the incredible amount of detail the external agents recorded often translated into a police records system composed of tens of thousands of notebooks, largely detailing of the mundane daily routines of watched individuals. Regardless, Okhrana leaders believed that no detail was too small to record, and any ordinary observation could be the key in cracking a case. Despite the volume of information collected by the external agency, the Okhrana remained in the dark about the inner workings of revolutionary organizations. In order to corroborate information collected through surveillance, the Okhrana employed secret informants, undercover agents and *agent provocateurs* through the internal agency to report on revolutionaries from within the organization.

“The internal agency,” wrote Okhrana Chief Vassilyev, “was much more dangerous for the enemies of the State than the open spy service of the Ochrana, for by means of it the authorities got to know of the most confidential happenings within the various revolutionary organizations.”<sup>33</sup> Okhrana agents penetrated not only revolutionary

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see: Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, pp. 37-52; P. P. Zavarzin, *Rabota Tainoi Politsii: Vospominaniya* (Paris, 1924), pp. 33-41; A. I. Spiridovich, *Zapiski Zhandarma* (Kharkov, n.d.), pp. 50-54.

<sup>33</sup> Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 54.

organizations, however, but also labor unions, student groups, and even illegal newspaper editorial boards. The internal agency divided its agents into two different categories, the secret informants and the *agent provocateurs*.<sup>34</sup> Secret informants reported information back to their Okhrana handlers without becoming members of revolutionary organizations. These informants might have been workers or students who, during the course of their daily activities, overheard information about a meeting time or encountered a person who had revolutionary sympathies. Despite the belief that the Okhrana had spies in every corner of society, it employed only a few hundred prior to 1905 and no more than a few thousand by 1917.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, as one Okhrana official wrote, “without informants, the security police are blind, since the internal life of the revolutionary organization is a world apart.”<sup>36</sup>

*Agent provocateurs* comprised the second category in the internal agency. Unlike the secret informants, *provocateurs* joined revolutionary organizations, took part in their activities, and encouraged others to do the same. These *provocateurs* intended to incite other revolutionaries to engage in illegal activity, only to have the Okhrana catch them red-handed in the act. *Provocateurs* played a dangerous role and lived under intense pressure; the job demanded them to betray their comrades daily and their lives were endangered if the truth emerged. Some *provocateurs* participated for loyalty to the regime, but the majority were ex-revolutionaries who did so for the monetary gain. The

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<sup>34</sup> Revolutionaries themselves made the division and subsequent definitions among internal agents. *Provocateurs*, they felt, were criminals, as they joined illegal organizations and partook in revolutionary activity. See: Nurit Schleifmann, “The Internal Agency: Linchpin of the Political Police in Russia,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique* Vol. 24, No. ½ (1983), p. 152.

<sup>35</sup> Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 82; Jonathan Daly, *The Watchful State: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1906-1917* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), pp. 212-213.

<sup>36</sup> A. V. Gerasimov, *Na Lezvii s Terroristami* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1985), p. 56.

security police paid low-level informants and *provocateurs* between thirty and forty-five rubles a month, but their star infiltrators earned one thousand rubles every month.<sup>37</sup>

Though many cases of provocation exist, recent historiography focuses primarily on the two extraordinary examples of Evno Azev and Roman Malinovskii. Born to a poor Jewish family in 1869, Azev joined the revolutionary cause as a bomb-maker while studying engineering abroad in Germany. From early on, Azev gained the trust and loyalty of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRP) and participated in assassinations of low-level government officials. However, Azev never placed his complete loyalty in one camp; in 1893, he wrote to the Okhrana Chief in St. Petersburg offering his services as an informant for a small monthly salary.<sup>38</sup> Azev lived his life as a *provocateur* until 1909, mostly under the supervision of Zubatov himself. During this time, he rose through the SRP ranks, so much so that the party leadership selected him to lead the terrorist wing of the organization. At the same time, he continued to report on the organization's activities and the Okhrana considered him their most valuable spy. What made the Azev case so extraordinary was that he truly worked for both sides, and his only loyalty being to money. Azev supplied the Okhrana with enough intelligence for countless arrests and disrupted a number of SRP plots; his case officer, General Gerasimov later wrote that he "had total confidence in Azev and gave him freedom of action."<sup>39</sup> Yet during his employment, he participated in over twenty-eight political assassinations, most notably those of Minister of the Interior Plehve in 1904 and the Tsar's uncle Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich in 1905.<sup>40</sup> His "provocation" went far beyond setting revolutionaries up

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<sup>37</sup> Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> Boris Nicolaievsky, *Azeff: The Russian Judas* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1934), p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> Gerasimov, *Na Lezvi s Terroristami*, p. 58.

<sup>40</sup> Lauchlan, "The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 58.



for capture and arrest; he directly withheld information from the police and undoubtedly participated in terrorist activities, all on the Okhrana's dime.<sup>41</sup>

Roman Malinovskii, though not as daring as Azev in his provocation, emerged just as infamous as an Okhrana *agent provocateur*. Malinovskii came from a working background and joined the labor movement early on. Those who have written about him described Malinovskii as a natural born leader, an excellent orator who possessed the ability to connect with other factory workers.<sup>42</sup> He started his double life after an arrest in 1910; the income generated from spying on his fellow workers helped support his gambling addiction. Malinovskii planted himself among the Social Democrats (SD), where he worked his way into party's leadership along side Vladimir Lenin. This placement in the SD's leadership allowed the Okhrana to use Malinovskii to weaken the opposition party: deep fractures existed in the SD party between Lenin's Bolshevik faction and the Mensheviks; if the smaller faction, the Bolsheviks, gained popular support then the Social Democrats would split, thus weakening it. In 1912, Malinovskii joined the Central Committee of the Party and was a public face for the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg, where he gave speeches and wrote articles for the *Pravda* newspaper; he was even elected into the State Duma as deputy chairman for the Social Democrats. At the same time, he remained the Okhrana's most valuable and highest paid spy – between 1910 and 1913, Malinovskii submitted eighty-eight reports on the Social Democrats to

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<sup>41</sup> The Okhrana paid Azev a monthly stipend of one-thousand rubles, not including extra bonuses. At the same time, he swindled money away from the Socialist Revolutionary Party and led a flamboyant and exciting life.

<sup>42</sup> For example, see: A. Badayev, *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), pp. 156-157; Ralph Carter Elwood, *Roman Malinovsky: A Life Without a Cause* (United States: Oriental Research Partners, 1977), p. 29.

the Okhrana leadership and his work directly led to the arrest several party members, including Stalin, I. A. Sverdlov, and G. K. Ordzhonikidze.<sup>43</sup>

If the internal agency was the Okhrana's greatest weapon, it was also its most notorious. Whatever insider information the Okhrana gathered through *agent provocateurs*, it came at the cost of moral credibility of the tsarist government. The exposure of Azev, Malinovskii, and others as police-funded *provocateurs* blurred the lines between revolutionaries and reactionaries for ordinary Russians, as many failed to see how the benefits of the internal agency outweighed its costs.<sup>44</sup> The increased presence of the Okhrana, especially after the 1905 Revolution, gave Imperial Russia the reputation of a police state with 'big-brother' like characteristics. Revolutionaries cried that the Okhrana was the "living symbol of all that is most repressive, cruel, mean, and revolting in autocracy."<sup>45</sup> The secrecy that shrouded the secret police sowed suspicion in every sect of society; even the well-to-do aristocracy looked at the Okhrana with distain and distrust. In his memoirs, Chief Vassilyev recounted that, "much that was mysterious, enigmatical, and dreadful was associated in the mind of the Russian people with the term Police Department."<sup>46</sup>

The policies the Okhrana employed alienated the regime's most ardent supporters as well. Vassilyev later wrote that "in all its operations it was a question of police action

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<sup>43</sup> Daly, *The Watchful State: Security Police and Opposition in Russia 1906-1917* (United States: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), pp. 151-152.

<sup>44</sup> The murkiness of the revolutionary underworld and the combative police force caused more capable Russians to believe that revolutionaries had infiltrated the security police, not the other way around. See: Anna Giefman, *Entangled in Terror: The Azev Affair and the Russian Revolution* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 133; Lauchlan, "The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 58; Assistant Minister of the Interior Vladimir Gurko wrote in his memoirs that, "the secret police agents penetrated into the revolutionary hiding places and in return revolutionaries penetrated into the sanctum of the secret police. It is almost impossible to determine where the secret police agents stopped and revolutionaries began." See: Vladimir Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1939), p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in: Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> Vassilyev, *The Ochrana*, p. 37.

pure and simple: the Okhrana's job was a to discover the evil-does."<sup>47</sup> But to the average Russian, who were the evil-doers? The radical revolutionaries? Or the repressive reactionaries? After leaving the police force and emigrating to the West, ex-Police Chief Aleksei Lopukhin wrote his condemnations on the Tsarist government and the security police. He criticized that many of the techniques used not only alienate citizens and created martyrs, but most were ineffective and even counter-productive. He complained, for example, that the passport system annoyed average citizens without effectively impeding revolutionaries, since most forged fake documents. Moreover, in his memoirs written in 1907, Lopukhin predicted that the government's increased reliance on the security police would only further alienate the Russian people from the Tsar:

When the whole political outlook of the ranks of Corps of Gendarmes boils down to the following propositions: that there are the people and there is the state authority, that the latter is under constant threat from the former, for which reason it is subject to protective measures, and that to execute these measures any means may be used with impunity...as a result, the protection of the state as carried out by the Corps of Gendarmes turns into a *war against all of society*, and, in the final analysis, leads to a destruction also of state authority, who inviolability can be assured only by a union with society. By widening the gulf between state authority and the people, the police engenders a revolution. This is why the activity of the political police is inimical not only to the people; it is inimical to the state as well.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, Lopkhin prophesized correctly, as the Tsarist government did not fall to the revolutionaries the Okhrana relentlessly pursued; instead it fell to the alienated masses. In a report drafted in October 1916, the Okhrana warned the government that the country teetered on the verge of revolution caused by the people. The anonymous writer cautioned that, "believing that the government has forgotten about its needs, the people

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> A. A. Lopukhin, *Iz Itogoz Shuzhebnogo Opyta: Natoiashchee I Budushchee Russkoi Politsii* (Moscow, 1907), pp. 32-33. Emphasis added.

like a dark, broad body is embittered not only at the government but at the principle according to which the power exercises its direct and normal obligations.”<sup>49</sup> Through the Okhrana, the Tsarist regime focused on combatting the most immediate threat to the status quo, but had done so at the risk of ignoring the basic needs and demands of the Russian people. Directly following the February Revolution, the acting Provisional Government abolished the “hated Okhrana” and replaced it with “militia units” – a term used specifically to “avoid association with their hated predecessor.”<sup>50</sup> The new authorities arrested, interrogated, and detained suspected Okhrana agents and revolutionaries hunted down secret informants throughout the country. Within weeks of the revolution, the Moscow police station burned to the ground at the hands of a popular riot.

The Okhrana operated for only 36 years, yet during that time it transformed a “worthless security police” into an seemingly omniscient, omnipresent force that held the power to spy, arrest, and exile deemed political opponents. Within decades, from the pathetic Russian security service of the 1870s emerged a centralized, technologically advanced secret police and innovator in modern surveillance tradecraft. Although the short-lived Provisional Government dismantled the tsarist secret police, the organization’s archives were not destroyed, leaving records, training manuals, and lists of informants available for the Bolsheviks’ taking. “Just as the tactics of massive breakthrough by mechanized armour, inaugurated but not exploited in the First World

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<sup>49</sup> “Doklad Petrogradskogo Okhrannogo Otdeleniia Osobomu Otdelu Departamenta Politsii,” *Krasnyi Arkhiv* Volume 17 (1926), pp. 3-55.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Kerensky, “Toward a Democratic Order,” in *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917*, ed. Robert Raul Browder and Alexander Kerensky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 192; “The Abolition of Some Judicial and Police Establishments and Institutions,” in *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917*, ed. Robert Paul Browder and Alexander Kerensky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 192.

War by the British at Cambrai were perfected by their enemies, the Germans, in the Second World War,” wrote Russian historian Richard Pipes, “so the techniques of police rule, introduced piecemeal by the Russian imperial regime, were first utilized to their fullest potential by their one-time victims, the revolutionaries.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), p.317.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CREATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION AND ITS OKHRANA INFLUENCES

Every good Communist is a good Chekist

-Vladimir Lenin,  
“Speech at the Ninth Congress of the  
Russian Communist Party, 1920,”  
in *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 483

Of all the revolutionary organizations the Okhrana pursued, the Bolsheviks were perhaps the most familiar with the operations of the Tsarist secret police. Most in the party's leadership had, in one form or another, interacted with the Okhrana prior to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in 1917 – Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotskii, Joseph Stalin, and Felix Dzerzhinskii had all served multiple sentences in the Tsarist judicial system. Once in power, these same Bolshevik leaders recognized the usefulness of a small, elite organization that could be utilized to combat political opponents and protect the new regime from general threats to the revolution. Yet, rather than creating a new political police force from scratch, the first Soviet secret police, the Cheka, drew heavily from the techniques and tactics that the Okhrana had implemented during its time of operations. Like its predecessor, the Cheka utilized external surveillance, relied just as heavily on perustration and cryptology, and perfected the ability to penetrate opposition organizations through secret informants and *agent provocateurs*. By developing and perfecting the same methods the Okhrana used, the Cheka quickly developed into an effective, and quite fearful, political police force.

Vladimir Lenin's initial vision of the first proletariat government did not involve a policing apparatus, and it certainly did not include a political secret police force. In fact, the Bolsheviks sought to evolve into a stateless society. To be sure, Lenin acknowledged

the need for a temporary state, with the ability to enforce its authority, during the transitional phase between revolution and consolidation. In March 1917, Lenin wrote that, “We need revolutionary government, we need (for a certain transitional period) a state... We need a state, but not the kind the bourgeoisie needs, with organs of government in the shape of a police force, an army and a bureaucracy separate from and set against the people.”<sup>1</sup> Following political consolidation, Lenin envisioned a transitory, volunteer militia, one formed by the masses, “that combines the functions of a people’s army with police functions, with the functions of the chief and fundamental organ of public order and public administration.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, once in power, the naïve view of a volunteer militia and police proved its weakness, and political practicality demanded the permanent institutions that Lenin once disavowed. Although the Bolsheviks grabbed power with relative ease, consolidation was not immediate. Moreover, the Bolsheviks predicted that the peasantry would rise in support, as would the rest of the European proletariat. Neither happened.<sup>3</sup> During the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, the Bolsheviks attempted to establish a ‘Workers’ and Peasants’ Army,’ a volunteer-based militia, which the German Army rapidly advanced through, forcing the Bolsheviks to bid for peace. The defense of the revolution during the Civil War could have been disastrous for the Bolsheviks had Trotsky not created the Red Army and introduced discipline. Likewise, a volunteer police also proved insufficient for the challenges the Bolshevik party faced. The new regime dismantled the

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Third Letter: Concerning a Proletarian Militia,” in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1958), pp. 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Although proletarian protests sprang up in western European countries, like Great Britain, Germany, and France, the Bolsheviks in Russia were quite isolated. Hungary briefly experienced a communist government in 1919, which collapsed within a few months. For a more complete picture on the Hungarian revolution, see: Andrew C. Janos & William B. Slottman, ed., *Revolution in Perspective: Essays on the Hungarian Soviet Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

Provisional Government's 'People's Militia' and replaced it initially with their own similar organization, the 'Workers' Militia,' a part-time, volunteer based force that was dismantled by mid-1918 for its ineffectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

When the Bolsheviks seized power, the party held very limited support throughout the entire country (in August 1917, the organization had only 200,000 members.)<sup>5</sup> Far from establishing a dictatorship of the proletarian majority, the Bolsheviks, isolated from the rest of Europe and surrounded by internal enemies, represented a dictatorship of the minority. Yet, even with limited support, the party held power where it counted most; that is, they dominated the Petrograd Soviet, which was the political nucleus for power in Russia. To protect their only source of authority, the Bolshevik-led Petrograd Soviet established the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) on 29 October 1917.<sup>6</sup> Created on the initiative of Lenin, the MRC served as the primary security force to protect the Bolshevik leadership and to combat counterrevolution, which included the rise of public drunkenness, rioting, and hooliganism. Within weeks of the revolution, the MRC gained the authority to conduct searches and arrests, enforce curfew laws, and protect, with deadly force, the remaining alcohol stores and wine cellars. By early November, Lenin tasked the MRC to eliminate with "the strictest measures" sabotage, profiteering, and hoarding of essential foodstuffs.<sup>7</sup>

By December 1917, the Bolshevik leadership dissolved the Military Revolutionary Committee and transferred the bulk of its authority to the newly

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<sup>4</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. xxxi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychanoi Komissii 1917-1921 g.: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: 1958), p.3.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police*, p. 14.



established commissariats. The MRC's responsibilities for combatting counter-revolution and sabotage, however, were transferred to a special commission attached directly to the All Russian Central Executive Committee, or VTsIK. This executive committee, in turn, tapped Felix Dzerzhinskii to head this special commission. At the time, the Bolshevik leadership faced imminent threats of general strikes throughout Russia. In response, Lenin charged Dzerzhinskii "to establish a special commission to examine the possibility of combating such a strike by the most energetic revolutionary measures, and to determine methods of suppressing malicious sabotage."<sup>8</sup> The establishment of the Cheka, then, did not result from formal legislation or executive decree; instead, Dzerzhinskii presented his recommendations for the formation of 'The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage' to the Sovnarkom (Council of the People's Commissars) on 20 December 1917. According to the recorded minutes, the Sovnarkom tasked Dzerzhinskii's commission:

1. To suppress and liquidate all attempts and acts of counter-revolution and sabotage throughout Russia, from whatever quarter
2. To hand over for trial by revolutionary tribunal all saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries, and to work out means of combating them.
3. The Commission solely carries out preliminary investigation, in so far as this is necessary for suppression.<sup>9</sup>

Compared to the reputation, size, and power the Cheka later gained, the apparatus originated from modest means and limited in authority. The 'Extraordinary Commission' very much represented a continuation of the Military Revolutionary Committee, and

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<sup>8</sup> Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychanoi Komissii*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> "Vipiska iz protokola No. 21 zasedaniia SNK ob organizatsii VCHK: 20 Dekabria 1917 g.," published in Aleksandr Iakovlev, *Lubianka: Organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB: 1917-1991* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Demokratiia, 2003), p. 302.

historians have contextualized the transition as such. In one of the first published collected documents on the Cheka, Russian historian G. A. Belov dedicated the first 63 pages of documents to the MRC.<sup>10</sup> From the description in the minutes, the Sovnarkom formed the Cheka primarily for investigative measures in combatting opposition activity, much like the Okhrana, and its powers were rather vague; there is certainly no indication that the Sovnarkom initially granted the Cheka any judicial rights. In fact, when first approved on 20 December, the Cheka even lacked the power to arrest and detain individuals, a right only decreed on 29 December 1917.<sup>11</sup> When first established, the Cheka dealt with similar situations as the MRC, including theft, public disturbances, rioting and drunkenness.

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the Cheka's foundation, the organization's role and status grew as did the threats of counterrevolution. Under Dzerzhinskii's guidance, the Cheka grew from a 23-person staff by the end 1917 to an employer of 250,000 agents by mid-1921.<sup>12</sup> Within weeks after its establishment, the Cheka encouraged all Soviets to organize similar police organs for combating counterrevolution and crimes against the state. When the Bolsheviks transferred headquarters to Moscow in March 1918, so too did the Cheka's leadership, and, like the Soviet government as a whole, centralized its authority and brought the regional offices under its control. The organization's responsibilities also broadened from investigative measures to include carrying out

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<sup>10</sup> Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychanoi Komissii*, pp. 3-63.

<sup>11</sup> The Commissariat of Justice granted the organ the power to arrest and detain. See: Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police*, p. 30; 359.

judicial sentences as well; whereas the Cheka could initially conduct searches and arrests, by late February 1918, its role included summary trials and executions.<sup>13</sup>

Dzerzhinskii directly oversaw the establishment and expansion of the Cheka - he recruited and trained agents, investigated conspiracies, and interrogated suspected counterrevolutionaries. Dzerzhinskii's personal experiences as a revolutionary enabled him to be a successful agent and effective leader. He joined the revolutionary movement in 1895, first as a member of Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) and later as a representative of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). Dzerzhinskii dedicated his life to the cause and was one of the most active members of the SDKPiL, constantly publishing and distributing revolutionary literature, organizing strikes, and leading public disturbances against the Tsarist regime.<sup>14</sup> His criminal life caused multiple investigations, and the Okhrana arrested him on several different occasions; by the 1917 Revolution, Dzerzhinskii had spent more than a quarter of his life in Tsarist prisons or in Siberian exile. The Cheka leader had spent the last three years of his sentence at the notorious Orel Prison, where rumored accounts included sadistic tortures committed against imprisoned revolutionaries.<sup>15</sup> From these experiences, Dzerzhinskii emerged as a hardened revolutionary veteran with a practical education that effectively prepared him for the role as the first Chekist.

Dzerzhinskii's experiences with the Tsarist secret police were familiar to other revolutionary leaders. By the time of the revolution, the average Bolshevik activist had spent four years of their life in Tsarist prisons or in exile, while the average Menshevik

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<sup>13</sup> These responsibilities will be discussed in full in Chapter 3. See: *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> For the complete history of Dzerzhinskii's underground involvement, see: Richard Blobaum, *Feliks Dzierzynski and the SDKPiL: A Study of the Origins of Polish Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 124.

had spent five.<sup>16</sup> Early interaction with the Okhrana influenced revolutionary leaders to envision their new government similar to the one they fought to overthrow. Russian historian Richard Pipes notes that:

All of them had been shadowed, searched, arrested, kept in jail, and sentenced to exile by the political police of the imperial government. They had battled with the censorship. They had had to contend with *agent provocateurs* planted in their midst. They knew the system intimately, from the inside, which meant that they also knew its shortcomings and loopholes. Their vision of a proper government was a mirror image of the imperial regime's to the extent that what the latter called 'subversion' they labeled 'counter-revolution'.<sup>17</sup>

Knowing the inner-workings of the previous secret police, Dzerzhinskii continued to organize and model the Cheka after its dismantled predecessor, so much so that many perceived that Soviet leaders had only resurrected the Okhrana. From early on, the Cheka leadership made multiple decisions that failed to distance itself from the Tsarist secret police. First and foremost, Dzerzhinskii transferred the St. Petersburg main office from the Smolny Institute into the Gradonachalstvo building, which had previously held the imperial Department of Police. The building contained prisons cells in its basement, which both policing organizations utilized to hold political prisoners. Chekist historian George Leggett ironically noted that, "future political prisoners of the Bolsheviks, including – such are the ironies of history – fellow Marxist Mensheviks, would be able to compare the amenities of the notorious Gorokhovaia prison cells as dispensed respectively by the Tsarist Okhrana and the Communist Cheka."<sup>18</sup> In his three-volume series on the Soviet forced labor camps, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted that Soviets not

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 124-125.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), p. 317.

<sup>18</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police*, pp. 29, 191.

only continued using the Tsarist prisons for their own political purposes, but also continued employing the same prison personnel:

Of course, even the Tsarist jailers were not entirely a loss to the proletariat, for after all theirs was a profession important to the most immediate purposes of the Revolution. And therefore it was necessary to 'select those persons of the prison administration who have not become totally calloused and stupefied in the patters of Tsarist prisons (And what does 'not totally mean? And how would you find that out? Does it mean they had forgotten 'God save the Tsar?') who can be used for work at the new tasks'.... And, of course, the prison buildings themselves, their cells, their bars and locks, although in appearance they remained exactly as before, in actual fact had acquired a new class content, a lofty revolutionary meaning.<sup>19</sup>

Also like its Tsarist predecessor, the Soviet Cheka encouraged an atmosphere of denunciations, where neighbors, classmates, coworkers, and even family members accused one another to avoid personal suspicion.<sup>20</sup> Although the act of denouncement has historically occurred in all societies, the Russian and Soviet security police relied heavily on denunciations as a major source of information.<sup>21</sup> The intelligence gathered through denunciations was inconsistent and unreliable; many victims of these false denunciations included societal outcasts or individuals accused in personal quarrels. Nonetheless, from these denunciations, both the Tsarist Okhrana and the Soviet Cheka conducted simultaneous mass arrests, preferably at night, leading to the sudden disappearance of whole families or groups of people. Under the Okhrana, these nighttime mass arrests were referred to as 'liquidations,' a term that continued to be used

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<sup>19</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation III-IV (Vol. II)* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia 1866-1905* (United States: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), pp. 61-62; Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, pp. 645-646.

<sup>21</sup> For example, one does not have to look past the age of McCarthyism in the United States.

under the Cheka and successive apparatuses, though it gained a much more ominous connotation and occurred much more frequently.<sup>22</sup>

The Cheka applied and perfected the same methods the Okhrana used for intelligence gathering, contributing to the perception that the Cheka “arose immediately from the Okhrana.”<sup>23</sup> Chekist leaders, including Dzerzhinskii and even Lenin to some extent, realized the usefulness in studying the Okhrana’s methods of intelligence gathering rather than developing their own. Even though these Bolshevik leaders had suffered at the hands of the Okhrana, they still recognized the success of the Tsarist secret police in suppressing dissidence; Vyacheslav Molotov later recalled that, “there were no fools in the [Tsarist] secret police. I served time in jail, and I was in exile. I know. They were often smarter than the fellows we have today....”<sup>24</sup> Although these revolutionaries had at one time accused the Okhrana’s techniques and tactics as “repressive, cruel, mean, and revolting,” Pipes argues that “techniques are neutral” and “can be applied by regimes of a ‘left’ orientation as readily as by those considered ‘right’”. Once tried and proven successful, they are certain to be used by any government, which – on whatever grounds – regards itself as entitled to a monopoly in politics.<sup>25</sup>

This continuity in methods is especially evident when comparing the external agencies employed by both security police forces. Ex-Okhrana Chief A. T. Vassilyev noted that from the abandoned Okhrana archives seized in Moscow in 1917, the

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<sup>22</sup> Under Soviet rule, the term ‘liquidation’ referred to execution. See: Iain Lauchlan, “Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects. Essays in Honour of R. B McKean*, ed. Ian Thatcher (England: Manchester United Press, 2005), p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, p. 645-646; A. T. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret Police* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Resis ed., *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1993), p. 271.

<sup>25</sup> Boris Nicolaivsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1934), p. 129; Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, p. 316.

Extraordinary Commission refined the same methods used by the Okhrana's external agency for their own similar surveillance team:

After the first period of disorder and terror was over, the Tscheka (Cheka) was constituted of two main divisions: the Counter-espionage Section and the Secret Operative Section. The functions of the former was to keep a careful watch upon all movements opposed to the Government, and, as under the rule of the Tsar, this task was performed, above all, by the elaborately thought-out External Agency. Thousands of persons were compelled, partly by persuasion or bribery and partly by threats of death, to assist in the counter-espionage. They included officers in the Red Army, women of every social class, politicians, clergymen, as well as workmen and peasants. Methods adopted were those that had been in vogue in the time of the Ochrana (Okhrana).<sup>26</sup>

According to KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin, the author of the earliest Chekist training manuals, D. G. Yevseiev, based his work solely on the tradecraft developed and perfected by the Okhrana.<sup>27</sup> This imitation continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century; both Oleg Gordievsky and Oleg Kalugin, two ex-KGB officers, acknowledged that even into the 1980s, the Soviet security agency still relied on the Tsarist training guides, especially those that dealt foreign intelligence and counter-intelligence.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the 'Instruction for External Surveillance' section in *The Essential Handbook for KGB Agents* reads near identical to the Okhrana's instructions for the External Agency, entitled *Instruktsiia No. 298*, sent from headquarters to the Paris office (since most of the Okhrana files were later destroyed, *Instruktsiia No. 298* serves as the closest document historians have to a training manual for the Tsarist secret police).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret Police*, p. 277.

<sup>27</sup> Dimitri Gavrilovich Yeseyev authored both the *Basic Tenets of Intelligence* and the *Brief Instructions for the Cheka on How to Conduct Intelligence*. For reference to the Mitrokhin Archives, see: Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (England: The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (United States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), p. 22; Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster: My Thirty-Two Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (United States: Basic Books, 2009), p. 14; Oleg Kalugin, *Vid s Lubianki: Delo Byvshego Generala KGB* (Moscow: Nezavisimoe Izdatel'stvo, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Compare: *The Essential Handbook for KGB Agents* (Moscow: The USSR Committee for State Security, 1978), pp. 23-40 and "Instruksii no. 298," Okhrana Records, Hoover Institution Archives, Box 41, Folder VIF.

The KGB handbook, distributed nearly a half century after the Okhrana's reign, instructed its agents to observe, memorize, and report in the exact same procedure as the Tsarist secret police. Both documents described their agents to be “politically and morally fit, firm in his convictions, honest, sober, brave, agile, strong, smart, and tough.”<sup>30</sup> Both handbooks stressed the importance of studying a suspect's physiognomy, and the KGB even directed its agents to memorize the facial features in the exact same manner as the Okhrana did, by “stop gazing and make a mental picture, trying to describe in thought the details, and then check by looking at the subject.”<sup>31</sup> The KGB issued the same protocols when following a suspect as the Okhrana – both documents detail how to shadow a suspect if he happens to walk down a busy street or turn a corner.<sup>32</sup> When the two handbooks are compared side by side, in many places the KGB manual literally reads word for word as the Okhrana instructions.

In addition to the External Agency, the Cheka also mimicked the Okhrana's Internal agency and evolved to rely just as heavily on *agent provocateurs*. Bolshevik leaders, especially Lenin, knew better than anyone the value of placing a mole within the opposition. Roman Malinovskii, the Okhrana *provocateur* who represented the Bolshevik party in the Tsarist Duma, was more than high-ranking revolutionary activist; he was also a personal friend of Lenin and deceived the Bolshevik leader equally as any other revolutionary. After accusations first emerged about Malinovskii's disloyalty, Lenin defended his “dear friend” as an “outstanding worker-leader” whom he had full faith in. Days after Malinovskii resigned from the Duma in May 1914, Lenin assured

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<sup>30</sup> “Instruksiia no. 298,” Okhrana Records, p. 13; The Soviet handbook added in that an agent should be a “person devoted to Soviet power.” See: *The Essential Handbook for KGB Agents*, pp. 9, 41, 47-48.

<sup>31</sup> *The Essential Handbook for KGB Agents*, p. 26; “Instruksiia no. 298,” Okhrana Records, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> *The Essential Handbook for KGB Agents*, p. 28; “Instruksiia no. 298,” Okhrana Records, p. 20.



fellow Bolshevik Aleksei Badaev to “not worry, there is a possibility of slander.”<sup>33</sup> After Malinovskii’s resignation, he fled the country, unfortunately for him to Germany where he was held as a prisoner of war until 1918. During his imprisonment, Lenin continued to write to his old friend and even sent him packages of food, clothes, and reading materials.<sup>34</sup>

When the Provisional Government opened the Okhrana archives following the February Revolution and exposed the truth about Malinovskii’s Okhrana involvements, Lenin distanced himself from the *provocateur* (his personal letters to Malinovskii during the war were omitted from his collected works). In a 1917 deposition held against Malinovskii in absentia, Lenin attempted to understate the damage the *provocateur* caused the party: “I have personally concluded on many occasions that after the Azef (Evno Azef, see Chapter 1) affair, nothing could surprise me. But I do not believe in the provocation in this case, not only because I saw no proof or evidence but also because if Malinovskii were a provocateur, the Okhrana would not have gained from that as much as our party gained from *Pravda* and the whole legal apparatus.”<sup>35</sup> While an argument could be made that Malinovskii, in the end, did help the Bolsheviks through speeches and his work in *Pravda*, the intelligence gained by his placement in the Bolshevik leadership undoubtedly aided the Okhrana as well. The Tsarist secret police’s information on the Bolshevik party was so detailed that its recovered files constitute as the best source on pre-revolutionary Bolshevik history. In fact, as Chekist historian Leggett argued, the

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<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Telegram to A. E. Badaev in St. Petersburg,” (23/24 May 1914), in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archives*, ed. Richard Pipes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Bertram D. Wolfe, “Lenin and the Agent Provocateur Malinovsky,” *Russian Review* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Autumn, 1945), p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Deposition in the Case of R. V. Malinovsky,” (8 June 1917), in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archives*, ed. Richard Pipes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 35.

Okhrana not only gathered a massive amount of intelligence on the Bolshevik party, but it also positioned itself – through Malinovskii – to influence the party’s tactics.<sup>36</sup>

According to one of Dzerzhinskii’s lieutenants, Martyn Latsis, the first Chekist leader strictly prohibited the use of *agent provocateurs* when the Cheka first formed.<sup>37</sup> Yet, despite this order, the Cheka quickly developed the same tradecraft of provocation to penetrate counter-revolutionary organizations; in fact, the first known successful case of Soviet provocation occurred as early as 1918. Dzerzhinskii dispatched agents to penetrate a Petrograd-based counter-revolutionary organization that recruited soldiers for General Alexei Kaledin, who led the White forces in Don territory.<sup>38</sup> The agents, who posed as former Tsarist officers wanting to join the opposition movement, quickly penetrated the underground organization and by February the following year, exposed the organization, resulting in the mass arrest of about four thousand counter-revolutionary activists.<sup>39</sup>

Like the other methods the Soviets employed, the Cheka expanded the use of provocation to penetrate foreign threats as well. The most sensationalized case of early provocation, the so-called ‘Lockhart Plot,’ involved the former British consul-general Robert B. Lockhart.<sup>40</sup> Lockhart, who had been stationed at the British embassy prior to the revolution, returned to Russia with unofficial intentions to persuade the new

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<sup>36</sup> The Okhrana placed Malinovskii in the Social Revolutionary leadership to specifically throw support behind Lenin and his Bolshevik faction, thus creating a division in the opposition party. See: Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police*, p. xxiv.

<sup>37</sup> M. Ia. Latsis, *Dva Goda Borby Na Vnutrenem Fronte: Populiarnyi Obzor Dvukhgodichnoi Deiatelnosti Chrezvychainykh Komissii po Borbe s Kontrrevoliutsiei, Spekuliatsei, i Prestupleniiami po Dolzhnosti* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1920), p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> For a more complete story on the Lockhart Plot, see: John W. Long, “Plot and Counter-Plot in Revolutionary Russia: Chronicling the Bruce Lockhart Conspiracy, 1918,” *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 10, Issue 1 (1995), pp. 122-143.

government to continue Russia's war with Germany. The mission, obviously, failed. Lockhart quickly changed his views on the Bolsheviks and looked at the new government with distain; by the spring of 1918, Lockhart actively involved himself with anti-Bolshevik forces and monetarily supported (over ten million rubles) counterrevolutionary activities in Moscow. After suspecting Lockhart's participation in the anti-Bolshevik underground, Dzerzhinskii assigned two Latvian *agents provocateurs* in June 1918 to penetrate the organization. By 31 August, the Chekist leader had compiled enough evidence and ordered the arrest of Lockhart and his other conspirators, which included French and American agents as well.<sup>41</sup> Soviet leaders hailed this operation as monumental success against the capitalistic west and the case remained somewhat of a legend in KGB history.<sup>42</sup>

Foreigners quickly observed the Cheka's reliance on *agent provocateurs* as a revival and expansion of the Okhrana's system. During the height of provocation in prerevolutionary Russia, Vladimir Burtsev, a Russian émigré living in Paris, dedicated his life to exposing Tsarist agents. Burtsev became famous after he single-handedly exposed Evno Azev as a *provocateur* (See Chapter 1), for which he gained the nickname 'Sherlock Holmes' of the revolutionary movement.<sup>43</sup> Burtsev published and edited multiple periodicals criticizing the Imperial Russia and the repressive methods the Okhrana used against the revolutionary movement, especially the technique of

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>43</sup> Rita T. Kronenbitter, "Sherlock Holmes of the Revolution," in *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police*, ed. Ben Fischer (United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), pp. 47-64. A copy of this article can also be found on the CIA's website. See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/okhrana-the-paris-operations-of-the-russian-imperial-police/5474-1.html>. (Accessed on 12 September 2013).

provocation. At the time, Bolshevik revolutionaries hailed Burtsev as a hero.<sup>44</sup>

However, as events unfolded and the Bolshevik government employed the same methods, Burtsev turned critical of his onetime co-conspirators. In an article published in 1927, Burtsev condemned the Bolshevik government: “These men are now in power, and their attitude towards provocation has radically changed. They have ‘improved’ the former Secret Police, replacing it by their Che-Ka or G.P.U., which has surpassed the former by its cruelty and treachery. If the Secret Police of the old days possessed its Azefs and Zubatovs, the present government of the Soviets has given Russia super-Azefs and super-Zubatovs.”<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the greatest contribution the Okhrana made to the Soviet secret police was its innovations in cryptology and perustration, or mail interception.<sup>46</sup> Lenin knew better than any other revolutionary the effectiveness of mail interception; through perustration, the Okhrana uncovered his brother’s involvement in the attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander III, for which he was hanged in 1887. Moreover, even though Lenin was cautious with his correspondence, the Okhrana had intercepted and collected at least forty of his letters to other revolutionaries.<sup>47</sup> The Cheka quickly restored the Tsarist ‘black offices’ already established in major cities and expanded the network to process an even greater volume of mail correspondence. More importantly, however, the Cheka inherited a portion of the Okhrana’s cryptologist team that operated

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<sup>44</sup> In an article written in 1927, Burtsev wrote that, “I remember well, how persons belonging to various political parties came to congratulate me at the office...Among them were Zinovyev, Chicherin, Lunacharsky and Litvinov, who strongly blamed the Russian Government for employing such methods.” See: Vladimir Burtsev, “Police Provocation in Russia,” *The Slavonic Review* Vol. 6, No. 17 (Dec. 1927), p. 261.

<sup>45</sup> Burtsev, “Police Provocation in Russia,” p. 261.

<sup>46</sup> KGB expert historian Christopher Andrew argued that the techniques and innovations the Tsarist secret police made in intercepting and decrypting mail correspondence. See: Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> Only forty letters remained following the revolution. Jonathan Daly assumes that more were intercepted, as the Okhrana held the policy of destroying all intercepted letters after ten years. See: Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 43.

in the imperial perustration offices. During Nicholas II's reign, the Russian Empire led the world in interception and decryption of foreign and domestic correspondence, both in the quantity of letters opened and the sophistication of methods developed.<sup>48</sup> Following the revolution, the Bolsheviks actively sought out Okhrana cryptanalysts and forcibly recruited those found to work for the new regime. The retention of these black office workers represented the majority of the cases in which the high level Okhrana officials served the new Bolshevik government in relatively critical positions.<sup>49</sup>

Although examples of personnel continuity between the Okhrana and the Cheka are few and far between, these individuals proved invaluable to the Soviet secret police and its development of cryptanalysis. According to Okhrana historian Jonathan Daly, only three Tsarist perustrators and one master cryptanalyst continued to work for the new government. The code-breaker recruited, however, was Ivan Zybin, who had headed the Okhrana's cryptology department and was considered a code-breaking genius; Moscow Gendarme Commander P. P. Zavarzin described Zybin as "a fanatic, not to say a maniac, for his work. Simple ciphers he cleared up at a glance, but complicated ciphers placed him in a state almost of trance from which he did not emerge until he was able to decrypt the document."<sup>50</sup> Under this 'fanatic's' guidance, the Soviets pieced together an effective perustration and cryptology department, one that far exceeded the size and efforts of the Okhrana.

Although the Tsarist Okhrana used black offices and cryptanalysts primarily in its war against the revolutionary underground, the organization also applied the same

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Andrew, "From the Okhrana to the KGB: Continuities in Russian Foreign Intelligence Operations Since the 1880s," *Studies in Intelligence* (Central Intelligence Agency), pp. 53-55

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Daly, *The Watchful State*, p. 218; Lauchlan, "Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia," p. 55, n. 30.

<sup>50</sup> P. P. Zavarzin, *Zhandarmy i Revoliutsionery: Vospominaniia* (Paris: Izd. Avtora, 1930), p. 159.

techniques to intercept and decrypt other governments' correspondence with their embassies, a development referred to as signals intelligence or 'signit'.<sup>51</sup> The Russian government directed secret Okhrana agents to obtain, through theft or black market purchase, embassy codes and diplomatic ciphers, to which the police's cryptology team easily broke. In this respect, the achievements made by the Okhrana in signals intelligence set a major precedence for the Cheka and its successive police apparatuses.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned before, the Bolsheviks feared both domestic opposition and Western conspiracies. Although the Soviet leaders exaggerated foreign threats, they believed that continued developments in signals intelligence protected the state from a capitalistic plots aimed at undermining the first communist country. In a speech delivered to the Ninth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, Lenin proclaimed that the effort made by the Cheka "was our effective weapon against the numerous plots and numerous attacks on Soviet power."<sup>53</sup>

Okhrana influence on the Soviet secret policing apparatus continued into the 1930s, most notably with internal passport system reintroduced in 1932. Following the revolution, the Bolshevik government abolished the passport system the Okhrana once used to monitor the movements of revolutionaries. Lenin, again, was personally aware of the effectiveness of such a system; seven days after his arrival and passport registration in capital city in 1893, the St. Petersburg Okhrana started recording Lenin's whereabouts and movements, so much so that Lenin felt compelled to change his residence eight times

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew, "From the Okhrana to the KGB: Continuities in Russian Foreign Intelligence Operations Since the 1880s," *Studies in Intelligence*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Report of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars" (23 December 1921), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), p. 175.

over the next two years.<sup>54</sup> Although the Soviet leadership did not re-implement the internal passport system until the early 1930s, the Cheka (and its successor apparatus, the OGPU) began to piece back together the identification and registration system throughout the 1920s. To assist, the Soviet secret police forcibly recruited Vladimir Dzhunkovskii, who had served Imperial Russia as the Assistant Minister of Interior - a position that directly headed the Okhrana - from 1913 to 1915. After the Bolsheviks seized power, the Cheka arrested Dzhunkovskii on suspicion of counterrevolutionary activity. Dzhunkovskii's bourgeois background and connection to the Okhrana undoubtedly ensured that he would share a similar fate as the other captured Okhrana leaders; yet in 1919, the Soviets released Dzhunkovskii, thanks to his expertise on the passport system and his willingness to directly assist Dzerzhinskii.<sup>55</sup>

The analogies between the Tsarist Okhrana and Soviet Cheka are self-evident and cases of continuities between the two systems are abundant. Under Dzerzhinskii's guidance, the Cheka modeled itself after its Tsarist predecessor, adopted the same methods for intelligence gathering, and applied them to perfect the art of counter-subversion. This Okhrana blueprint shaped the Soviet culture of secret policing and is evident in all the secret services employed throughout the Soviet era. Yet, although direct parallels exist between the two organizations, Chekists viewed themselves very differently and denied any comparison to its Tsarist predecessor. Dzerzhinskii's lieutenant Latsis claimed that the Cheka was "the first in the world to raise a sword not

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<sup>54</sup> Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege*, p. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir F. Dzhunkovskii, *Vospominaniia: Tom Pervii* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Imedni Sabashnikovoykh, 1997), pp. 21-23. By the 1930s, Dzhunkovskii's expertise on the internal passport system was no longer required by the Soviet leadership and he fell victim to Stalin's terror in 1938.

for the sake of enserfment and oppression...but for the liberation from oppression and slavery of all.”<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to the Tsarist Okhrana, which was rarely viewed positively by any faction of society, the Bolshevik government hailed Chekist agents as heroes of the Communist state and protectors of the October Revolution. In an interview for *Pravda* on the fifth anniversary of the Cheka’s creation, Dzerzhinskii stated that:

The Cheka was the guardian of the revolution and served with honor in its difficult task. In the midst of the civil war, when we were caught in the grip of the blockade, when pressed by famine, cold, and misery, when domestic and foreign imperialists approached the heart of the republic, the Cheka and its local organs carried out its selfless, heroic work...The sharp eye of the Cheka infiltrated everywhere. The Cheka was an instrument of the dictatorship of the workers. The proletariat has to work in the organs of our finest sons. And it is not surprising that our enemies wildly hated Cheka and KGB officers. The hatred is well deserved. The Cheka is proud of its heroes and martyrs, who died in the struggle.<sup>57</sup>

Although Lenin never indicated a reliance on such service in his prerevolutionary writings, and its repression seemed quite contradictory to his own ideals, the Bolshevik leader easily justified the Cheka’s implementation as a defense of the revolution, as a defense of the proletariat: “The government of the workers cannot exist without such an organization as long as exploiters remain in the world.”<sup>58</sup> Far from merely justifying the creation of the Cheka, however, Lenin sought to place it at the center of the Bolshevik government and indeed Soviet ideology; in a speech given at the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Lenin declared that “every good Communist is a good

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<sup>56</sup> As quoted in: Daly, *The Watchful State*, p. 225.

<sup>57</sup> “Zapis’ Besedi s Korrespondentom Gazeti “Pravda” o Piatoi Godovshchine VCHK,” published in Aleksandr Iakovlev, *F. E. Dzerzhinskii: Predsedatel’ VChK – OGPU 1917-1926* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Demokratiia, 2007), pp. 453-454.

<sup>58</sup> As quoted in: Amy Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Massachusetts: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1988), p. 33.



Chekist,” emphasizing his belief of the Cheka’s role in the Communist state.<sup>59</sup> The organization’s powers and authority continued to grow and evolve as the Bolshevik government faced unrelenting threats throughout the Civil War. The continued reliance on the state security force indeed represented the major issues Lenin and his supporters faced following their seizure of power. Without the predicted, and very much needed, support of the Russian peasantry and without the rest of Europe’s proletariat rising up against other bourgeois, the Bolshevik minority remained isolated and surrounded by enemies. With its elevated heroic status and ill-defined powers, the first Soviet secret police waged its war against class enemies through mass violence and widespread terror.

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<sup>59</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report,” in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), Vol. 30, pp. 439-490.

### CHAPTER 3: DZERZHINSKII'S CHEKA AND REVOLUTIONARY TERROR

Do you really believe that we can be victorious without the very cruelest revolutionary terror?

-Vladimir Lenin to Isaac Steinberg, 1917  
in Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution*, p. 145

Although major continuities among the Imperial and Soviet secret police do exist, the differences between the Okhrana and the Cheka are striking. The size and authority the Cheka reached within its first few years far surpassed that of its imperial predecessor. And, without the popular support that Lenin had predicted, the Bolshevik government relied more and more on Dzerzhinskii's force to safeguard the revolution. The Cheka originated as a small, investigative organ; however, the Soviet government quickly granted the secret police the right to arrest and detain suspects, interrogate and torture prisoners to force confessions, and perform summary executions. The Cheka's power and repressiveness culminated in the 'Red Terror', characterized by mass arrests and executions, Russia's first concentration camps, and an all out war waged against those considered class enemies.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the instability of the Russian Civil War, Lenin increasingly regarded the use of terror as indispensable and utilized it as a preventive tool. Although Lenin's pre-revolutionary writings mentioned only a small, temporary police force, he certainly wrote favorably and frequently for the implementation of terror; as early as 1905, Lenin justified the use of terror following the inevitable revolution as a way to "settle accounts with Tsarism."<sup>2</sup> Through the Cheka, the Bolsheviks not only settled such accounts, but subjugated an entire nation to accept their minority rule.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis assumes that the Red Terror timeframe spans from the 5 September 1918 declaration of the terror till the end of the Russian Civil War in 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Edition, vol. 8, p. 32. As cited in Robert Conquest, *The Human Cost of Soviet Communism: Prepared for the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate*, p. 7.

The Bolshevik leadership often cited the 1789 French Revolution as a precursor to their own in 1917; Lenin, for example, referred to it as the first proletarian revolution and commended the Paris Commune as a “superb example of the great proletarian movement of the nineteenth century.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, Lenin was also aware of the Commune’s weaknesses and failings. First and foremost, Lenin believed that the Paris Commune had made a mistake in failing to abolish the French judicial system, which he viewed as a bourgeois institution meant to protect private property; this belief corresponded with Lenin’s attitudes towards law in and of itself, which he believed served only as a tool the dominant classes used for their own interests.<sup>4</sup> In 1918, Lenin wrote that the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule, conquered and maintained by the proletariat’s violence against the bourgeoisie, unrestricted by law.”<sup>5</sup> To avoid the same mistake, Lenin dissolved the entire Russian legal system on 22 November 1917, and replaced the existing Russian courts with the People’s Courts and Revolutionary Tribunals, the first to deal with criminal cases and the second to handle counterrevolutionary crime. In a 1908 essay entitled “Lessons of the Commune,” Lenin also criticized that “instead of destroying its enemies,” the first attempted proletarian government “sought to exert moral influence on them.”<sup>6</sup> The lesson, Lenin then concluded, was that the Russian proletariat must “never forget that in certain conditions the class struggle assumes the form of armed conflict and civil war; there are times when

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<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune,” in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), vol. 13, pp. 475-478.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990), p. 796

<sup>5</sup> See: Jane Burbank, “Lenin and the Law in Revolutionary Russia,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 54, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), p. 23-44.

<sup>6</sup> Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune,” pp. 475-478.

the interests of the proletariat call for the ruthless extermination of its enemies in open armed conflict.”<sup>7</sup>

The Bolshevik leadership charged the Cheka with leading the charge into this open and armed conflict. As stated in Chapter 2, the Bolshevik government faced threats from all fronts, and as security problems grew, so too did the size and scope of the Soviet secret police. The ambiguity of the Cheka’s establishment allowed the organization to claim authority that it had not been originally designated and its attachment to the Council of People’s Commissars, or the Sovnarkom, guaranteed its loyalty to the Bolshevik Party (as opposed to being attached to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, or the VTsIK, which minority parties populated, unlike the Sovnarkom, which the Bolsheviks dominated).<sup>8</sup> This direct relationship between the ruling body and the Soviet secret police was quite dissimilar from the relationship between the Okhrana and the royal family. Constitutionally, the Okhrana departments were subordinate to both the Department of Police and to the Minister of the Interior, which provided government oversight and limited the independence of Okhrana chiefs.<sup>9</sup> By having the Cheka responsible only to the Sovnarkom, essentially to the Bolshevik party, the Soviet leadership ensured that the secret police could not be restricted by political opponents, many of whom opposed the implementation of summary executions and mass terror.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lenin, “Lessons of a Commune,” pp. 475-478.

<sup>8</sup> Chekist historian George Leggett noted that the Sovnarkom functioned as the executive branch of the infant government, while the VTsIK operated as the legislative. In time, the Sovnarkom gradually acquired the authority of the VTsIK and the different branches blurred together. See: George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> A. T. Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret Police* ((Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 276.

<sup>10</sup> This issue caused friction between the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries in the VTsIK.

Although the Okhrana gained the reputation of an all-seeing, big-brother like apparatus, the Cheka far surpassed the size of its Tsarist predecessor within the first years of its creation. The last Tsarist Chief of Police A. T. Vassilyev estimated that by 1917, no more than 1,000 Okhrana officers (not including informants or *agent provocateurs*) patrolled the entire Russian empire.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these designated political policemen, the Interior Ministry also had at its disposal 15,000 officers in the Corps of Gendarmes who aided the Okhrana in their political investigations. Comparatively, however, these numbers are dwarfed by the size and strength the of Cheka. By 1921, the first communist secret police amounted to some 250,000 men in just the Russian Soviet, the RSFSR (excluding those auxiliary organizations in the Ukraine, Caucasian, and Belorussian republics), which equated to over fifteen Soviet Chekists for every one Tsarist Okhrannik.<sup>12</sup> This comparison is made even more dramatic when considering the area each organization patrolled. Although the Okhrana amounted to only a small fraction of the Cheka, it patrolled an empire that included Polish, Finnish, and Baltic territories, which the Soviets temporarily lost.

Even with its small size, the Okhrana amounted to a highly effective force that was exceedingly successful in penetrating revolutionary organizations. This result is reflective of the individuals the Okhrana recruited as agents, who typically came from the professional Gendarmes ranks. Okhrana agents were highly educated, well trained, and quite proud – characteristics only amplified following Zubatov’s reforms in the 1890s. Okhrana historian Jonathan Daly describes Tsarist agents as obedient, professional, and loyal, who held a worldview that “was paternalistic and traditional...and the central value

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 359.

in that worldview seems to have been honor, not valor.”<sup>13</sup> Even with an honorable force with high standards, Russian society attached a negative notoriety to the Okhrana, one that even dissuaded some Bolsheviks from joining the Soviet secret police. Inevitably, the revolutionary work tasked to the Cheka caused it to attract criminals, fanatics, and sadists. Victor Serge, a Bolshevik revolutionary and later a member of the Comintern, observed of the Cheka personnel that:

The only temperaments that devoted themselves willingly and tenaciously to this task of ‘internal defense’ were those characterized by suspicion, embitterment, harshness and sadism. Long-standing inferiority-complexes and memories of humiliation and sufferings in the Tsar’s jails rendered them intractable, and since professional degeneration has rapid effects, the Chekas inevitably consisted of perverted men tending to see conspiracy everywhere and to live in the midst of perpetual conspiracy themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the professionalism the Okhrana emphasized, the Cheka personnel consisted largely of illiterate officers.<sup>15</sup> Corruption plagued the Soviet secret police from early on and numerous reports detail accusations of theft, bribery, drunkenness, and blackmailing.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Chekists viewed themselves as “the very incarnation of the Party’s will, with the power of life and death over lesser mortals” – an attitude the Soviet and Chekist leadership encouraged.<sup>17</sup>

It is not surprising that the Cheka amassed to such a large, suspicious force early on. The new regime fought protests in factory districts, peasant unrest in the countryside, counterrevolutionary conspiracies, nationalistic uprisings, and periodic military mutinies. In this context, the Cheka served the new government well, especially considering

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia 1866-1905* (United States: Northern Illinois Press, 1998), p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941*, ed. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> See: G. S. Agabekov, *G.P.U.: Zapiski Chekista* (Berlin, 1930), p.39.

<sup>16</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, pp. 117-120

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Bolshevik's lack of legitimacy. While the organization grew in numbers, however, so too did its authority and jurisdiction. As seen in the previous chapter, the Sovnarkom initially tasked the Cheka with only the punitive rights to confiscate evidence, expropriate cards, and publish lists of revolutionary enemies, only granting the right to arrest nine days after its creation. Arrested individuals were to be handed over to Revolutionary Tribunals, under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Justice, for trial and sentencing. In the chaotic atmosphere of the first few months of Bolshevik rule, however, the Cheka's authority broadened even more to include the right to exercise summary justice. Following the German Army advance during the Brest-Litovsk negotiations in February 1918, Lenin signed a Sovnarkom decree which stressed that "Enemy agents, speculators, thugs, hooligans, counter-revolutionary agitators, German spies, are to be shot on the scene."<sup>18</sup> This decree established martial law in the country and circumvented the judicial wing of the Soviet government.

Although this decree, entitled "The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger," never specifically mentioned the Cheka, or implied that they would be tasked with carrying out such cases, the secret police interpreted the edict as justification for shooting those deemed enemies.<sup>19</sup> The first recorded summary execution occurred just three days Lenin's decree, when Felix Dzerzhinskii, head of the Cheka, directly ordered his subordinates to shoot a blackmailer. Initially, the Cheka exercised summary justice only

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<sup>18</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger," in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), vol. 27, p. 30-33.

<sup>19</sup> In his collection of documents on the Cheka, historian G. A. Belov commented that until the 21 February proclamation, "the right of the Cheka was limited. It operated as a preliminary investigation only in so far as this was essential for the prevention of crime.... With the start of the German offensive, counterrevolution had strengthened in the struggle against Soviet power, and strong measures were needed to deal with spies, gangsters, and other enemies.... The decree provided the Cheka the immediate right to execute active counterrevolutionaries." See: G. A. Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychanoi Komissii 1917-1921 g.: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: 1958), p. 95, n. 1.

in criminal cases, carrying out the first political executions in July 1918.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the next two months, the Cheka played an increasingly active role in suppressing counterrevolutionary as its own punitive organ. The growing authority attributed to the Cheka, however, did not go without notice and by early March 1918, public complaints published in newspapers exposed early Chekist misdeeds committed during their fight against counterrevolution. Yet, rather than attempt to restrain Dzerzhinskii's Cheka, Lenin regarded it as an essential tool of the revolution and embraced its use in implementing terror.

The Cheka gained unlimited authority to apply a countrywide, systematic reign of terror in September 1918, following two attacks on the Bolshevik leadership. On 17 August 1918, the young military cadet Leonid Kanegisser shot and killed Moisei Uritskii, head of the Petrograd Cheka and who had signed the execution of twenty one officers involved in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy, one of whom was Kanegisser's close friend. That same evening, following a speech given to Moscow workers, an assailant shot Lenin twice as he was leaving the Mikhelson factory. The would-be assassin, surprisingly, was Fanny Kaplan, a 28-year-old female Social Revolutionary. Both attacks rocked the party leadership, who feared the incidents were part of a larger counterrevolutionary plot against the Bolsheviks. However, the two attacks were not connected: Kanegisser later confessed he acted alone and out of revenge for his friend's execution; Kaplan likewise asserted that she also acted alone and did so because she felt

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<sup>20</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 59.



that Lenin had betrayed the revolution.<sup>21</sup> Regardless, the Soviet government portrayed the two acts as a unified conspiracy against the Communist regime.

The attacks triggered immediate calls for reprisal and revolutionary justice from the Bolshevik leadership. By early September, major Soviet publications called for workers to carry out “merciless mass terror” against all political enemies. On 3 September, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* published a Chekist proclamation, written by the Deputy Chairman Yakov Peters, which declared that:

The criminal gamble of Socialist Revolutionaries, Whites, and all other fake socialists leads us to the criminal designs of the enemies of the working class to meet a mass terror.... Let the enemies of the working class remember that anyone who had been arrested with weapons in their hands, without permits and identity cards shall be subject to immediate execution; anyone who dares to agitate against the Soviets will be immediately arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps. The representatives of the bourgeois class have to feel the heavy hand of the working class. All representatives of predatory capital, all of the marauders and speculators will be put to forced labor and their property confiscated; persons involved in counterrevolutionary ideas will be destroyed and crushed by the heavy hammer of the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>22</sup>

The following day, *Izvestia* also published the text of a telegram from the acting People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, Grigorii Petrovskii, who bolstered Peter’s call for mass terror against the opposition. The telegram instructed all Soviets that “all Rights SRs known to the local Soviets must be arrested immediately. Considerable numbers of hostages must be taken from among the bourgeoisie and officers. Mass shootings must be applied unreservedly upon the least attempt at resistance.”<sup>23</sup> On 5 September, the Soviet government officially enacted its Decree on the Red Terror, which proclaimed that

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 806-807.

<sup>22</sup> Peters originally wrote the proclamation on 31 August 1918. See: “Obrashchenie VChK I Predstavitelei Rayonnikh ChK k Trudyashchimsya Respubliki Otvetit na Ranenie V. I. Lenina Usileniem Bor’by s Kontrevolyutsionerami,” in G. A. Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychanoi Komissii 1917-1921 g.: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: 1958), pp. 181-182.

<sup>23</sup> As cited in: Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 109.

“it is essential to protect the Soviet Republic against its class enemies by isolating these in concentration camps; that all persons involved with White Guard organizations, conspiracies, and insurgencies; and that the names of all those shot to be published, giving the grounds for applying the measure.”<sup>24</sup>

Regional and Provisional Chekas immediately fulfilled these calls for action. In fact, the Petrograd Soviet committed the first mass killing of the Red Terror, over 500 executions on 3 September, two days prior to the Sovnarkom’s official endorsement. Multiple Soviet publications throughout the country recorded announcements from regional Chekas on each organization’s daily doings: the Nizhnii Novgorod Cheka reported the execution of 41 enemies on 31 August; on 22 September, the Ural Regional Cheka reported the arrest of 431 counter-revolutionaries, of which 35 were shot; the provisional Cheka in Penza announced on 29 September that it had executed 152 Whites in retribution for an ambush killing of an socialist worker; the Tsaritsyn Provisional Cheka shot 103 enemies in the month of September; and so on. Individuals condemned to death in these cases included former Tsarist officers, ex-policemen, ex-Duma representatives, landowners, members of the clergy, and members from the Kadet Party, the Mensheviks, and Right SRs. These reports, although indicative of the daily terror the Cheka unleashed throughout the country, only represent a small fraction of recorded executions; Sergei Melgounov, the author of *The Red Terror in Russia*, claimed that only one per cent of executed individuals had their name published.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Postanovlenie SNK o Kracnom Tereore,” published in Aleksandr Iakovlev, *F. E. Dzershinskii: Predsedatel’ VHK – OGPU 1917-1926* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Demokratiia, 2007), p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Sergei Melgounov, *The Red Terror in Russia* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1926), p. 40.

Unfortunately for current day scholars, no accurate statistic exists that represents the full impact the Red Terror had on the country as a whole. Chekist Lieutenant Martyn Latsis offers the academic community the only published, semi-official Soviet figure. In his publication *Two Years of Fighting on the Home Front*, Latsis recorded that between 1918 and July of 1919, the Cheka executed 8,389 individuals; in his second publication, Latsis wrote that for the remaining months in 1919 and throughout 1920, the Cheka executed an additional 4,344, totaling to 12,733 individuals.<sup>26</sup> The statistic is limited (Latsis admits that it accounts for only twenty provinces in just the Russian Soviet) and absolutely underestimated. Many historians have produced detailed lists of known mass executions to discredit Latsis's figures and have reported their own Red Terror death toll estimations.<sup>27</sup> Journalist and historian William Henry Chamberlin, for example, estimated a total of 50,000 deaths at the hands of the secret police, while Chekist historian George Leggett concluded 140,000 fatalities.<sup>28</sup> In a prepared study for the United States congress, titled *The Human Cost of Soviet Communism*, Soviet historian Robert Conquest placed the death toll as high as 200,000.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Bolsheviks painted the preceding regime as bloody and repressive, a police terror of this magnitude never occurred under Tsarist rule. In the last half century of the imperial regime, the Russian government saw a dramatic increase of assassinations

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<sup>26</sup> M. Ia. Latsis, *Dva Goda Bor'by na vnutrennem fronte* (Moscow, 1920), pp. 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> Sergei Melgounov dedicated an entire chapter in his publication to specifically dispute the statistics Latsis produced. See: Melgounov, *The Red Terror in Russia*, pp. 39-111. George Leggett challenged Latsis's statistics and provided substantial evidence to prove that they were indeed understated. See: Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 464.

<sup>28</sup> These estimations are representative of the entire death toll for all districts in entire country, not just the Russian Soviet. See: William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1917-1921 Vol. II* (United States: Macmillan, 1935), p. 75; Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 359.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, Conquest concluded that this figure was in all probability an underestimation. See: Robert Conquest, *The Human Cost of Soviet Communism: Prepared for the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 11.

and attempted assassinations aimed directly against state officials and the Tsar's own family. Yet, even with these attacks, the Tsarist government executed far fewer individuals in its last fifty years of rule than the Bolsheviks did during its first two. Moreover, the Okhrana did not pronounce death sentences; executions were handed down by courts of law prior to the 1905 Revolution and by Military District Courts and Field Courts Martial in the 1905 aftermath. According to Conquest's congressional study, the Russian state only executed forty-eight individuals from 1866 to 1900, a timeframe that includes thirty-nine political assassinations, including Tsar Alexander II.<sup>30</sup> However, as the battle between the Russian state and revolutionary underground increased in tensions at the turn of the century, so too did these radical organizations' reliance on political assassinations as a method for change - between 1900 and 1914, the revolutionary terror claimed the lives of over 10,000 state employees.<sup>31</sup> In response to these attacks, the Russian state saw a rise in capital punishment cases, especially following the 1905 crisis. Yet, using the most generous Soviet sources and estimations, Conquest concludes that during the last fifty years of Tsarist rule, the number of executions did not surpass 14,000, a stark contrast to numbers the Cheka reached by 1920.<sup>32</sup> The imperial state limited these political executions to those who were involved in assassination plots against government officials. The Cheka, on the other hand, had no such limitation and applied summary justice indiscriminately.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Conquest, "The Human Cost of Soviet Communism," p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> As cited in Iain Lauchlan, "Security Policing in Later Imperial Russia," in *Later Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects Essays in Honour of R. B. McKean*, ed. Ian Thatcher (Manchester: United Press, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> Conquest, "The Human Cost of Soviet Communism," p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> The Cheka even targeted women and children for arrest, torture, and summary execution. See: Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (England: The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 37; Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 198.

The Cheka terrorized the Russian population by more than just mass executions of deemed enemies. On 4 September, one day prior to the Decree on Red Terror, the Commissar of the Interior, Grigorii Petrovskii ordered that, “it is necessary to take from among the bourgeoisie and officers numerous hostages. In the event of the least attempts at resistance or the least stir in White Guard circles, resort must be had at once to mass executions. Executive Committees of local provincial soviets ought to display in this regard particular initiative.”<sup>34</sup> This order meant that the state sanctioned the detention of innocent individuals chosen solely for class background, not guilt of counterrevolution. During the height of the Red Terror, the Cheka took thousands of hostages throughout Soviet Russia, many of whom perished in large-scale executions. According to Martyn Latsis, the Cheka took 3,061 hostages in 1918 and an additional 10,050 hostages by July 1919, totaling to 13,111 individuals.<sup>35</sup> However, similar to the statistics Latsis provided on the number of Cheka executions, these numbers also seem to be understated. In his publication on the Red Terror, Sergei Melgounov compiled a list of Chekist reports on the number of hostages taken, including one report of 700 hostages taken in Nizhny Novgorod on just one day, which statistics which disputes that given by Latsis.<sup>36</sup>

The practice of hostage taking related back to Lenin’s own writings, when, in early August 1918, he drafted a decree which recommended that twenty-five to thirty hostages should be selected from every grain-producing district as assurance that the

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<sup>34</sup> As quoted in Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 818.

<sup>35</sup> Latsis, *Dva Goda Borby na Vnutrennem Fronte*, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> Melgounov argued that the Chekas took hostages with no intent of releasing them: “There were thousands of captives over whose heads the Red Terror kept the Damocles’ sword so long and so constantly suspended that at last they would even refuse to leave their cells if told that they were going to be released, since the announcement seemed to them merely a trap to induce them to go quietly to execution.” See: Melgounov, *The Red Terror in Russia*, pp. 8-9.

produced grain would be delivered.<sup>37</sup> These hostages, Lenin stressed, should be selected from the wealthier bourgeois class, thus reassuring that the grain would indeed be delivered. During the Red Terror, the same stipulation applied, and the Chekas targeted members of the old elite: doctors, lawyers, engineers, technicians, and other educated specialists. This habit, however, soon affected Soviet institutions in the industrial and railroad sectors, as many of their senior level experts and engineers were being arrested and detained; the number of hostages taken were so great that the Cheka leadership instructed that a 48-hour advanced notice must be given prior to arrest so that each institution could find a proper replacement specialist.<sup>38</sup> The Soviet government employed the policy of hostage taking throughout the Civil War. Under Trotskii's leadership, the Red Army often detained family members of ex-Tsarist officers to compel these soldiers to fight against the Whites.<sup>39</sup>

During the Red Terror, the Cheka also gained the authority to detain suspects for indefinite periods of time and directed interrogations against those it arrested. These interrogations usually took place late at night, when prisoners were least alert, and the inmate suffered from a near-starvation diet. During these sessions, Chekist officers threatened, beat, and tortured prisoners to force admissions. The level of brutality the Cheka used torturing its victims is typically compared to the Spanish inquisition - its arsenal of methods included hand flaying, scalping, burying alive, immersing limbs into

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<sup>37</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> A few days later, Chekist leader Yakov Peters issued an order that criticized local Cheka units for their indiscriminate arrests that hindered state improvement. See: "Prikaz No. 113 VChK Mestnym Chrezvychnym Komissiyam ob Izmenenii I Uluchshenii Metodov ikh Raboty," Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychnoj Komissii*, pp. 236-238.

<sup>39</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 151.

boiling water, sawing bones, and branding.<sup>40</sup> By the end of 1919, the Cheka exercised the right to extra-judicially commit individuals to their own Chekist prisons without the right to appeal.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the People's Courts and the Revolutionary Tribunals, the Soviet secret police established its own courts, in which the Cheka leadership met in secret and, with no witnesses or defense for the accused, pronounced the verdict in absence of the accused.

Juxtaposed against this growing political police, the Okhrana's size and power was dwarfed by that of the Cheka within a few years following the revolution. The Okhrana, unlike the Cheka, operated in a state mostly bound to the rule of law.<sup>42</sup> The Minister of Interior restricted the Okhrana's rights to searches, arrests, and detention of individuals for a limited period of time; the political police had no judicial powers and it could, at most, recommend a sentence up to five years of administrative exile to the state.<sup>43</sup> The Tsarist political police did not run any of the prisons or camps and, although cases existed where the Okhrana applied torture, they were isolated incidents and certainly not state endorsed. As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, the Tsarist secret police developed an interrogation pattern in which the Okhrana agent acted more as a psychiatrist than an interrogator; he sought to understand the suspect's personality and his motives for joining the revolutionary movement. Unlike the Okhrana, interrogations under the Cheka were brutal and the interrogator sought only to extract confessions to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 197-198; Numerous accounts of torture can be found in Sergei Melgounov, *The Red Terror in Russia* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1926).

<sup>41</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>42</sup> Although Tsarist Russia was certainly more bound to the rule of law than the Soviets, laws enacted during the imperial regime were rather arbitrary. The emergency legislation passed in 1881, which granted the Okhrana the majority of its rights to search, arrest, and detain suspected revolutionaries, was originally intended to be temporary laws during the revolutionary upheaval following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. These laws, however, remained on the books and governed the Russian political police until February Revolution of 1917.

<sup>43</sup> D. B. Lieven, "The Security Police, Civil Rights, and the Fate of the Russian Empire, 1855-1917," in *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 244.

guilt. The difference between the two organizations' interrogation techniques highlights a greater implication between the Okhrana and Cheka: the Tsarist secret police sought intelligence on the revolutionary opposition to help identify and analyze social problems in Russian society; Okhrana Chief Sergei Zubatov certainly understood that until the Russian state addressed these social issues, the revolutionary underground would continue to grow stronger among those dissatisfied with living and working conditions. Moreover, the Okhrana leadership attempted to reform its policies following public outcry, especially following the 1905 revolution; ex-Okhrana Police Chief Aleksei Lopukhin, for example, criticized the use of *agent provocateurs* and the implementation of the passport system, citing that annoyed average citizens.<sup>44</sup> The Cheka, the other hand, obsessed with discovering the regime's enemies, failed to convert gathered intelligence into useful analysis on Soviet society as a whole and had little concern for the public's objection to its own methods.

In addition to mass executions, hostage-taking, and widespread torture, the Red Terror also saw a dramatic growth in the prison population. During these first few years of Soviet rule, three types of imprisonments existed: regular prisons ran by the Commissariat of Justice (the NKIu); labor camps under the Commissariat of Internal Affairs (the NKVD); and special concentration camps that the Chekas used primarily for segregating potential class enemies.<sup>45</sup> The Sovnarkom's Decree on the Red Terror announced that "it is essential to safeguard the Soviet Republic from its class enemies by

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 175; Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 832-837.



isolating them in concentration camps.”<sup>46</sup> Individuals placed in these Chekist camps, the country’s first concentration camps, were not held for judicial sentencing, but rather as a preemptive measure against those who had not been charged with a crime but perceived to be potentially dangerous to the regime. Unlike the Tsarist judiciary system, which sentenced individuals to prison for defensive purposes, the Soviet Cheka used the concentration camps as an offensive, preemptive tool. Although the Red Terror Decree authorized the Cheka to construct the camps in 1918, the large majority of them were built in the spring of 1919, typically erected from old, forcibly-closed monasteries. The Cheka ran these camps throughout the entire civil war period and by 1922 had 56 established camps throughout the RSFSR. Once again, Latsis provided the only published statistics on the concentration camp population during the Red Terror, which grew from 1,791 detainees in 1918 to 7,305 prisoners by July of 1919.<sup>47</sup>

The NKIU prisons held both political prisoners, committed by either the Cheka or the Revolutionary Tribunals, and criminal inmates, sentenced by the People’s courts. By 1920, an estimated 60,000 prisoners had been committed to these prisons, one third of whom the Cheka had sentenced; by the end of 1921, the Commissariat of Justice held jurisdiction over 267 prisons containing more than 73,000 inmates.<sup>48</sup> Though the Soviet government held these prisoners in the very same prisons once used by the Tsarist police, the conditions under communist rule were considerably worse than during the proceeding regime.<sup>49</sup> They were often overcrowded, with little heat, scarce rations, and no clean

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<sup>46</sup> “Postanovlenie SNK o Kracnom Teroore,” published in Iakovlev, *F. E. Dzershinskii: Predsedatel’ VHK – OGPU 1917-1926*, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> These statistics are assumed to be understated, much like the rest he gives in his publication. Latsis, *Dva Goda Borby na Vnutrennem Fronte*, p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p.182.

<sup>49</sup> Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, p. 645.

water. Since some Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks experienced prison life under both the Tsarist regime and the Soviets, a few memoirs exist that compare the two experiences. In his autobiography, Pitirim Sorokin jokingly commented that a Bolshevik prison compared to a Tsarist one was “just about as a country inn compares with a first-class hotel,” and described his political imprisonment under the Tsarist regime as “humane.”<sup>50</sup> In *The Memoirs of Ivanov-Razumnik*, the author, a well known literary critic, noted that while in imperial prisons, he and other prisoners received unlimited parcels from family and friends, enjoyed walks in the yard, were allowed to interact freely with others, played cards, and even helped stage plays for the prison population – a sharp contrast to his description of imprisonment under Bolshevik rule, where he shared a cell with 200 other starving prisoners.<sup>51</sup>

The Soviet government gave the Commissariat of Internal Affairs the jurisdiction over forced labor camps (*lageria prinuditelnykh rabot*) in the spring of 1919. Initially, these camps were established for “the purpose of combatting violators of labor discipline, safeguarding revolutionary order, and combatting parasitical elements of the population.”<sup>52</sup> Those individuals sentenced to the forced labor camps through either the People’s Courts, which dealt with criminal cases, and the Revolutionary Tribunals and the Cheka, for political offenses; a decree on 18 March 1920 granted the Cheka the authority to commit individuals to the camps for up to five years.<sup>53</sup>

The Soviet government did not have to search far to find examples of a forced labor system – the Tsarist government often prescribed internal exile and hard labor, or

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<sup>50</sup> Pitirim A. Sorokin, *A Long Journey: An Autobiography* (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1963), p. 143, 45

<sup>51</sup> R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *The Memoirs of Ivanov-Razumnik* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> As cited in: Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 177.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

*katorga*, as a judicial sentence for political cases dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup> The international community heavily criticized the Russian Empire's exile system. Perhaps no one better influenced this attitude than George Kennan, the uncle of the American diplomat, who examined the Russian exile system and published a two-volume series on it. When Kennan originally began his quest in 1885, he admitted that he thought favorably of the Russian state; noting his prior biases, Kennan wrote that, "I then believed that the Russian Government and exile system had been greatly misrepresented...that Siberia was not so terrible a country as Americans had always supposed it to be...and the nihilists, terrorists, and political malcontents generally, who had so long kept Russia in a state of alarm and apprehension, were unreasonable and wrong-headed fanatics.... In short, all my prepossessions were favorable to the Russian Government and unfavorable to the Russian revolutionists."<sup>55</sup> Yet, by the end of his journey through the Siberia, which allowed Kennan to interact with the prisoners personally, the explorer wrote highly critical of the Tsarist Russia's treatment towards political criminals.<sup>56</sup> Kennan described the Okhrana as an organization with "a history stained with acts of violence, outrage, and crime, including the arrest and imprisonment of innocent citizens by the hundreds, the taking of bribes from notorious criminals, the subornation of perjury, the use of torture, and the beating nearly to death of pregnant women."<sup>57</sup> In addition to criticizing the political police, Kennan also indicted the entire

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<sup>54</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (United States: Anchor Books, 2003), p. xxxi.

<sup>55</sup> George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System Volume I & II* (New York: The Century Company, 1891), V. I, p. iv.

<sup>56</sup> In addition to his two-volume publication on the Siberian exile system, Kennan also published a number of articles, mostly pertaining to the Russia's political police force and treatment of political prisoners. See: George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System Volume I & II* (New York: The Century Company, 1891); "Prison Life of the Russian Revolutionaries," *The Century* Volume 35, Issue 2 (December 1887), pp. 285-298; "The Russian Penal Code," *The Century* Volume 35, Issue 6 (April 1888), pp. 880-886; and "Exile by Administrative Process," *The Century* Vol. 36, Issue 5 (September 1888), pp. 720-735

<sup>57</sup> Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, v. II, p. 52.

penal code: “It was not terrorism that necessitated administrative exile in Russia; it was merciless severity and banishment without due process of law that provoked terrorism.”<sup>58</sup>

Kennan was not the only outspoken critique of the exile system, as many organizations raised awareness of political repression in the Russian Empire. The Krakow Union of Help for the Political Prisoners in Russia published pamphlets throughout Western Europe and the United States that encouraged its readers to monetarily support those condemned to the Siberian labor camps.<sup>59</sup> However, as horrible as the Tsarist exile system and *katorga* were, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conditions in the Russian prison system, and indeed in most European prison systems as well, improved moderately during a wave liberalization in prison reform.<sup>60</sup> They certainly paled in comparison to the conditions of the early camps under the Soviets; camp prisoners and exiles had the luxury to read, send and receive mail, write and publish work, and freely interact with other prisoners – luxuries that scarcely existed, if at all, under the communists. Parallel to the increase of death penalty sentences carried out in the last decade of the imperial regime, the labor camp population drastically swelled during the same period as well, rising from 6,000 inmates in 1906 to 28,600 in 1916.<sup>61</sup> Comparatively, however, this size is dwarfed by the scale of the Soviet forced labor system. By late 1920, the NKVD had constructed 84 camps just in the RSFSR, holding 25,336 inmates. These numbers jumped to 120 camps by December 1921, detaining

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., v. I, p. 258.

<sup>59</sup> The organization stated that “the object of this society is to offer monetary and other assistance, in kind, to political prisoners, to collect, inquire into, and publish documents bearing on the conditions of life in prisons, and, finally to organize acts of protest against the tortures endured by political offenders.” See: Krakow Union of Help for Political Prisoners in Russia, *Tortures of Political Prisoners in Russia: Publication of the Latest Authentic News* (Manchester, London: National Labour Press Limited, 1913), p. 51.

<sup>60</sup> Applebaum, *The Gulag*, p. xxxii.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. xxxi.

40,913 prisoners, and by October 1922, 132 labor camps holding more than 60,000 inmates.<sup>62</sup> This forced labor camp system not only survived the Civil War, but rather thrived throughout the 1920s and utilized during Stalin's reign as his main tool for terror and repression.

Although the Cheka had developed and perfected the same techniques of its Tsarist predecessor, the Red Terror clearly identifies the certain foundational fanaticism that separated the Okhrana from the Soviet secret police. Above all, the rights and authority Lenin granted to the Cheka during this period demonstrate the Soviet government's intentions to control the public. Unlike the Okhrana, which defended the Tsarist regime from revolutionary attacks, the Soviet government intended for the Cheka to be an offensive tool, one that preemptively eliminated threats to the Bolshevik regime before a crime had even been committed. This intention is also seen with the Bolshevik inheritance of the Okhrana's black cabinets (see Chapter 2). Government oversight restricted the Okhrana's ability to intercept mail to and from known revolutionaries; black cabinet agents under the Tsarist secret police searched for evidence to implicate suspected revolutionaries and prevent crimes committed against the state. The Cheka, on the other hand, expanded the network of black offices and practiced complete surveillance of all correspondence. Instead of implication of guilt, the Chekist agents searched for the slightest disapproval to the Soviet state.<sup>63</sup>

The call for mass terror highlighted a major cleavage within the Bolshevik party, and not all in the new government endorsed the Cheka's growing role in the new regime.

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<sup>62</sup> Statistics as cited in: Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 178.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Holquist, "Information is the Alpha and Omega of our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 69, No. 3 (September, 1997), pp. 421-426.

Senior officials in both the Commissariats of Internal Affairs and Justice logged complaints to the Sovnarkom about the Cheka's encroaching authority on their on departments'.<sup>64</sup> The Cheka's ability to detain, interrogate, and construct their own prisons directly violated the powers of the Soviet Judiciary and Internal Affairs. Isaac Steinberg, the Commissar of Justice, frequently and publicly spoke in protest of the Cheka's growing powers and criticized the organization's infringing authority and methodology.<sup>65</sup> He personally protested Lenin's "The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger" Decree, which Steinberg interpreted as the start of the Cheka terror. After protesting the cruelty of the manifesto's approval of summary execution, Lenin replied, "do you really believe that we can be victorious without the very cruelest revolutionary terror?"<sup>66</sup>

Lenin's response to Steinberg's objections begs to question the causation of cruelty seen during the Red Terror. To Steinberg, Lenin justified the use of mass terror as an insurance of Bolshevik survival. Historian Richard Pipes supports this claim, arguing that the limited size of the Bolshevik party and lack of popular support outside the major cities forced the Communists to rule "despotically and violently."<sup>67</sup> Yet, to the public, the Bolshevik leadership justified the Cheka's methods by claiming that terror had been forced upon them as a response to the so-called White Terror implemented by anti-Bolshevik forces.<sup>68</sup> While the White Army did execute captured Bolsheviks, the crimes committed by anti-Bolshevik forces, by and large, never reached the scale the Red

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<sup>64</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 121.

<sup>65</sup> Steinberg served as the Commissar for Justice from December 1917 until he resigned in March 1918. After his resignation, Steinberg continued to be vocal against the Bolshevik's reliance on the secret police and use of terror.

<sup>66</sup> Isaac Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution* (United States: Reinhart, 1953), p. 145.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (United States: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Report of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars," in *Collected Works Volume 30*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, pp. 205-252; Cheka Lieutenant Latsis declared that, "to the White Terror life forced the reply of the Red Terror." Cited in Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 110

Terror did nor was it as systematic as the terror implemented by the Cheka.<sup>69</sup> Historian Orlando Figes argues that neither the Bolsheviks nor the Whites are to be blamed for causing Russia's mass terror; rather, wide-spread violence "erupted from below" as an integral part of the revolution, which no doubt influenced the shape of Soviet institutions, including the Cheka.<sup>70</sup> Radicalized by the anarchic conditions, the Bolsheviks merely encouraged, and arguably perfected, the use of terror.

While evidence supports the arguments of both Pipes and Figes, neither one fully explains the cause of the Red Terror. In fact, this violence stems back to Marxism itself, as many opponents argue that the Marx's theory, at its core, justifies expending human life in exchange for the building of communism. Lenin's own theories on the proletarian revolution further resonates this belief that the ends justify the means.<sup>71</sup> In December 1917, Lenin wrote:

We have always known, said and emphasized that socialism cannot be 'introduced,' that it takes shape in the course of the most intense, the most acute class struggle – which reaches heights of frenzy and desperation – and civil war; we have said that a long period of 'birth-pangs' lies between capitalism and socialism; that violence is always the midwife of the old society; that a special state (that is, a special system of organized coercion of a definite class) corresponds to the transitional period between the bourgeois and the socialist society, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>72</sup>

As the Russian Civil War drew to a conclusion and a Bolshevik victory was imminent, many in the Bolshevik leadership believed that the Cheka had performed its duties but outlasted its utility.<sup>73</sup> Lenin's decision to implement the New Economic Policy

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<sup>69</sup> Conquest, "The Human Cost of Soviet Communism," p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 525.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>72</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Fear of the Collapse of Tile Old and the Fight for Tile New," in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), v. 26, pp. 400-403.

<sup>73</sup> Dzerzhinskii himself believed that the Cheka's powers should be restricted following the Civil War. See: Leggett, *The Cheka*, p. 340.

inaugurated a new period of economic liberalization and an attempt to liberalize the image of the Soviet secret police.<sup>74</sup> On 8 February 1922, the Soviet government replaced the Cheka with the State Political Directorate (*Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie* or GPU), which the Commissariat of Internal Affairs incorporated and restricted the secret police to investigate political subversion without the power of detention and punishment. Though this reorganization restricted the Cheka's power and authority, the Soviet government did not constrain the GPU for very long: by August 1922, the state authorized the GPU to exile individuals for a period of up to three years; by October the same year, the GPU exercised the right to summary execution in cases of theft and banditry.<sup>75</sup> Rather than reform the Cheka, the Soviet government continued to really on the use of terror and coercion. Unlike the Cheka, however, the GPU and its successor organizations were not established as temporary organs but rather as integral parts of the Soviet state. Like the Cheka, the GPU, OGPU, and NKVD remained the essential tools Lenin and his heirs utilized to safeguard Soviet rule.

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<sup>74</sup> The economic liberalization was met with a tightening of political dissent, as the NEP was introduced at that same time Lenin banned intra-party factions. The attempt to liberalize the image of the secret police was not a sincere one. Felix Dzerzhinskii had been named the Commissar of Internal Affairs since 1919, and therefore gained jurisdiction over the GPU after the police was reorganized.

<sup>75</sup> The GPU had the right to exile, through administrative order, individuals either abroad or in designated settlements under the GPU authority. The right to summary justice only pertained to theft cases where the criminal was caught red-handed. See: Christopher Andrews and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (United States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), p. 64.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to examine the techniques and tactics the Okhrana established and assess the influence the Tsarist secret police on the creation of the Cheka under the Bolsheviks. As seen, there exist strong continuities between the Tsarist Okhrana and the Soviet Cheka and the analogy between the two apparatuses is apparent. Both organs were tasked to defend a despotic regime during incredible peaks of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary instability. Through a series of effective reforms in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Okhrana developed into a highly elite, professional force that, on the whole, successfully penetrated underground revolutionary parties. Particularly under the leadership of Sergei Zubatov, the Okhrana innovated many modern policing methods and cultivated an elaborate tradecraft that heavily influenced the intelligence community. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Tsarist police perfected the art of intelligence-gathering through four major methods: interrogations, mail perustration, external surveillance, and internal informants. Although the imperial political police failed to prevent the series of political assassinations during the regime's last decade of rule, it did help to contain the revolutionary instability following the 1905 crisis. And, while the regime it swore to protect ultimately fell, it did not do so at the hands of the revolutionary organizations the Okhrana penetrated and neutralized.

The Cheka, too, served its state effectively. However, the general success the Cheka achieved in its first years was due in large part to the policing groundwork already laid out by its predecessor. The Bolsheviks were all too familiar with the operations of the Okhrana – the Tsarist secret police infiltrated the closest circles of the Bolshevik party and had amassed an impressive volume of information on the revolutionary

organization. Most of the Bolshevik leadership had, in one form or another, interacted with the Okhrana prior to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. Once in power, the Bolsheviks recognized the usefulness of a small elite organization that could combat political opponents and general threats to the revolution. Rather than building a Soviet secret police force from scratch, the Cheka drew from the techniques and tactics that the Okhrana had successfully used against the Bolsheviks. By developing and perfecting same methods the Okhrana used, the Cheka quickly developed into an effective, and fearful, force.

Yet the Cheka quickly surpassed the size and authority its predecessor ever achieved. The multiple threats the Bolshevik party faced, in addition to a general lack in legitimacy and popularity, Lenin came to heavily rely on Dzerzhinskii's political police force to implement terror and coercion. In addition to tackling political subversion and exterminating deemed counterrevolutionaries, the Cheka aided in protecting the Soviet frontiers and railways, helped to combat Red Army desertion, and investigated administrative misconduct.<sup>1</sup> The Cheka, too, failed to prevent the political assassinations, specifically that of Uritskii and the attempted assassination of Lenin. Its radical, brutal response, however, classified the Soviet police force into a completely different league than that of the Okhrana. Since many in the Bolshevik leadership had interacted with the Okhrana prior to the revolution, most knew the weaknesses and loopholes of the Tsarist police and judicial system. Although the Soviet regime modeled its force labor camps and internal exile camps off of those first implemented during imperial rule, Bolshevik

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<sup>1</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 358.

leaders identified the shortcomings of the previous system to ensure a stronger punitive regime.

While the continuities between the two policing organs are apparent and the influence the Okhrana had on the Cheka are documented, there exists a severe gap in the historiography on the subject. Currently, few publications attempt to address the evident parallels. Soviet historians George Leggett and Christopher Andrew both dedicate significant portions of their works to acknowledge the influences the Okhrana had on the Cheka.<sup>2</sup> Aside from these two examples, however, the literature overwhelmingly focuses on the dissimilarities between the two political policing forces. Iain Lauchlan, author of many manuscripts on the activities of the Okhrana, argued that, because the Cheka inherited only a handful of Okhrana officers into their own ranks, the secret police forces represent “the most notable case of discontinuity between the Tsarist and Soviet regimes.”<sup>3</sup> While many Soviet institutions filled middle-to-low level positions with previous Tsarist officials, specialists, and bureaucrats (Lauchlan, for example, uses the Soviet Commissariat of Justice, which recruited 90% of its staff from the Tsars judicial system), Lauchlan underestimates the importance of those few Okhrana officers that continued to work for the Soviet regime. The recruitment of cryptanalyst Ivan Zybin and Assistant Minister of the Interior Vladimir Dzhunkovskii proved invaluable to the Soviet

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<sup>2</sup> See: Leggett, *The Cheka*, pp. 21, 22, 29, 73, 158, 189, 190, 277, and 357-361; Christopher Andrews and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (United States: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1990), pp. 17-64. Both Russian historians Orlando Figes and Richard Pipes briefly acknowledge the continuities between the Tsarist Okhrana and the Soviet Cheka. See: Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), p. 317 and Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution* (United States: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 646.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Lauchlan, “Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia,” in ed. Ian Thatcher, *Later Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects Essays in Honour of R. B. McKean* (Manchester: United Press, 2005), p. 55.

secret police and its developments in cryptology and its internal passport system. In this respect, the quality of the recruits was far more important than the quantity.

Despite the lack of acknowledgement, the study of continuities and changes between the Okhrana and the Cheka is essential to the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia. First and foremost, the strong elements of continuity between the two policing apparatuses should force historians to reevaluate the culture of intelligence-gathering and espionage attributed, up to this point, only to the Soviet era in Russia's overall history. This culture of secret policing, this narrative of the government in constant battle against its citizens, was rooted first in Imperial Russia, not the Soviet period. Yet, this culture was embraced, rather enthusiastically, by a regime that claimed to despise and hate the autocracy. This early exposure to a proto-police state very much influenced the mentality, and to some extent the radicalization, of the revolutionaries. Russian historian Orlando Figes concludes that "one can draw a straight line from the penal rigors of the Tsarist regime to the terrorism of the revolutionaries and indeed to the police state of the Bolsheviks."<sup>4</sup>

Identifying the continuities between the Tsarist and Soviet secret police is also significant because it highlights that the achievements made by the Okhrana to the intelligence community are generally overlooked. Again, the secret policing organizations under the Soviet regime are generally characterized as innovators in intelligence-gathering and experts at the tradecraft. These characteristics, however, also accurately describe the Tsarist Okhrana, but hardly attributed to it in intelligence history. In the 1950s, the CIA correctly identified the importance of the Okhrana; the Agency's

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<sup>4</sup> Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 124.

deep interest in the Okhrana files opened at the Hoover Institution demonstrated that the Tsarist secret police held vital information on the tradecraft of the later Soviet apparatuses. Indeed, the Okhrana files did reveal important information on the Soviet methodology for gathering intelligence through external surveillance. According to Aleksei Myagkov, a KGB agent who defected in the 1970s, “it was not only the Cheka that made use of their [the Okhrana’s] methods; they also persist to this day, and are being extensively used by the KGB,” and that KGB recruits “were all astonished at the similarities between the Tsarist system and the KGB’s in the way of working with agents. Even the written reports of the Okhrana sleuths differed little from the communications of our agents.”<sup>5</sup>

Studying the changes between the Tsarist Okhrana and the Soviet Cheka is significant as well, as it accurately highlights the major difference between Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. Under the latter regime, the secret police force, and the state’s use of it for political subjugation, changed drastically in both scale and intent. The brutal police repression seen during the Bolshevik’s first few years surpassed the most violent days of Russian autocracy. The state justified every action the Cheka took as necessity to protect the revolution. For the Bolsheviks, the end justified the means – but the means used were barbaric. Lenin did not see the implementation of terror in terms of morality; in a speech given in February 1920, he stated bluntly, “for us this question is one of expediency.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Aleksei Myagkov, *Inside the KGB: An Expose by an Officer of the Third Directorate* (United States: Arlington House, 1976), pp. 46-48.

<sup>6</sup> “Rech V. I. Lenina Na 4i Konferentsii Gubernskikh Chrezvichainikh Komissii,” in G. A. Belov, *Iz Istorii Vserossiiskoi Chrezvichainoi Komissii 1917-1921 g.: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: 1958), p. 366.

This is not to deny that the Tsarist regime was violently repressive and despotic. Especially following the 1905 Revolution, the state applied severe penalties to political cases, executed thousands of revolutionaries, and sentenced thousands more to forced labor camps and internal exile. The Siberian exile system gained worldwide notoriety, and for good reason; while it amassed to only a fraction of the Soviet Gulag, it remained a deadly form of punishment under Tsarist rule. However, violence in Imperial Russia was episodic and certainly not relied on in absence of legitimacy. Political police action taken against revolutionaries was done so in retribution for specific acts of subversion. The Soviet secret police, on the other hand, executed innocent individuals deemed class enemies.

The study of changes between the Okhrana and the Cheka also reminds us the roots of Stalin's repression and the continuation of a Soviet police state till the fall of Communism. It was under Lenin, and through the Cheka's employment, that Russia experienced a vast system of concentration camps, public show trials, mass executions, and nightly mass arrests. Lenin had laid the groundwork for Stalin's totalitarian police state. The Cheka's legacy remained at the heart of the successor Soviet secret police apparatuses, which glorified Dzerzhinskii's Extraordinary Commission as an ideal prototype. Dzerzhinskii himself was elevated as a heroic, uncompromising leader, yet he oversaw and encouraged the implementation of indiscriminate terror. The founding Cheka influenced succeeding organs until the collapse of the Soviet Union and dissolution of the KGB; according to Andrei Soldatov, the current Federal Security

Service (FSB) under Putin's rule has resurrected Felix Dzerzhinskii and the Cheka as security police idols.<sup>7</sup>

The study of the continuity and change between Imperial and Soviet secret police forces falls into the overall historical debate of strong continuities between Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. The debate is rich with scholarly works and many top Russian historians have contributed to its discussion, most notably Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Richard Pipes. In his publication *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, Pipes argues that major affinities exist between the Imperial Russian regime and the Soviet Union. To highlight such similarities, Pipes examines the concept of patrimonialism that existed throughout the Tsarist rule. "Tsarist patrimonialism," Pipes writes:

Rested on four pillars: one, autocracy, that is, personal rule unconstrained by either constitution or representative bodies; two, the autocrat's ownership of the country's resources, which is to say, the virtual absence of the private property; three, the autocrat's right to demand unlimited services from his subjects, resulting in the lack of either collective or individual rights; and four, state control of information. A comparison of Tsarist rule at its zenith with the communist regime as it looked by the Lenin's death reveals unmistakable affinities.<sup>8</sup>

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, completely rejected Pipes' conclusions on the similarities between the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. In an article published in the *Foreign Affairs* journal, Solzhenitsyn criticized the historical community, and in particular American academics, for assuming "an indissoluble link between the universal disease of communism and the country where it first seized control – Russia."<sup>9</sup> To Solzhenitsyn, the misdeeds of the communist regime have been unfairly blamed on the

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<sup>7</sup> Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (United States: Public Affairs, 2010), p. 3; this notion is supported by David Satter, as well. See: David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago and It Never Happened Anyways: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 11-28.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), p. 503.

<sup>9</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Misconceptions About Russia are a Threat to America," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Spring, 1980): p. 797.

traditions of old Russia. In the same article, Solzhenitsyn charged that in Pipes' book *Russia Under the Old Regime*, the author "allows for only one possible conclusion to be drawn: that the Russian nation is anti-human in its essence, that it has been good for nothing throughout its thousand years of history, and that as far as any future is concerned it is obviously a hopeless cause."<sup>10</sup>

The study of the specific continuity between the Okhrana and the Cheka, then, presents a unique piece into the greater argument between Pipes and Solzhenitsyn, that is, of the major continuities between Imperial and Soviet Russia. The most notorious aspect of the Soviet Union was its culture of secret policing that, through the Cheka and its successors, carried out mass arrests, deportations, and executions. Yet, the Soviet culture of secret policing and many of the techniques the Bolsheviks later implemented are rooted in Imperial Russia. The Cheka recruited Okhrana personnel to help develop their own methodology, used Okhrana training manuals to instruct their own agents, and modeled its early punitive system (especially the use of internal exile and forced labor) off of the Tsarist's. However, while the continuities do exist, the implementation and escalation of terror, repression, brutality, and radicalization represent the most significant changes from Imperial to Soviet rule. The size and scale of the Red Terror, a relatively small period of time, alone demonstrates that the Soviet regime was unlike anything during imperial rule.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 801-802. Pipes aggressively responded to this indictment in his later publication *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*: "Even Someone entirely ignorant of Russia should find it inconceivable that on a single day, October 25, 1917, in consequence of an armed putsch, the course of a thousand-year-old history of a vast and populous country could undergo complete transformation. The same people, inhabiting the same territory, speaking the same language, heirs to a common past, could hardly have been fashioned into different creatures by a sudden change of government. It takes great faith in the power of decrees, even decrees backed by physical force, to believe in the possibility of such drastic mutation, unknown to nature. Only by viewing human beings as inert matter entirely molded by the environment could such an absurdity even be entertained." See: Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p. 503.



From all that could be learned from the Tsarist secret police, however, the Soviet state and policing apparatuses overlooked the Okhrana's greatest failure: the Tsarist state did not fall to the revolutionaries that the Okhrana had pursued; rather, the 300-year old monarchical rule crumbled at the hands of the people. The techniques that the Okhrana relied on, especially the organization's use of *agent provocateurs*, alienated the regime's most ardent supports and widened the gap between the Russian Tsar and his people. The Soviet government also paid a high price for the methods used by the Cheka. Although Soviet secret police achieved total supervision society and aided in the survival of the communist regime, it too suffered the same fate as its predecessor, at the hands of the Soviet population, not the scores of enemies it relentlessly pursued.

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