

PILSUDSKI INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

FOR RESEARCH IN THE MODERN HISTORY OF POLAND, INC.

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A R C H I V A L S E C T I O N

COLLECTION: JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI

ZESPÓŁ: ARCHIWUM JÓZEFA PIŁSUDSKIEGO

TEKA XVII

Records of the Paris branch of the Imperial Secret Police
/Okhrana/ on the activities of J. Piłsudski and other
revolutionaries.

Akta rosyjskiej Ochrazy z Ambasady Rosyjskiej w Paryżu,
dotyczące Józefa Piłsudskiego i innych rewolucjonistów.

17 dokumentów z lat 1895 - 1914.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS SERVICE

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(EDITORS: A conference for reporters and photographers will be held at the Hoover Institution (formerly Hoover Library) at 10:30 a.m. Monday, October 28. Easton Rothwell and Witold Sworakowski will show the materials. Opened and unopened boxes will be available for pictures.)

A "phantom file" of Russian secret police dossiers which the Communists thought was destroyed more than 30 years ago was opened publicly for the first time today at the Hoover Institution on the Stanford University campus.

The dossiers and other materials, a veritable who's who of the Russian revolutionary movement, were shipped secretly from Paris to Stanford University in 1926 by Basil Maklakoff, the last pre-Communist Russian ambassador to Paris.

He then signed a statement that he had burned the entire lot.

Because the truth would have placed his life in jeopardy, Maklakoff stipulated in a contract with the Hoover Institution that the 16 large wooden packing cases were to remain sealed until his death and the contents not shown to the public until at least three months thereafter.

Maklakoff died in July of this year in Switzerland at the age of 86. Hoover Institution scholars have thus far opened five of the boxes and have given the contents a hurried examination, according to C. Easton Rothwell, director of the Institution.

What they have found principally are dozens of fat folders, each belted with a cloth strap and buckle, containing detailed records of the Imperial secret police on the activities of Russian revolutionaries in Western Europe.

"Already we have found files on Trotsky, Molotov, and Pilsudski. I have no doubt but that we shall find material on Lenin, Stalin and other leading men of the revolution," declares Witold Sworakowski, assistant director of the Hoover Institution in charge of Eastern European Collections.

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"This is the only Russian police archive of any magnitude accessible to scholars outside the Soviet Union. It will unquestionably prove to be a mother lode of knowledge on the crucial years leading to the overthrow of the Romanovs in March 1917.

"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 being opened."

Maklakoff realized the great value which the papers held for succeeding generations and was willing to take the risk of deceiving the Communists in order that they would not be swallowed up in Russia. He received no pay for the papers.

Hoover Institution officials still are not able to divulge the method by which Maklakoff was able to ship the files to Stanford, since the agents with whom he worked are still alive.

The former ambassador gave the code name "Tagil," the name of a Siberian village, to the shipping operation. He bound each of the 500-pound packing boxes with wire and fastened the ends together with lead seals impressed with his initials on one side and "Tagil" on the other.

The cases were kept first in the basement of the Stanford Museum. After the Hoover Institution's 285-foot tower building was completed in 1941, they were transferred to a storage room on the top floor, under the cupola.

The Paris branch of the Imperial secret police, the so-called Okhrana, was established in the Paris embassy in 1883. The agents worked behind diplomatic titles.

The office was developed into a vast political counter-intelligence center extending surveillance over Russian revolutionaries in France, England, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and the Scandinavian countries.

The failure of the Russian revolution attempt of 1905 increased greatly the number of political refugees in Western Europe. Their organizational and ideological
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preparations and their illegal publications, which they smuggled into Russia by the thousands, prepared the ground for the successful revolution of 1917.

"The Paris office of the Okhrana was assigned to collect information on all this activity and the individuals connected with it and to report it to St. Petersburg," Professor Sworakowski explains.

"It is known that the Okhrana used every means to reach its ends: 'persuasion' and deportation to Siberia, street shadowing and censorship, bribery and provocation. The files of its Paris branch, which we are now digging into box by box, document this activity in detail.

"It is true the Soviet government has the complete files of the home office of the Okhrana but only a very limited number of documents from these files have been published and these were selected because they were favorable to Lenin, Stalin, and the Bolshevik organizations.

"The Paris files now make it possible to study police reprisals not only against the Bolshevik wing but also against their opponents, the Social Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks, and others. The Paris files also document police measures against the nationalist and socialist movements of the Poles, Latvians, Armenians, Jews, Georgians, and other minority groups in Russia."

Of the five cases opened, three contained dossiers; one held 15,000 jumbled 5x7 cards, apparently a complete index of the office operation; and the fifth contained books of press clippings, cables in code, the key for which Maklakoff thoughtfully enclosed, and correspondence.

Many of the dossiers include front and profile, police-type photos. Trotsky, about 25 at the time, is pictured with such a bushy head of hair he might easily be mistaken for a woman. Most of the men are identified by their family names, rather than their later, more famous party pseudonyms. Molotov, for instance, appears as Skriabin and Trotsky as Bronstein.

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When in March 1917 the tsarist government in Russia was overthrown, the office of the Paris Okhrana, benefitting from diplomatic immunity, was closed and sealed under Maklakoff's custody.

Under pressure of demands cabled to St. Petersburg by Russians in Western Europe who for years had been persecuted by the Paris Okhrana, the provisional government of Russia created an inter-party commission to study the files.

"The main objective was the exposure of secret agents among the Russian emigrees, the 'provocateurs' who, for a handsome salary from the Okhrana, spied upon their political friends," Professor Sworakowski explains.

But the investigation was cut short when the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917. The commission was disbanded and the Okhrana rooms in the embassy were again sealed.

Finally in 1924 France recognized the Soviet regime. The embassy building and its contents were to be turned over to Russian emissaries. It was at this time that Maklakoff activated his operation "Tagil." Two years later the files arrived on the Stanford campus.

Maklakoff took a staff position in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was still so employed when he died while on a holiday to Switzerland.

The material in the boxes will have to be inventoried and organized before it will become available for research, Professor Sworakowski points out. He says this might take a year and a half after funds to do the job are obtained.

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