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Sergei Leskov

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DIVIDING THE GLORY OF THE FATHERS

By SERGEI LESKOV

The door to my office at *Izvestia* opens part way and a quiet, inconspicuous man enters. I look at him with disbelief: Is he really the man I made arrangements to meet? I was expecting an aging James Bond-type with broad shoulders and a proud glance. My guest looked more like a modest clerk from a small office, for whom an occasional beer on the way home and golf on Sundays are big adventures.

However, Col. Vladimir Barkovski of the intelligence services is a real superman. Apparently, in real life, looking inconspicuous is more important than the ability to leap tall buildings. In the 1940s Barkovski was one of the Soviet intelligence agents who obtained many of the West's secrets about the development of nuclear weapons. Today he teaches at the Supreme School for Intelligence Work, researches the history of the Soviet intelligence services, and holds a Ph.D. He visited *Izvestia's* office after the paper published Academician Yuli Khariton's memoirs on the history of Soviet atomic weapons. In his briefcase Barkovski had documents that had never been published before.

Roald Sagdeev (page 32) is right when he says that an intense debate between the secret service and nuclear scientists is raging in the Russian press. But Sagdeev argues that the foreign intelligence service has begun publicizing its role in the development of Soviet weapons in order to diminish the reputation of

the scientific intelligentsia, which, he says, has been an engine of democratic change. Sagdeev points out that the KGB's role has also been stressed by the ultra-patriotic press, which is close to the anti-Semitic *Pamyat* organization, which would like to downplay the accomplishments of the scientists because many of them were Jewish.

However, it would be an exaggeration to suggest cooperation between the KGB and *Pamyat*. *Pamyat* has carefully calculated that the secret services had a higher percentage of Jews than any other organization. Such a link also seems unlikely now that the foreign intelligence service has been removed from the sadly renowned KGB and put under the direct command of the Russian president. In any case, the secret service has a serious public relations problem: in the minds of Russians, no matter how successful the work of Soviet intelligence may have been on foreign territories, it was never enough to justify the terror that the national security apparatus perpetrated on their compatriots at home.

A painful review of history is taking place in Russia. Everyone, whatever his political orientation, is trying to make a significant place for himself in the chronicles of Russian history. Similar skirmishes are arising around many formerly secret Russian activities. The intensity of these struggles is all the greater because, given the current economic disintegration in Russia, no great new feats are being performed. The heirs of history have no choice but to divide what was achieved by previous generations. The sons now divide the glory of their fathers.

Everyone is busily trying to make a place for himself in history.

Sergei Leskov, who covers science and economic issues for Izvestia in Moscow, is a Bulletin visiting fellow.

Barkovski says at least ten British experts were supplying the Soviet Union with information about the atomic bomb.

Participants in the nuclear dispute have also suffered from the decline. Nuclear scientists threaten that there will be a brain drain to Third World countries; and it is no secret that the foreign intelligence service is closing a number of its foreign bureaus.

The dispute over the history of nuclear weapons will not be settled any time soon. There are many reasons—including the failure, noted by Sagdeev, to publish secret documents in a historical journal. Both sides saw the documents in question, and not only did they not reach the same conclusions regarding the historical record, they drifted farther apart. Perhaps the reason for the ban on publishing the intelligence record on the bomb program in *Issues in the History and Methods of Natural Science* is part of the struggle for a place on the Mount Olympus of history rather than a concern with nuclear nonproliferation. Experts who saw the banned text told me that even Edward Teller and Andrei Sakharov would not have been able to build a bomb based on the information it contained.

Furthermore, as is always the case in Russia, decisions are carried out only half-way. Such was the case with the circulation of the journal scheduled to publish the documents. Notice of the ban arrived a little late, and at least 200–300 copies got into subscribers' hands. In St. Petersburg, where most of these issues were distributed, it is available to anyone who wants to read it. If Saddam Hussein or Kim Il Sung really think that this half-century-old information could be of any use to them, they will certainly get it despite all the efforts of Russian censors.

Some members of the staff of the magazine maintain that there are other reasons for the ban. Apparently Igor Kurchatov made notes on intelligence reports indicating which pages could be shown to Khariton. For Khariton, "the Last of the Mohicans," the publication of these remarks would mean a blow to his reputation—his role, and the role of the institute in the creation of atomic weapons would be considered less significant.

This is not said to impugn the reliability of the facts Khariton presents. But there are two sides to the controversy. I do not want to take sides, but I have gathered materials on the role of the intelligence service in the creation of the Soviet atomic bomb from a variety of sources. The information that Colonel Barkovski, once known as agent "Dan," made available to me, should be a part of the record.

In 1940, the head of the Science and Technology Intelligence Department, Leonid Kvasnikov (attention, pseudo-patriots: he was also

Jewish), directed a number of foreign bureaus to penetrate Western nuclear research centers to procure information on the work of atomic physicists; this initiative was entirely his own. In 1941 the London bureau obtained the first reliable document on the problems of atomic weapons—a copy of a secret report given to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The report contained a detailed account of research in this area.

It is interesting how the opinions of Russian scientists changed after they learned of this report. In December 1941, when Georgi Flerov wrote his first letter urging the Soviet Union to establish an atomic program, a seminar on the possibility of creating atomic weapons was organized. Abram Ioffe, Peter Kapitza, Nikolai Semionov, Nikolai Khlopin, and other important scientists were present. One of the seminar participants, Isaak Gurevich, said later that he was not sure what the result would have been if a vote had been taken to begin work on an atomic bomb.

From 1945 to 1954, the United States conducted a number of atomic bomb tests. Soviet intelligence agents in the United States and England obtained several thousand pages of technical information. Among these documents were calculations for the construction of the plutonium charge; the method of calculating the critical mass of the fissile material; information on the detonation device for the plutonium charge of the atomic bomb; detailed information about the gaseous diffusion factory that produced uranium 235, including a drawing of a section of the cascade assembly of separation units; information about a plutonium production reactor; a report on the study of secondary neutrons and the coefficient of multiplication of neutrons in the mass of pure metallurgical uranium; a series of reports on the metallurgy of uranium and plutonium; and information about the kinetics of atomic reactions. Agents also obtained information about the behavior of less critical systems, about materials used in missile building—beryllium, zirconium, stainless steel—and others, and about methods of preparing uranium rods in protective shells. They also got a complete description of the technique for extracting uranium from pitchblende.

Such extensive information could not have come from Klaus Fuchs alone. According to Barkovski, there were at least ten British experts supplying the Soviet Union with information on the atomic bomb. Some of them, whose identities remain secret, are still alive. Perhaps it was characteristic of the time that they all worked without a financial reward. One of the British spies, when he refused financial compensation, told Barkovski, "You have the Stalingrad battle going on right now;

you need money for tanks." The scientists' first real opportunity to apply intelligence information came with the construction of the first experimental reactor in the Soviet Union, which was begun in Laboratory No. 2 in 1946. Intelligence had also provided a description, measurements, and other information about a heavy-water reactor in April 1945.

Meanwhile, the intelligence service continued its work, even after the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb. In the 1950s, for example, intelligence procured information about American power and submarine reactors.

In the old days, when it was not a matter of dividing the glory and fighting each other for a place in the sun, scientists made more positive statements about the contribution of intelligence work in the creation of the atomic bomb. Abram Ioffe said in a report now in the KGB archives: "The information we received was always precise and, most of the time, complete. Of course access to such a complete source of information reduces the volume of our work by many months, facilitates the choice of direction, and frees us from extended searches. Never have I encountered one false instruction." Boris Nikitin, director of the Radium Institute wrote: "These materials are of great practical interest to us. This information greatly reduces the volume of our research. In many cases it is sufficient to test the information instead of conducting special research."

The archives also contain statements about the contribution of the intelligence service to the creation of the hydrogen bomb. In 1947, Isaak Kikoin, asked to evaluate stolen material, wrote: "Remarks about the super bomb in this document are of great interest." Andrei Sakharov himself thought that Americans started working on the hydrogen bomb first, and that if it were not for them, the Soviet Union would not have addressed the thermonuclear problem when it did.

Nuclear scientists may have been rewarded more generously than the intelligence agents who participated in the program. But it is pointless to search for any kind of logic in the hierarchy of Soviet rewards—some irrational principle ruled this sphere. After all, it is ridiculous to think that Leonid Brezhnev deserved his five stars for service to the country. At the same time, one of the most outstanding of Soviet secret agents, Richard Zorge—who warned Stalin about Germany's aggression—was recognized 30 years later only because, by chance, someone pointed out the agent's grave to Khrushchev while he was visiting Japan. Soviet intelligence agents in the Soviet Union were always rewarded modestly in compari-



son to those in other fields. Fuchs was not rewarded because he had confessed to espionage, violating the immutable principle of the Soviet agent "to keep your silence to the end."

The dispute between scientists and foreign intelligence continues. There was a time when these adversaries used to work together, without consideration for their own lives, on the problem of national security. And no one thought to quantify the merits of other's services. It would be as ridiculous as an argument about which wheel is more important to the car.

This senseless debate is one more expression of a general tendency in today's Russia. As collapse and disintegration embrace all aspects of life, the adversaries who fight for false sovereignty are making a hole in the common ship. The dispute about who deserves the most credit in the creation of atomic weapons has run parallel to the geopolitical and economic problems of the former Soviet Union. And prospects for a quick return of wisdom to the Russian house are foggy. ■

Klaus Fuchs violated the immutable principle of the Soviet agent "to keep your silence to the end."