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PhD Thesis

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed: Robert Henderson

Date: 29 1X 2008

(Robert Henderson)
Abstract

The thesis describes the early life in emigration of the Russian revolutionary, historian and radical journalist Vladimir L'vovich Burtsev (17/29 November 1862 – 21 August 1942). Particular emphasis is placed on the nature and extent of the police surveillance of Burtsev and the émigré community in Europe during the period. The relationship between the Criminal Investigation Department of London's Metropolitan Police and their Russian counterparts in Europe – the Zagranichnaia agentura, ('Foreign Agency') – is examined in detail.

Burtsev's biography has great contemporary relevance, unfolding, as it does, in an atmosphere of increasing anxiety in Britain (both governmental and non-official) about growing numbers of foreign anarchists, terrorists, and 'aliens' in general (which would lead, in due course, to the passing of the 1905 Aliens Act) and the increasingly interventionist police methods of the era. The thesis describes Burtsev's relationship with the émigré community and its British supporters, examines his (at times extreme) political views and reviews the radical journalism which led to his trial and imprisonment in 1898. This, the 'Burtsev affair', signalled a major shift in British government policy towards political refugees on the one hand and to international counter-terrorist co-operation on the other and it is one of the aims of this thesis to detail the reasons for these changes.
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Naturally, I alone bear responsibility for this work in its final incarnation.
Introduction

What I saw was the portrait of a man, still young, frail in appearance, pigeon-chested and narrow-shouldered. His face made a great impression on me: it was haggard, sickly and ascetic, though illumined, or rather transfigured, by his eyes – eyes so full of fire and tenderness as to be quite fascinating. I at once understood the man’s ascendancy, his genius for suggestion and temptation, the strange magnetism which fires imagination and stirs to action and makes him such a formidable apostle of the revolutionary gospel.¹

Such was the reaction in April 1904 of Maurice Paléologue, then Director of the Russian Department of the French Foreign Office, on seeing a photograph of Vladimir L’vovich Burtsev for the first time. The photograph formed part of the latter’s police dossier, which had been passed to Paléologue on the instructions of the Russian ambassador in Paris, together with a request for the immediate deportation of this most dangerous individual. Ambassador Nelidov² was anxious to convince the French that the terrorist Burtsev posed as much of a threat to them as he did to the tsarist autocracy, warning of his ‘amazing gift for rousing the evil instincts of young revolutionaries and rapidly turning them into fanatics capable of frightful crimes’.³

A measure of how serious and continuous a threat Burtsev was deemed to be is shown by the fact that at one time, of the twenty-three undercover agents employed by the Foreign Agency of the Russian Department of Police to report back on the activities of all opposition parties abroad, two were assigned exclusively to watch over him.⁴ According to the historian Iain Lauchlan, a further indication of the importance accorded to Burtsev by the Russian police can be gained from the sheer


³ Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 60.

size of his fond at the State Archive of the Russian Federation. The collection referred to contains no fewer than 2,447 documents, the majority of which relate to Burtsev’s activities during the decade prior to 1917, when he came to international fame following his successes in the denunciation and exposure of various police spies and agents-provocateurs (notably Evno_Azev) who had infiltrated the ranks of the Russian revolutionary movement abroad. This collection of documents certainly contains much of interest concerning the pursuit and harassment of this ‘Sherlock Holmes of the Revolution’ by the Russian Department of Police. However, Lauchlan is wrong to refer to it as Burtsev’s Department of Police fond. The collection in question is, in fact, part of Burtsev’s personal archive, the provenance of which will be described later in this Introduction.

His police fond, on the other hand, is far less widely known. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the earliest files, covering the period of Burtsev’s life here under discussion, have, so far, escaped the attentions of Western researchers. From these documents, which will be described in detail later, it is clear that, even from his earliest years, Burtsev occupied a place near the top of the Okhrana’s ‘most-wanted’ list.

Moreover, it was not only the Russian authorities who regarded Burtsev with concern. Other police forces in Europe were anxious that any unofficial or secret links that they maintained with their counterparts in their headquarters in the basement of the Russian Embassy in Paris should remain that way, for fear of incurring the displeasure of their own governments (or, indeed, citizens). After all, at this time the Russian secret police had an ‘almost universal reputation as an agency of tsarist tyranny’. The worry that Burtsev would expose these links ensured that, for decades, he was kept in a state of almost constant harassment by police forces throughout the continent and became, as one commentator pointed out, ‘clearly the most-hunted émigré in Europe, being arrested, expelled, or imprisoned in all four of the

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6 GARF f. 5802, Burtsev Vladimir L’vovich, op. 1–2.
democracies (England, France, Switzerland and Belgium) as well as Germany and Denmark'. Moreover, this was no new development: from the moment of his escape from Siberian exile in July 1888 Burtsev was pursued relentlessly and, even at that early stage of his revolutionary career, succeeded in attracting the personal attention of Emperor Alexander III himself, who, on a number of occasions, showed a keen interest in his early recapture and his displeasure when these attempts failed.¹⁰

Considering the importance attached to this 'formidable apostle of the revolutionary gospel', it is surprising that comparatively little has been published on Burtsev either in the West or in Russia. It is the aim of this study to begin to fill that gap by examining Burtsev's early life in emigration, his academic and political activities, and the journalism which led ultimately to his trial and imprisonment in an English jail. This trial demands to be re-examined in light of the new relevance which it has assumed in twenty-first century Britain in relation to the ongoing debate on terrorism and state security. If one doubted the contemporary significance of Regina v. Burtsev, one need look no further than the trial of Muslim cleric Abu Hamza and the defendant's subsequent appeal against conviction in 2007 when the Burtsev case was specifically referred to in the judgment of the Court and the arguments used in the trial again brought up for discussion.¹¹

A central aim of the study is to chart the growth of the surveillance, both Russian and British, under which Burtsev was placed and to analyse the influence of international politics on his life and that of the Russian political emigration in London. Finally, the study will investigate Burtsev's relationship with the Russian

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émigré community and its supporters as it developed in an atmosphere of increasing anxiety (both governmental and non-official) in Britain about growing numbers of foreign anarchists, terrorists and 'aliens' in general. It is hoped that, by the end of the study, the reasons why Burtsev was accorded such respect by his adversaries will have become clear.

There follows, in this Introduction, a broad historiographical overview, analysing what has been written to date on the topics of Burtsev's life in emigration and British and Russian police surveillance of the émigré community. Also provided are brief analyses of the relevant literature on the subjects of the international pressures which were brought to bear on the British government with regard to its treatment of political émigrés, the international (and, in particular, Anglo-Russian) social and political associations, which formed during the period, and the changing attitude of the British public towards émigrés in general. The Introduction also includes a discussion, in broad terms, of what the study hopes to bring to the understanding of each of these themes. Initially, however, it may be useful to provide a brief sketch of Burtsev's life.

**Biographical sketch**

Vladimir L'vovich Burtsev was a nineteen-year-old student in Kazan' when, on 1 March 1881 (13 March n.s.) Tsar Alexander II was killed by the Party of the People's Will (*Partiia Narodnoi Voli*). The assassination led to a crackdown on any form of political opposition within the country and the young Burtsev, a supporter, albeit a passive one at this stage, of the revolutionary opposition, did not have long to wait for his 'prison career', as he termed it, to begin. In late 1882, having moved to St Petersburg to continue his studies at the university, he was arrested, along with 400 or so others, for attending a gathering to protest at the expulsion of a fellow student. On this occasion he was imprisoned for just a few weeks without trial. Three years later he was again arrested, this time for distributing illicit literature and for his association with the old revolutionary German Lopatin and other members of the People's Will. Having spent a year in the fearful Trubetskoi Bastion of the St Peter and Paul Fortress.

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in St Petersburg, he was transported to Siberia, where he survived for two years before escaping in July 1888, eventually finding his way to Switzerland.

There, in Geneva, he became involved in the production of the Socialist-Revolutionary journal *Samoupravlenie* (Self-Government) and his own short-lived *Svobodnaia Rossiia* (Free Russia), which he co-edited with the populist V.K. Debagorii-Mokrievich, assisted by the Ukrainian liberal M.P. Dragomanov. The programme of *Svobodnaia Rossiia*, as expressed by the editors in their opening article, was, firstly, the fight for political freedom and, secondly, the struggle for economic and social change. To achieve these ends the editors stressed the need for the liberal and revolutionary opposition parties to unite and, indeed, had Burtsev’s own programme consisted of these two elements only – constitutionalism and socialism – he may well have succeeded in attracting wider support. However, by this time Burtsev had already conceived his own specific political ideology, which contained an important third component – namely, the use of ‘the most forceful revolutionary means available in the struggle against the government’, i.e. political assassination. David Saunders has accurately summarized Burtsev’s political programme thus: ‘High political terror was to bring constitutional change, which in turn was to facilitate economic and social reform.’

Burtsev was later to acknowledge that this unique political outlook was specific to him and distanced him from the majority of revolutionaries, both at the time and later. Indeed, his views placed him firmly between two camps: the radicalism of his stance had the effect of alienating him from the constitutionalists and other more moderate opponents of the tsarist regime, while at the same time his liberal constitutionalism set him against the old populists in emigration, such as I.V.

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13 *Samoupravlenie* ran from no. 1, December 1887 to no. 4, April 1889. Nos. 3 and 4 were under Burtsev’s editorial control. *Svobodnaia Rossiia* appeared three times – in February, April and May 1889.

14 Burtsev explained his political programme thus: ‘I gave primacy to the struggle for a constitution in the name of all-national objectives and attached great importance to the role of the intelligentsia and to revolutionary organizations in this struggle. It was namely for this reason that at that time I particularly insisted on the use of the most forceful revolutionary means available in the struggle against the government.’ Burtsev, *Bor'ba*, p. 32.

Dembo, who pleaded with him to drop liberals such as Dragomanov and come over to their side.

In July 1889, aware of his lack of support in Switzerland, Burtsev left for Paris where he took up residence with the populist I.N. Kashintsev (Anan’ev). Their flat on Boulevard St Jacques was visited on a regular basis by numerous other members of the People’s Will, including the police spy A.M. Landezen. As a result of the latter’s provocation and the consequent discovery by the French police of a Russian ‘bomb-factory’, Kashintsev and a number of his comrades were arrested. Shortly before this, Burtsev had set off for Rumania and Bulgaria with the intention of returning to Russia. Tracked all the way by the Okhrana, he was forced to give up that plan and decided instead to try to return to England. Newspaper reports of an attempt by the Turkish and Russian police to remove him from a British merchant ship at Constantinople brought him for the first time to the attention of the British public. The attempt was thwarted by the captain of the vessel, who, despite threats and bribes, steadfastly refused to hand the hapless refugee over. As a consequence, on their arrival in England, both captain and refugee were welcomed as heroes by the national press and by British liberal society, which was becoming increasingly ill-disposed to the inequities and perceived cruelties of the tsarist regime.\footnote{See, for example, \textit{The Times}, 19 January 1891, p. 7: ‘Tribute to Captain Rees Of The Steamship Ashlands’; and 20 January 1891, p. 13: ‘The Arrest Of Russian Refugees in Turkey’.

The British government, however, was not inclined to extend the same welcome to the troublesome new arrival, even though his stand against the Russian government was finding support on both sides of the House of Commons. Moreover, it was not long before the first of a series of missives from the Russian ambassador was received demanding the imprisonment or expulsion of Burtsev and his comrades. Such calls were rejected out of hand but, at the same time, as archival evidence suggests (and as shall be shown below), the British police did begin to take a keener interest in the activities of foreign, and in particular Russian, political refugees in the capital.

Another item of interest is that almost immediately upon his arrival in London Burtsev sought admission to the Library of the British Museum. And, so, began a love affair which was to continue long after his departure from Britain. His early days in London also saw the flowering of another \textit{affaire de coeur}: this time with a French
woman, Mme Charlotte Bullier, who had earlier helped him avoid capture by the Russian police in Paris. She visited him in London, gave him financial assistance on a number of occasions and, eventually, persuaded him to embark on a lengthy European trip with her. Unbeknownst to Burtsev, however, Bullier was a paid informer of the Russian police, who, during the course of the couple’s European tour, made several attempts to entrap him, but without success. Finally, having succeeded in locking their quarry in the cabin of a steamship in Marseilles, only then to discover that the ship was incapable of making the journey to Russia, the exasperation of the Head of the Department of Police reached the point where he had to be dissuaded from dispatching a warship from the Black Sea Fleet to fetch him! Here is yet more proof, if such were needed, of the extent of the desire of the Russian police to effect the arrest of this notorious young revolutionary.

Released from his temporary captivity, Burtsev moved briefly to Zurich before eventually returning to his literary and journalistic endeavours in the British Museum. His main academic preoccupation during this period was the compilation of materials for a history of political and social movements in nineteenth-century Russia, which saw the light of day in 1897 under the title Za sto let, or A Century of Political Life in Russia (1800–1896). He then proceeded to the publication of his new journal, Narodovolets (Member of the Party of the People’s Will) of which three issues appeared from April to October 1897. The last of these, in particular, contained some forthright calls for summary justice to be meted out to Nicholas II, and for this he was arrested by the British police on 16 December 1897 and charged with incitement to murder ‘a non-British subject’. Found guilty in February 1898, Burtsev was sentenced to eighteen months’ hard labour, which he served, in full, in Pentonville Prison and later in Wormwood Scrubs. Released in the summer of 1899, he did not leave Britain immediately, but stayed on for a few more years.

This is another period of Burtsev’s life which is not described in any detail in his autobiography. It was at this time and under considerably straitened circumstances that Burtsev began the publication of the first six volumes of the Socialist-Revolutionary Byloe. Istoriko-revolutsionnyi sbornik (The Past. An Historical-

Revolutionary Collection), followed by the pamphlet *Doloi tsaria!* (Down with the Tsar!), a compilation of all the articles for which he had been imprisoned.\(^{18}\) *Byloe* was notable for openly advocating the use of political terror if the Russian government refused to make any concessions towards liberalism and democracy and, as such, was much more seditious than anything Burtsev had published earlier.

His journalistic endeavours were interrupted in March 1901 when he fell seriously ill and was obliged to leave London for a rest cure in Switzerland.\(^{19}\) There, following the publication of an inflammatory fourth issue of *Narodovolets*, he was arrested in November by the Swiss police, at the request of the Russian government, and expelled from the country. In early 1904 he proceeded thence to Paris, where the Foreign Agency induced the French government to expel him. On this occasion, however, with the support of the French socialists, he stubbornly refused to leave the country. Despite the growing fury of the Russian ambassador and an order from the French cabinet that he be expelled immediately, Burtsev managed to remain at his address in Paris until the end of July 1904, moving then for a short while to Annemasse on the Swiss border. At this point the French government decided to take advantage of the parliamentary recess to quietly arrest and expel him, but he managed to escape to England. There he patiently waited until the French parliament reopened in the autumn before returning to Paris.

Meanwhile in Russia, following the assassination of the reactionary V.K. Plehve,\(^{20}\) P.D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii took over as Minister of the Interior and the first signs of the so-called Russian ‘political spring’ began to appear as a prelude to the revolution of 1905. Following receipt of the text of the October Manifesto, promising broad civil liberties and the election of a popular assembly, the State Duma, together with news of an amnesty for political refugees, Burtsev decided on an immediate

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20 The much hated Plehve was assassinated by the SR terrorist Egor’ Sazonov on 15 July 1904 in St Petersburg.
return to his homeland. In late October 1905, having obtained a false passport, he crossed back into Russia, thereby ending his first period of emigration.

In January the following year, 1906, together with the historians V.Ia. Bogucharskii and P.E. Shchegolev, Burtsev recommenced production of his journal *Byloe* dedicated to the history of the Russian liberation movement. It was also at this time that he had his first meeting with the young police officer from the Warsaw Okhrana, Mikhail Efimovich Bakai, who, declaring himself to be a Socialist- Revolutionary by inclination, offered his services as an informant to Burtsev. It was in large measure thanks to the information thus provided that Burtsev went on to achieve such success and wide recognition as an unmasker of provocateurs and police spies within the ranks of the revolutionary movement. His first, and certainly most famous exposure was that of Evno Azev (1869–1918). A secret police agent from 1892, Azev managed to infiltrate the ranks of the Party of Socialists- Revolutionaries (PSR) in 1899 and rose to become the head of its Combat Organization (*Boevoia organizatsiia*), in which role he masterminded a number of terrorist assassinations (including that of Plehve previously mentioned) before cold-bloodedly betraying his comrades to the police. Accused by Burtsev of provocation, he was eventually ‘tried’ and sentenced to death by a revolutionary tribunal in 1908 but managed to escape abroad. Many more exposures were to follow, including those of A.M. Landezen- Garting, Z.N. Gerngross-Zhuchenko, A.E. Serebriakova and Deputy of the State Duma and leader of its Bolshevik fraction, R.V. Malinovskii.

In 1907, under Burtsev’s editorship, there appeared the *Istoriko-revolutsionnyi al’manakh izdatel’stvo Shipovnik* (Historical-Revolutionary Almanac of the publishing House ‘Shipovnik’), a calendar of important dates in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, but it was confiscated by the censor before publication.\(^{21}\) Threatened with arrest, in the autumn of 1907 Burtsev left Russia again to begin his second period of emigration – this time in Paris, where he founded and published the journal *Obshchee delo* (Common Cause) and also published a seventh number of *Byloe*. During this period he also set up the weekly *Budushchee* (The Future), in which he continued to attack the government and the tsar as its head.

\(^{21}\) It did, however, reappear in 1917 under a different name. See Burtsev, V.L. (ed.), *Kalendar’ russkoi revoliutsii. Izdatel’stvo ‘Shipovnik.’* Petrograd: Shipovnik, 1917.
However, at the outbreak of war in 1914 he unexpectedly issued a call to all revolutionary and opposition parties to reach a compromise with the Russian government, so as to defend their homeland rather than betray it, and then announced his intention to return home, declaring his full support for both the government's domestic and foreign policies. However, on crossing the border he was immediately arrested, imprisoned in the Peter and Paul fortress and then sent into exile to the village of Monastyrskoe, in Turukhansk, Western Siberia. Following petitions (from, among others, A.F. Kerensky, later to become prime minister in the Provisional Government, and V.A. Maklakov (later Russian ambassador in Paris), he was allowed to return to Petrograd at the end of 1915, having served eighteen months of his sentence.

Far from supporting the February Revolution, Burtsev denounced all those who did and, following the July events, became one of the leaders of the anti-Bolshevik campaign, attacking Lenin and his supporters, denouncing them as agents of Germany and accusing Maxim Gor'kii in an article in Novaia zhizn' of patronizing the Bolsheviks.

On the day of the overthrow of the Provisional Government, 25 October 1917, Burtsev published the first and only issue of Nashe obshchee delo (Our Common Cause). Headlined Grazhdane! Spasaile Rossiiu! (Citizens! Save Russia!) on the order of Trotsky, it was confiscated immediately. Burtsev was arrested and sent (for the third time in his life) to the Trubetskoi Bastion. He remained in prison until February 1918, when Gor'kii, in spite of his political disagreements with Burtsev, interceded on his behalf. As a result, he was released and, in May of that year, aware of the dangers which he faced if he remained in Russia, emigrated for the third and final time. Arriving in Stockholm he wasted no time, immediately publishing the brochure Prokliatie vam, bol'sheviki! Otkrytoe pis'mo bol'shevikam (Damn You, Bolsheviks! An Open Letter to the Bolsheviks) which came out in the following year in English and French editions.²²

Moving to Paris, Burtsev then re-established Obshchee delo which, for a time, served as the leading journal of the Russian emigration, attracting such notable

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contributors as I.A. Bunin, L.N. Andreev and A.N. Tolstoi. As a supporter of the White Movement of A.V. Kolchak, A.I. Denikin and, especially, P.N. Wrangel, Burtsev attempted through the pages of his journal to unite all anti-Bolshevik forces abroad but ultimately failed in this task. In the summer of 1921 he co-founded and chaired the Russkii natsional’nyi komitet (Russian National Committee) the main aim of which was the overthrow of the Bolsheviks and the re-establishment of Russian statehood. Throughout the 1920s, while not giving up his opposition to the Bolsheviks, he devoted more time to literary topics: as well as publishing the first volume of his autobiography in 1923 he contributed articles on a range of bibliographic and archival themes to foreign academic journals such as the Slavonic Review. 23

From then on, and throughout the 1930s, he was to endure some particularly difficult times. Although an attempt to republish Byloe in 1933 met with failure, Burtsev did succeed in publishing a biographical sketch on Pushkin 24 and also began to engage in a struggle against antisemitism, producing a number of anti-fascist articles. In 1934 he famously took the stand to give evidence at the ‘Berne Trial’ to demonstrate that the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion had been forged by the Russian Imperial Police. 25 In general, however, he endured his final years in isolation and poverty. By the time German forces entered Paris on 14 June 1940 the vast majority of the Russian émigré population had fled the city and Burtsev was left to fend for himself. Somehow he managed to survive for another two years until, on 8 August 1942, he was admitted to the Hotel Dieu hospital suffering from blood-


poisoning. He died at 9.00 a.m. on 3 September 1942 in his eightieth year and received a quiet burial at the Russian cemetery at St Geneviève des Bois on the southern outskirts of Paris. The extent of his isolation by this time is shown by the fact that it was only some two months later that the death of the 'Revolution's Sherlock Holmes' was first reported in the Western press.

26 According to one version the infection had developed from an untreated wound to his foot caused by a rusty nail in his shoe. See Al'bus, N. and Mel'gunov, S.P. 'Poslednii iz don kikhotov: k desiatiletiiu konchiny V.L. Burtseva', Vozrozhdenie: literaturno-politicheskii taletadi. Paris: no. 24 November–December (1952), pp. 153–154 (hereafter 'Poslednii iz don kikhotov').

Historiography

Burtsev’s life in emigration

The existing historiography on Burtsev does not do him justice. Taking into account his considerable lifetime achievements it is perhaps surprising that no one has yet undertaken a study of his remarkable life. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this has been the difficulty, until relatively recently, in obtaining access to the primary source materials on Burtsev located in the Russian archives. As will become clear, most academic research in the West has been based on materials from two archival repositories: firstly, the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace in Stanford, California, which contains two major archives of interest to Burtsev scholars; and, secondly, The National Archives at Kew, London. These archives will be described in detail later in this Introduction. Fortunately, over the past decade, as the Russian archives have begun to open up, there have been signs of a renewed academic interest both in Russia, and indeed in the West, in the political movements and individuals active in the period leading up to the 1917 revolution.

The scholarship that exists on Burtsev deals mainly with his activities in the decade prior to 1917, focussing primarily on the role he played in unmasking police spies within the ranks of the revolutionary opposition. The milestone events of this period – the Azev, Garting, and Malinovskii affairs – have been treated by among others, Rita T. Kronenbitter, Nurit Schleifman, Fredric Zuckerman, Boris Nikolaevskii and, more recently, Anna Geifman and Leonid Praisman. Although

1 A first attempt at a biography was undertaken in 1988 by Bianca Pelchat in the form of an unpublished MA thesis. As such it is based mainly on secondary sources and contains numerous factual inaccuracies and misreadings of Burtsev’s works. Despite this, however, it does provide a useful overview of his life. See: Pelchat, B.D. ‘Vladimir Burtsev: Wilful Warrior in Dubious Battle’ (hereafter ‘Vladimir Burtsev’), Carleton University (Ottawa) MA Dissertation, 1988. Mention must be made here of another work, also unpublished, but of much more relevance to the present study – namely, a 1998 postgraduate dissertation which is based on a thorough examination of Russian archival documents. See: Panteleeva, T.L. ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaja i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva, 1882–1907 gg.’, Moscow State University, Kandidat Dissertation, 1998 (hereafter ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaja deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’).

these works concern a later period in Burtsev’s life than that dealt with in the present study, they are of interest in that they add some depth to Burtsev’s character, occasionally providing descriptions of certain of his personality traits.

Burtsev himself summarized his early life in emigration in his unfinished autobiography *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu rossiu: moi vospominaniia. (1882–1922 gg.)* Invaluable though this work is, it was written in retrospect. Consequently, inaccuracies and lacunae abound and, as is the rule with all first person narratives, it must be treated with some caution. The book comprises forty-five chapters, of which only six deal with the years 1891 to 1905. These few chapters amount to no more than forty or so pages and it must be said that this brief account is far from complete. One of the most glaring omissions, for example, relates to Burtsev’s travels in Europe in the early 1890s, which the author dismisses in one short sentence. The present study will fill this gap and show that this interlude, covering as it does the period of his association with the French adventuress Charlotte Bullier, was, in fact, a most formative period in Burtsev’s life. Given the intensity of the passions generated in the affair, it is no surprise that it has attracted the attention of novelists such as Iurii Davydov. Most Burtsev scholars, however, have tended, wrongly in my view, to overlook this stormy relationship. No doubt due mainly to the author’s misremembering of events after some twenty or more years, moreover, Burtsev’s autobiography also contains some other minor factual inaccuracies and omissions.

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3 Burtsev, *Bor'ba*. Chapters 10–14 cover the period of his London emigration.

4 *ibid.*, p. 110. ‘During the years 1892–1894 I visited Paris, Geneva and Zurich trying to establish contact with Russia but this led to nothing.’

from the narrative, which, in the course of the study, will be corrected and completed.\(^6\)

The early days of *perestroika* and *glasnost* saw something of a revival of interest in Burtsev in Russia and resulted in the republication of some of his works. The first, a facsimile reprint of *V pogone za provokatorami* (originally Moscow–Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1928), was published in Moscow in 1989.\(^7\) This heavily abridged version of *Bor’ba za svobodnuiu rossiiu* has merit insofar as it provides copious footnotes and a more detailed name index than appeared in the original. However, the Introduction, provided by the Soviet historian S.A. Piontkovskii, is a damning and somewhat unbalanced attack on Burtsev as an enemy of the proletariat, who, ‘as an historian of the revolutionary movement paid scant attention to the revolutionary struggle of the classes’. Refusing even to credit Burtsev with the unmasking of Azef, which he argues was the sole work of the former Chief of Police, A.A. Lopukhin, Piontkovskii then attempts to justify the cuts made to Burtsev’s original text, explaining that they concerned:

\[\ldots\text{the author’s endless repetitions and self-praise with regard to his so-called revolutionary deeds. Burtsev goes on far too long and with great tedium about his literary undertakings. All this has been omitted as have his reminiscences of his years as a student, which add nothing new in a factual sense.}\(^8\)

Piontkovskii fails to mention the other significant cuts that were made in this republication, notably those relating to any passage remotely critical of Lenin and the Social Democrats in emigration and, indeed, later.\(^9\) It must be owned that Burtsev is guilty at times of restating his point of view *ad nauseam* and, indeed, he does occasionally describe his achievements in what could best be described as a rather

\(^6\) Additional first-hand information on his life is contained in a little-known autobiographical essay which was serialized in the press at the time of his 1909 visit to the USA. See *The New York Times*, 29 August and 5, 12 September 1909: ‘The Man Who Unmasked The Spies Of The Czar’.


\(^8\) *ibid.*, p. viii.

\(^9\) Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, pp. 146–150, 216 and 360, all of which have been excised from the 1990 reprint.
self-congratulatory manner. One of his colleagues, while respecting him, ‘believed
that his main motivation came from a desire to prove himself more astute or clever
than anyone else.’10 However, Burtsev’s literary output, including his journalistic
activities, should not be dismissed out of hand. As he himself stated:

I am a ‘desk-man’, a literary man, and a journalist. My life has been devoted mainly
to the production of journals and newspapers. I am essentially a journalist and always
have been, even during those periods when I was involved in my fight against
provocateurs. It is for this reason that in my reminiscences so much space is devoted
to the fate of my publications.11

Indeed, an analysis of these publications offers a valuable insight into the
development of the man’s complex political belief system.

In 1983 David Saunders published just such a study in which he scrutinized
Burtsev’s journalistic output and examined in detail his relationship with other major
figures of the emigration and British political activists of the day.12 While it is true, as
Saunders states, that Burtsev often found himself socially isolated in London,
managing to cause offence to his fellow émigrés and others through some of the
extreme political views which he expressed in his journals, it is possible, nevertheless,
to counter Saunders’ assertion that, at the time of his arrest, Burtsev had ‘no more
than a few Russian minnows’ on his side.13 It will be shown below that at this time
(and, indeed throughout his spell of imprisonment and later) support for Burtsev was
much more far-reaching than has been generally acknowledged.

Like most other Burtsev scholars to date, moreover, Saunders passes little
comment on his other, non-political, literary output. The present study will seek to
redress the balance by drawing attention to Burtsev’s early bibliographical, literary
and historical studies, such as his pseudonymous contributions to Istoricheskii

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10 Boris Savinkov’s opinion of Burtsev according to the biographer of the former, Rick Spence. See.
295 (footnote).
11 ibid., p. 6.
13 ibid., p. 51.
vestnik." It is hoped that the provision of such additional details will allow a more rounded picture of the man to emerge.

Furthermore, to fully understand the formative influences on Burtsev's political outlook one cannot simply ignore his university years, as, for example, Piontkovskii does. A much earlier and fuller account of these years than that which appears in Burtsev’s autobiography can be found in the first edition of his political journal, Svobodnaia Rossiiia, which was first published in Geneva in 1889. The present study will take account of these years and also examine other gaps in Burtsev’s account of his early life. Fortunately, some excellent investigative work on the topic has already been carried out by F.D. Akhmerova. In her short biographical textbook for students Akhmerova examined the state archives of the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and succeeded in unearthing a number of previously unpublished documents which help throw new light on Burtsev’s family, childhood, youth and more besides.

More proof of Burtsev’s rehabilitation in post-Soviet Russia was provided in 1991 with the publication of another edition of V pogone za provokatorami, this time bound together in one volume with a reprint of Burtsev’s later ‘Protokoly sionskih mudretsov’ – dokazannyi podlog (1938). On this occasion, it was the novelist and historian Iurii Davydov who provided the Introduction, the main focus of which, however, as with most other studies by Russian scholars, lies in the later, post-1905, period of Burtsev’s life.

Some other biographical information of relevance can be found in the handful of Burtsev obituaries and reminiscences, such as those by V.M. Zenzinov and N.

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Al’bus and S. P. Mel’gunov. In his obituary for *Novyi zhurnal* (New York, 1943) the former Socialist-Revolutionary, Zenzinov, rather bluntly expressed the view that Burtsev, his old acquaintance, was ‘unimportant as a writer and bad as a politician’. He also appears to share Piontkovskii’s belief that Burtsev’s famed exposure of Azev had more to do with his contacts with ex-members of the Department of Police than any ‘Sherlock-Holmesian genius’. He does, however, believe that were it not for Burtsev’s stubbornness, Azev would almost certainly have escaped censure. Zenzinov describes Burtsev’s relationship with former police detectives and provocateurs as a tender, almost loving one, and makes the remarkable (though unsubstantiated) allegation that, when imprisoned by the Bolsheviks, Burtsev shared not only a cell with S. P. Beletskii, the former Director of the Department of Police, but also a bed! Very little, in fact, is known of Burtsev, the private man, and one of the aims of the present study is to fill this gap. Such assertions as the above, therefore, will be investigated in full.

On the tenth anniversary of Burtsev’s death the émigré historian S.P. Mel’gunov, together with another acquaintance of Burtsev, N. Al’bus, produced a lengthy reminiscence in which the latter rather sentimentally took up one of Zenzinov’s themes – that of Burtsev as the ‘last of the Don Quixotes’ (*Poslednii iz Don Kikhot*), striving to protect his Dulcinea, Mother Russia. He added nothing new to our knowledge of Burtsev’s early period of emigration but, intriguingly, stated his belief that most of Burtsev’s archive had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo in occupied Paris. His co-author, Mel’gunov, on the other hand, was of the opinion that it had come into the possession of his former secretary and publisher, ‘V.Z. Rotshtein’. In fact, it is difficult to be sure of the exact movements of Burtsev’s

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18 Zenzinov, ‘V.L. Burtsev’; Mel’gunov, ‘Poslednii iz don kikhotov’.

19 A more likely version of events is contained in a later reminiscence by I.I. Manukhin, a doctor at the Trubetskoi Bastion, who described how Burtsev had asked to be placed in a cell next to Beletskii. When the latter was later taken to the prison hospital, Burtsev succeeded in being transferred to the same ward where the two occupied ‘adjacent beds’ (*smezhnye koiki*). See Manukhin, I.I. ‘Vospominaniia o 1917–18g. 2. “Oktyabr”’, in *Novyi zhurnal*, 54 (1958), pp. 104–116.

papers after his death. Certainly, a large proportion ended up in the Hoover Institution, having been received from the French communist Boris Souvarine, in 1966 or 1967, with a supplement arriving in 1968 from Souvarine through Milorad Popov. These papers now form part of the Hoover’s Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, 1801–1982 (a total of five boxes of documents within Series 95 and 260). Apparently, a portion of Nicolaevsky’s impressive archive did indeed fall into Nazi hands and was never recovered, though whether any of Burtsev’s papers were included, as Al’bus believed, is unknown.

Although the Hoover’s Burtsev collection does contain some of his earlier writings (for example on the trial of Russian nihilists in Paris in 1890 and on prisons and places of exile in Russia in the 1880s), in the main, Series 95 and 260 comprise the author’s later correspondence, from 1912 onwards, and a selection of ‘post-Azev’ speeches and writings. They do not, therefore, constitute a major source of information for the project in hand. Fortunately, there exist other series within the Nicolaevsky Collection, most notably, the records of the Departament politii, 1884–1934, commonly referred to as the Okhrana archive, which contains a wealth of relevant materials. As mentioned earlier, this important archive has served as one of


23 A note on the history of the Nicolaevsky papers is to be found in ‘Introduction to the Register of the Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, 1801–1982’ available online at:

http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=tf7290056t&chunk.id=odd-1.7.4.

24 Hoover Institution on War Revolution and Peace, Russia, Departament Politii, Zagranichnaia Agentura, Paris (Okhrana) Collection. section XVIIId: Revolutionay Leaders: Vladimir L’vovich Burtsev – Box no. 197. (hereafter HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/). The Burtsev collection continues in Box 198 though most of the documents therein date from the post 1905 period of his life.
the primary sources for Burtsev scholarship and, indeed, it is difficult to overestimate its value to the historian of the revolutionary period. In the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars like David Saunders, were investigating aspects of Burtsev's life in London, they placed a heavy reliance, firstly, on the Okhrana file and, secondly, on the records of various British governmental departments held at what is now The National Archives at Kew.

Perhaps the event in that part of Burtsev's life covered by the present study that has attracted greatest interest is his trial in London in 1898. The most detailed coverage of this event is to be found in an article by Alan Kimball. The author provides a thorough examination of the development of Foreign Agency links leading up to the arrest, the political context of the trial and the international political machinations which surrounded it but he did not have access to all the Home Office files associated with the case. A few years later, and again basing his study on the Okhrana files, Donald Senese provided a short addendum, investigating the role of the British police in the arrest and trial and showing the true extent of their co-operation with the Foreign Agency in Paris.

Both Senese's and Kimball's reliance on the Hoover and Kew files does lead, however, to a rather one-dimensional picture of Burtsev. The present study will make use of additional archival sources, including the Burtsev files held at the State Archive


26 The files concerning Burtsev held at Kew include the Home Office files at HO 144/272/A59222 and HO 144/272/A59222B; a transcript of his 1898 trial: The Queen versus V. Bourtzeff and K. Wierzbicki at DPP 4/32 (30103CC) pp. 123–192; the Depositions at CRIM 1/49/5 and the Indictments at CRIM 4/1153 ff. 30–31. Foreign Office files detailing the exchange of confidential telegrams between London and St Petersburg on the case include FO 65/1543 and FO 65/1544.


of the Russian Federation (GARF), and at the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). These two collections were first described in 1989 — and, it should be said, in some detail — by N.A. Sidorov and L.I. Tiutiunnik. According to GARF, their Burtsev archive originally formed part of the émigré *Russkii zagranichnyi istoricheskii arkhiv* (Russian Foreign Historical Archive) in Prague, of whose Council Burtsev himself was a member. He donated some of his documents to the archive in 1925–1926 and the collection continued to grow in the years that followed. One part of the archive, which had been moved to Germany following the occupation, was in turn seized by the Soviet Union in 1945 as spoils of war and, finally, the remainder was 'presented' by the Czechoslovak government to the USSR Academy of Sciences (whether the gift was made willingly or not is still far from clear). A year later, in 1946, more documents were released from the *spetskhran* at the Lenin Library and added to the Burtsev collection. All that is known of the provenance of the Burtsev collection at RGASPI is that it was "acquired in 1969 from a collector in France".

Important though these two archives are for the study in hand, they nevertheless cannot match in value the information contained within another collection held at GARF. This is Burtsev's personal, four-volume Department of Police dossier: *Po rozysku Burtseva* (Concerning the Investigation of Burtsev) which I was fortunate enough to discover during a study trip to Moscow in April 2007, and

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which, I believe, has escaped the attentions of other Western researchers.\textsuperscript{33} Although incomplete (sadly, volume one is missing) its three extant volumes contain over 600 pages of agents’ reports, interdepartmental correspondence, circulars, copies of letters obtained by illegal interception and a wealth of other materials covering Burtsev’s activities during the period 1890 to 1897.

The contents of all of the above highlight a problem facing the Burtsev researcher that should not be underestimated: namely, Burtsev’s virtually illegible handwriting, which is often impenetrable to foreigner and native Russian alike.\textsuperscript{34} Fortunately, there are times when Burtsev lapses into legibility in his Russian hand, also, occasionally, writing in French or English. Moreover, when the situation gets desperate it is sometimes possible to guess at the content of his letters from his correspondents’ replies.

In addition to the above archives, extensive reference will be made in the present study to a series of unpublished documents from the Central Archives of the British Museum which, taken together, constitute a substantial and virtually untapped source of unique, biographical and historical information and which add considerably to our knowledge of the topics here under investigation: Burtsev’s association with the Russian émigré community in London and its British supporters; the circumstances leading up to his arrest in the Round Reading Room; and, perhaps more intriguingly, the extent and nature of the police and other ‘non-official’ surveillance of Russian exiles in London during the last decade of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{35} It may


\textsuperscript{34} In 1904 Jaakoff Prelooker, the Russian editor of the London émigré magazine \textit{The Anglo-Russian}, replied to a letter from Burtsev to the effect that he could not guess what the latter wanted since he could not make out his handwriting. A few months later Prelooker wrote again: ‘I positively cannot make out your handwriting. I can decipher the odd word here and there but I simply do not understand a thing. Please write slowly and clearly!’ RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 58 and 65. Prelooker to Burtsev 13 January and 16 June 1904.

be useful here to provide a brief description of the structure and content of the archive in question.\textsuperscript{36}

The main class of the British Museum Archives are the Minutes of the Trustees and the corresponding volumes of Papers and Reports (CE 1–8). Matters under discussion range from reports of Egyptian excavations and new accessions to the Museum's collections, to the more mundane issues of staff promotion and disciplinary matters. In the late nineteenth century it was the Trustees who had the ultimate responsibility for admissions to (and, in Burtsev's case, expulsions from) the Reading Room. Additional classes of relevance to this study include the Records of the Director's Office, which contain the Letter Books (CE 27) and the Register of In-Letters: Register and Numerical (CE 28) 1859–1947. Therein is to be found correspondence between the Director and a range of government departments, including the Home Office and Scotland Yard, on such diverse subjects as bomb hoaxes, suppressed books and reader admissions. The Volumes of Readers' Signatures are complete from 1842 to 1926, and are supplemented by the Temporary Admissions Signatures of Readers and their related volumes of indexes covering the years 1867 to 1927. Possibly the most valuable material is to be found in the Readers' Admissions Correspondence (CE 80–83), which comprises letters of application and testimonials and is virtually complete from 1890 onwards.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Surveillance}

All of the above add detail to Burtsev's biography, throw new light on Anglo-Russian political relationships of the period and provide ample proof of the popularity of the Museum Library amongst the Russian political émigré community. They also point to the presence in the Reading Room of other individuals, both English and Russian, whose primary purpose for admission was certainly not that of self-betterment, but rather, as will be demonstrated, the covert surveillance of the émigrés at their academic labours.

\textsuperscript{36} The archives date from the Museum's foundation in 1753 to the present and are retained by the Museum in its building in Bloomsbury where they are open for access by appointment.

With regard to the topic of surveillance, Bernard Porter's works on the early years of the Special Branch contain much of value. However, as Porter points out, the difficulty in obtaining access to certain police archives makes a comprehensive study of the subject difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. It is for this reason that he was unable to provide a full account of the life of Chief Inspector William Melville of Scotland Yard (1850–1918), who, as we shall see, was to play a key role in Burtsev's life in London. Fortunately, permission to access certain of these closed files was recently granted to Andrew Cook and, as a result, some of the mysteries surrounding Melville's career have now been explained. However, neither Cook nor Porter examined in detail the important links which existed between Melville's department and the Okhrana's Foreign Agency in Paris, though Cook does make reference to the valuable correspondence between these two departments which is to be found in the 'Relations with Scotland Yard' folder in the Hoover Institution's Okhrana archive. It is these links that will be explored here.

After the February Revolution of 1917 a multi-party committee, including S.G. Svatikov of the Provisional Government and the Socialist-Revolutionary, V.K. Agafonov, carried out an investigation in the Russian Embassy in Paris into the Foreign Agency's archive. The resultant report, which constituted the first Russian history of the Agency based on its own internal papers, is thorough and contains useful lists of all the Okhrana's operatives working in Europe. Among the first Western researches into the surveillance activities and other operations of the Russian political police abroad were those undertaken in the 1960s and published in the CIA's Studies in Intelligence series. These include a number of articles by the pseudonymous 'Rita T. Kronenbitter'. One such article, 'The Sherlock Holmes of the Revolution', concerning as it does Burtsev's unmasking of Azev, falls outside the

40 ibid., pp. 122–124, notes 10 and 14. The folder in question is located in HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 3.
42 A number of these declassified articles were republished in 1999. See supra p. 25, footnote 25.
remit of the present study, but nevertheless does contain some interesting comments on his personality and his position within the revolutionary movement.

Also of relevance to the present study is Kronenbitter's 'Paris Okhrana, 1885–1905', which is the first Western history of the Foreign Agency based on its own archive. In the words of the editor of the Studies in Intelligence collection, the articles reveal: 'the Okhrana’s foreign operations through anecdote, not analysis. For historians they suggest possibilities for more in-depth studies of Russian intelligence and counterintelligence operations in their formative period'. While this is a fair assessment, in that Kronenbitter's work does undoubtedly suggest the sort of areas for further study that will be explored herein, her work is of limited use to the historian due to the dearth of footnotes and references.

Richard Johnson was one of the first (after Kronenbittter) to make use of the Hoover Institution's riches to examine the activities of the tsarist secret police abroad and their relations with other police forces in Europe. While his work is of a much higher academic standard than that of Kronenbittter, he too pays little attention to the late Victorian period, focussing instead on the Foreign Agency's operations on the European mainland after 1905. By this time Burtsev had left London, both Petr Ivanovich Rachkovskii, the Head of the Foreign Agency and his successor, Leonid Aleksandroovich Rataev, had moved on, and William Melville had embarked on quite another career. With regard to the latter, Johnson makes the unfortunate mistake throughout his study of confusing the Chief Inspector with Assistant Commissioner of the CID, Sir Melville McNaghten. Perhaps one should not attach too much importance to this slip, though Johnson's belief that 'Melville' was the Chief Inspector's first rather than last name may have led him to the conclusion when examining the Rachkovskii–Melville correspondence that the two were on more intimate terms than was in fact the case.

Also, like many other scholars, Johnson neglects to take full account of certain invaluable documents contained in the Okhrana archive, such as agents' reports and,

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44 Fischer, Okhrana, in unpaginated preface, subsection 'Conclusions'.

45 Johnson, 'The Okhrana Abroad'.

46 ibid., p. 14.
in the case of Burtsev, the vitally important file on the tsarist informer Bullier. As mentioned above in the context of Burtsev’s personal life, it is my contention that any serious examination of his political development must also take this relationship into account. Davydov has referred, albeit obliquely, to the affair as being one of the major early causes of Burtsev’s ‘hatred of traitors, provocateurs, and the secret police which remained in his soul like a wound which would never heal’. The revolutionary’s relationship with Bullier, however, has been described in detail only once – and even then incompletely – by D. Gogol in a short article written in the 1920s. Gogol evidently based his study on Foreign Agency documents held by the Department of Police in Soviet Russia, which are less complete in some respects than those retained at the Hoover Institution. The latter, for example, include not only copies of the regular submissions and reports sent from Paris to St Petersburg, but also the source notes and agents’ submissions on which the regular official reports were based.

It is important, however, to bear in mind that the Foreign Agency in Paris was only one of the Department of Police’s sources of information on political exiles abroad. For example, regular reports were received from Russian consuls in London and the other centres of emigration in Europe (and, indeed, further afield). These documents and many more besides are contained in Burtsev’s police dossier referred to earlier.

Since the late 1980s, a growing number of Russian (and, indeed, Western) scholars have had the opportunity to consult the archive of the Department of Police at the State Archive of the Russian Federation and, as a result, have produced a collection of studies on various aspects of the Okhrana and its relations with political activists in the pre-revolutionary period. Perhaps one of the best of these is Z.I. Peregudova’s study of the Russian political police. Peregudova’s focus is again on the post-1905 period, but in a brief chapter she does provide something of value for the

47 Most of the Bullier dossier is located at HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (folder 2), while an extract is also to be found at 15/IIle/folder 3. ff. 662–667.


current study with regards to the history, personnel and the working methodology of the Foreign Agency.  

Charles Ruud and Sergei Stepanov’s collaborative work on the same topic again draws extensively on the GARF files and contains a useful chapter on the Foreign Agency that provides more details of P.I. Rachkovskii’s term as Head of that Department. The same cannot be said of Fredric Zuckerman’s handling of the topic, which takes no account of Russian archival sources but, rather, limits itself to those primary sources available in American repositories. Jonathan Daly was right to point out some of the shortcomings and inaccuracies of this work, though to dismiss it as ‘unusable as a work of scholarship’ is too harsh. Daly’s own study of the security police in Russia in the late nineteenth century, on the other hand, does merit serious attention. His exhaustive researches in the Moscow archives have resulted in a work which provides much of relevance to the present study, in particular his comprehensive description of the origins and development of the security police system and the various reforms of the 1870s and 1880s which helped transform the service within a matter of years into one of the world’s most efficient law enforcement agencies.

Of the handful of biographies of P.I. Rachkovskii, the head of the Foreign Agency in Paris from 1884 to 1902, the earliest is the 1918 article in the journal

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50 Peregudova, Politicheskii sysk. The author devotes one chapter to the Zagranichnaia agentura (Section 1, Chapter 4) but only eight of the twenty-eight pages of that chapter deal with the period before 1905.


Byloe.55 V. Brachev's biography of this most remarkable and unscrupulous individual is the most detailed, while his history of the Foreign Agency also contains a useful chapter on Rachkovskii's successor, L.A. Rataev.56 While I.S. Vakhrushev gives a detailed account of Rachkovskii's rise to power, R. Ganelin provides another slant on the man's unprincipled machinations – though like Brachev, he adds little to our knowledge of his subject's relationship with either Burtsev or Melville.57 A recent two-volume compilation of the memoirs of some of the heads of the Okhrana shows the continuing interest within Russia in the operations of the tsarist secret police.58 One of the latest Western studies on the Okhrana abroad is another work by Fredric Zuckerman which, though again based chiefly on American primary materials, does contain valuable information on both Rachkovskii and Rataev and references to several unpublished archival sources.59

The present study will examine in much more detail the relationship between Melville, Rachkovskii and their operatives using materials from the Hoover Institution, GARF and RGASPI. Also, by reference to previously unpublished materials from the British Museum archives, the study will show for the first time the extent of Scotland Yard’s undercover surveillance of the Russian community and demonstrate the lengths to which the British security services were prepared to go in their efforts to control foreign radicals in London. Moreover, by reference to other unpublished documents in the British Museum, new light will be shed on certain surveillance activities carried out not by police officers but by members of the

Museum’s staff. Such practices were hinted at in some contemporary accounts, which will also be examined.

**Foreign governmental pressure**

The influence of international politics on the life of Burtsev and the Russian revolutionary emigration in London has been described by Alan Kimball, and in more detail by Bernard Porter.\(^6\) As is quite clear from their accounts, Burtsev’s prosecution in London in 1898 was instigated at the behest of the Russian government, but the reasons why Britain was so keen to grant this favour to St Petersburg are not immediately evident. Many governments of the day were, each for their own reasons, keen to maintain and develop friendly relations with Russia, and Salisbury’s was no different. The British prime minister was seeking a rapprochement with Russia at the time: Britain’s diplomatic negotiations with Russia and Salisbury’s ‘approach’ in 1898 are dealt with by Alan Palmer, but the author fails to mention the Burtsev affair, which was certainly very much on the prime minister’s mind at the time.\(^6\) The extent of Salisbury’s personal involvement in the case has been demonstrated by both Kimball and Senese – the latter pointing out that, initially, the Home Office was not keen to prosecute and was only persuaded to reconsider its decision at the direct request of the prime minister.\(^6\) According to Johnson, at the time of the Burtsev case, ‘Russophobia was running high in England in the wake of Russian indications that she might undertake a unilateral settlement of the ‘Straits Question’ in which England had considerable interest.’\(^6\) Whether Salisbury hoped that his ‘sacrifice’ of Burtsev

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would in any way make the Russians more accommodating in their discussions on this major question is debatable. It may, however, have been one of a number of contributory factors leading to the trial.

Throughout the 1890s international pressure had been growing on Britain to take a stand against terror and to firmly demonstrate its opposition to the tactics employed by the new breed of bomb-throwing European terrorist by withdrawing the right of asylum for such dangerous political fugitives. As Porter points out, Salisbury was one of a minority in the early 1890s who was in favour of the introduction of this measure, and attempted to have it enacted in his 1894 Asylum Bill. Although the bill was defeated, pressures continued to grow, not least from Russia, which, by the turn of the century, had managed to reach agreements with almost all the governments of Europe concerning the extradition of 'anarchists' and other dangerous political fugitives. However, although Britain attended the international anti-anarchist conference in Rome in late 1898 she managed to avoid signing up to any agreement that might impinge on the right of asylum, a principle much treasured by the British public at least. Britain argued that there was no need for such international agreements as her existing laws were adequate to deal with any situation which might arise. And, of course, to demonstrate this Lord Salisbury could point to the recent case of a certain Russian 'terrorist' in London who had been brought to book and who was now firmly behind bars.

In analysing the background to Burtsev's prosecution one should not lose sight of the importance of personal opinion: Salisbury's own views of Russia and the tsarist regime certainly had some bearing on his actions. A description of how these views came to be formed is provided by Andrew Roberts, who shows that, as a High Churchman, Salisbury had an automatic sympathy with the Orthodoxy of the Russian crown. He points also to the longstanding (and, some would say, unhealthy) friendship which Salisbury and his wife had with Count Nikolai Ignat'ev, the Russian ambassador in Constantinople. Roberts also shows how, in 1891, for fear of spoiling the all-important Anglo-Russian relationship, Salisbury refused to allow his ambassador to St Petersburg to remonstrate with the tsar about Russia's pogroms and how, in the following year, Salisbury privately asked the ambassador whether he

64 Porter, Origins, p. 110.

65 ibid., pp. 112–113.
could take any steps to stop Jews emigrating to Britain (not placing the request in a formal despatch ‘because it is evidently so delicate’). Yet, unfortunately, in his study Roberts neglects to mention the prime minister’s personal contribution to the outcome of the Burtsev case.\(^{66}\) The current study, by reference to British parliamentary papers, diplomatic exchanges between London and St Petersburg and press reports of the day will attempt to establish the true reasons for the British government’s ‘u-turn’ in its policy on political asylum.

**International political association**

The first phase of the Russian political emigration to England, the so-called *dvorianskii etap* (the ‘nobility stage’), is usually said to have begun with Alexander Herzen’s arrival in London in 1852. But although Herzen developed contacts with a range of continental exiles during his stay in London, he did not form any particular friendship with any member of the British intelligentsia. The first such close Anglo-Russian associations did not come into being until the second wave of the emigration, in the late 1870s and early 1880s. This new emigration had been brought about by a crackdown on all liberal and radical opposition groups within Russia in response to the steadily increasing number of political killings that culminated, in March 1881, with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II.

While many members of the British public were appalled at this political lawlessness, there were also those, such as Edward Robert Pease and George Bernard Shaw, who were no less dismayed at the inequities of the autocratic system that had engendered such atrocities. In the course of the 1880s, contacts gradually developed between these English liberals, on the one hand, and the ‘new breed’ of Russian émigrés, such as Prince Peter Kropotkin and Sergei Kravchinskii (Stepniak), on the other. By the end of the decade the number of English men and women actively promoting reform in Russia was greatly bolstered following the publication, in *The Century Magazine*, of a series of articles by the American explorer George Kennan.

describing his impressions of Siberia and his meetings there with exiled dissidents such as F.V. Volkovskii and E.E. Lazarev. 67

Within two years, as a result of this growth in awareness of the political situation in Russia, the influential Society of Friends of Russian Freedom was formed under the presidency of the Liberal Robert Spence Watson. In 1970 Barry Hollingsworth's history of the SFRF appeared, in which he meticulously described the activities of the society through to its demise during the First World War, mentioning in passing its close involvement in the Burtsev trial of 1898, in both organizing an appeal and arranging for Burtsev's defence. 68 Since then a number of articles have been published concerning Anglo-Russian political and social affiliations. Chief among them is the special edition of the journal Immigrants and Minorities which appeared in 1983 and comprised contributions (either on the emigration as a whole or on individual refugees, from Volkovskii to Rothstein, and their relations with their British counterparts). Contributors to the special edition included Colin Holmes, Bernard Porter, John Slatter, Donald Senese and David Burke. 69 More recently, Burke has developed his essay on Rothstein and the influence of the Russian émigrés of the day on the British political movement. 70

This study will attempt to present a more detailed picture of the émigré community of the day, describing their complex inter-relationships: the constant


69 'From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain'. Special issue of the journal Immigrants and Minorities, vol. 2 no. 3 (November 1983).

uncertainty of who was friend (and who informer) and their interaction with their British and other European associates. By reference to documents held in The Institute of International Social History, attention will be drawn for the first time to Burtsev’s friendship with one such European comrade: namely, the German anarchist and historian Max Nettlau. Use will also be made of the various biographical and autobiographical works on the leading émigrés and friends of Burtsev, such as Kropotkin and Stepinak. One particularly curious biography of the latter, overlooked so far, is a short work published in Zurich in 1896 under the name Arkadij Schiriaeff. This was in fact the nom de plume of the Okhrana informer, Lev Dmitrievich Beitner, who some years earlier had struck up friendships with Volkhovskii, other members of the Russian Free Press Fund (Fond vol’noi russkoi pressy) and also, of course, with Burtsev. To date, little has been written on Beitner’s function as one of the Okhrana’s foremost informers and provocateurs in London, though he does merit a brief biographical note in L.P. Menschchikov’s useful compilation of Foreign Agency documents. Drawing on Russian Department of Police records, the present study will describe in greater detail the pivotal role he was to play in Burtsev’s life in emigration in London.

The diaries of Olive Garnett are also of immense value, giving as they do not only a detailed description of the émigré community’s daily interaction with their English counterparts but also unique glimpses into the life of her father, the Keeper of

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Printed Books at the British Museum, Richard Garnett and other of his colleagues at that institution. These accounts are of particular interest when read in conjunction with the official reports of the Museum Trustees for the same period.

Of course, Olive was not the only member of the Garnett family to take an interest in the Russian revolutionary movement. As V.V. Shirokova has pointed out, her sister-in-law, Constance Garnett, the famous translator of the Russian classics, was persuaded by Stepniak in 1894 to visit Russia, where she met the radical author and journalist V.G. Korolenko, passed on money and letters, and, more importantly, helped to establish links between the émigrés and the revolutionary organization within Russia. More recently, Anat Vernitski has published a short article concentrating on the relationship between Olive Garnett and Stepniak-Kravchinskii and pointing to parallels between her diaries and her literary works. It is unfortunate, however, that throughout this article Vernitski refers to Felix Volkhovskii, one of the major figures in the London emigration, as ‘Volkhonskii’. This careless error gives one reason to doubt either the thoroughness of the proof-reader, or the extent of the author’s knowledge of his subject.

The importance of the SFRF’s journal Free Russia in increasing public awareness will be stressed in the chapters that follow, as will the activities of the Russian Free Press Fund, both of which have already been covered to a certain extent by Oliver and Senese. A certain amount of work has also been done on the other major émigré journal of the period, The Anglo-Russian. However, the full extent of


76 Other such links between the emigration and the political movement within Russia are discussed in Shirokova, V.V. ‘Iz istorii sviazai russkikh revoltsionerov s emigrantami’, Osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie v Rossii, no. 8 (1978), pp. 41–52 (hereafter ‘Iz istorii sviazai russkikh revoltsionerov’).


79 See Slatter, J. ‘Jaakoff Prelooker and the Anglo-Russian’, Immigrants and Minorities, vol. 2 no. 3 (November 1983) (hereafter ‘Jaakoff Prelooker’), pp. 49–66. Also, Peaker, C. ‘We are not
Burtsev’s association with its editor, Jaakoff Prelooker, has been neglected and will be described here in detail. In addition, account will be taken of the impact of Burtsev’s own publications, especially Za sto let, Svobodnaia Rossiia, Byloe and, of course, Narodovolcets, which, during his trial, became one of the most widely-read political journals in Britain. As the author recalled:

*The Times* and others carried whole columns of the most striking passages from my articles about Nicholas II and the Russian government and my call to revolutionary struggle. Of course, before my trial, I could never have dreamed of obtaining such wide publicity for the cause. It was thanks to the Russian government and the English judiciary that I was given the opportunity to tell the world’s press everything that was on my mind.  

**British public attitudes to émigrés**

John Slatter has written that: ‘Intellectually speaking, the quarter century preceding the Great War was a time of greatly increased interest in and knowledge about Russia which it would not be an exaggeration to call ‘Russomania’. He finds the expression of this ‘Russomania’ in a dozen or so English novels of the day that contain depictions of Russian political refugees, and he describes how, in these works of fiction, the exiles:

...were seen as the passive victims of a horrible tyranny; as ideological missionaries or kulturträger, as adventurer-heroes, Indiana Ivanovs; and as a kind of negative mirror-image of the adventurer-hero, the traitor and self-seeker, often a double agent.  

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80 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 132.

81 Slatter, J. ‘Bears in the Lion’s Den: The Figure of the Russian Revolutionary Emigrant in English Fiction, 1880–1914’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 77, no. 1 (January 1999) (hereafter ‘Bears’), p. 37

82 *ibid.*, p. 54.
In popular literature, then, the Russian émigré could represent all things to all people but, unfortunately, within this world of fiction it is impossible to detect any trend or signs of the attitudinal change to these refugees which certainly took place in society as the century drew to a close. 83 As mentioned above, at the time of Burtsev’s arrival in London in 1891, thanks to the efforts of Kennan, Stepniak and Volkovskii and to the good works of the SFRF, the attitude of the British public to the tsarist government in Russia was primarily one of hostility. Conversely, friendship and support were exhibited towards those who revolted against it and who had been forced to flee their homeland as a result. Indeed, as Slatter has pointed out, the refugees had even managed to convince some of the moral justification of terroristic acts against the tsarist autocracy, arguing that:

terrorism and conspiracy were certainly repugnant and not morally justified in Britain where the government was elected, obeyed the laws which it had made and did not act above and beyond them: but in Russia, where the government was not elected and did not obey its own laws but acted above and beyond them, they were the only political choices left open to the people and were morally justified by the iniquity of the government. 84

Burtsev, in fact, had personally experienced the great strength of support from the British public in 1890, when he had paid a brief visit to London as a delegate from Paris to attend a series of meetings on the infamous Iakutsk atrocities. Reports of the massacre of a transport of political convicts in Siberia had sparked an angry protest march and rally on 9 March 1890 in Hyde Park, which attracted a great deal of supportive press attention. Russian exiles in London were invited to the demonstration, where it was suggested they should dress in their native costumes ‘so that the crowd may have an opportunity of recognizing them and expressing its sympathy for their sufferings.’ 85 And sympathy, indeed, there was. But although much

83 Bernard Porter is more successful in his attempt to demonstrate how the British public’s perception of foreign political radicals in general was reflected in the fiction of the day and how that depiction developed over the period in question. Porter, Origins, pp. 98–113.

84 Slatter, ‘Bears’, p. 36.

85 The Times, 10 March 1890, p. 6: ‘Treatment Of Russian Prisoners’. Also, 25 February 1890, p. 3: ‘The agitation against the Russian Atrocities’.
has been written on the views of the Victorian public to emigration as a whole, little research has been carried out on public attitudes to the presence in London of Russian political refugees at the time or, for that matter, on the noticeable shift in attitudes towards them as the decade progressed.\(^{86}\)

An exception is Bill Fishman’s excellent study, in which he describes the changing attitudes of the population of London’s East End to the steady rise in numbers of poor East European economic migrants throughout the period and also comments in some detail on the position of political militants within their numbers.\(^{87}\) As Fishman points out, the main grounds for anti-alienism were either economic (the perception that the influx of continental paupers had created a surplus labour market, thereby leading to a reduction in wage rates) or simply racist. However, there were also those, such as W. H. Wilkins, who opposed immigration on political grounds, accusing the incomers of swelling, ‘the secret socialistic or foreign revolutionary societies which abound in that part of the metropolis’, and which ‘have papers of their own circulated among themselves written in “Yiddish”, breathing the vilest of political sentiments – Nihilism of the most outrageous description.’\(^{88}\) The study will highlight the role played by the Russian Department of Police (and indeed by Scotland Yard) and the various means by which they sought to stoke up these fears and influence public opinion against the émigrés, such as their strategy of ‘seeding’ the British press: the inserting of alarmist reports into various newspapers and journals and the overstating and amplifying of the danger to the public of those foreign (and in that number) Russian nihilists, anarchists and terrorists in their midst. As will be demonstrated, more of the British public came to share these anxieties as the decade progressed.

The experience of Vladimir Burtsev precisely reflects this change in attitude: whereas upon his arrival in 1891 he had been publicly feted as a hero, by the time of his trial some seven years later, while still attracting support from British political


activists, the attitude towards him of the press and the general public had changed markedly. The earlier sentiments of sympathy and support for the plight of the political refugee were replaced by feelings of unease and anxiety that such dangerous individuals should be allowed to roam free in the public’s midst. The ‘Burtsev affair’ signalled a major change in British government policy towards political refugees and also mirrored a change in the public’s perception of them. One of the purposes of the present project, then, is to detail the reasons for this change and explain the causes of the public’s growing fear of aliens in general, which would lead first to the passing of the Alien’s Bill of 1905 and, ultimately, to Britain’s abandonment of its long-cherished policy of asylum.
Chapter One 1862–1891: From piety to protest

This chapter examines the period of Burtsev’s life up to his arrival in London on 6 January 1891. As well as offering a description of his childhood and education, attention is drawn to the social and political events that helped form his early political outlook and forced Burtsev, and many like him, into exile. The chapter also examines the prevailing attitudes of the British public towards the tsars and their people and the forces and events that shaped these attitudes. An account is given of the foundation and early development of a Russian secret police presence abroad, in the form of the Zagranichnaia agentura (Foreign Agency), based in the Russian embassy in Paris, and its less well-known ‘sister’ organization which operated from Bucharest, Romania. Finally, on the basis of previously unpublished Russian archival documents an account is given of the pursuit of Burtsev by this ‘Balkan Agency’ that culminated in his flight to Britain. This narrative throws new light on the operations of the Russian Department of Police and also on the diplomatic relations between Russia and her neighbours in this period.

First betrayal

Burtsev’s description of his family background and reminiscences of his early years are, as previously mentioned, sketchy and inaccurate. From these alone it is difficult to gauge the extent of familial influence (if any) on the development of his radical outlook. Neither his father, Lev Aleksandrovich, a staff captain in the Orenburg Cossacks, nor his mother, Sofiia Aleksandrovna (née Alatortseva), the daughter of a Collegiate Assessor, were likely candidates to preach the ‘revolutionary gospel’ to any of their four children, Iuliia, Aleksandr, Vera and Vladimir.¹ In 1870, after the early death of his father, Burtsev, then only eight years old, moved with his family from his birth-place, Fort Aleksandrovskii on the Caspian Sea,² to the home of his paternal aunt and her well-to-do merchant husband in the quiet provincial town of Birsk, in Ufa province, where his education and upbringing continued. After spending two years at the district school there, he moved on to the Ufa High School for Boys.

¹ The latter was born on 17/29 November 1862.
² Now Fort Shevchenko, Kazakhstan.
Apparently, the young Burtsev found the first two years difficult but he recalled coming top of the class regularly in years three to six. His aunt and uncle, like the rest of the inhabitants of Birsk, were law-abiding, God-fearing folk, who, far from wishing to instil any radical views in their nephew, rather hoped that once he had finished his education he would either take over the management of his uncle's distillery or become a doctor.

However, according to F.D. Akhmerova, not all of the young Burtsev's antecedents were of the same stock. His paternal grandfather, Aleksandr L'vovich, for example, had been implicated in the Decembrist uprising and had been brought to trial in 1826. Moreover, it would appear that the grandfather's rebellious spirit had passed down the line to reach not only Vladimir but also his elder brother Aleksandr, a graduate of the St Petersburg Technological Institute, who, in 1882, had been placed under secret police surveillance for corresponding with a former student at the Institute, the Jewish Social Democrat Iakov Rombro. It may be that Aleksandr, like his brother, would have gone on to pursue a revolutionary career had he not tragically died of a brain haemorrhage only five years later, at the young age of twenty-nine.

By his own admission, Burtsev was a deeply religious child who regularly attended church, visited the local monastery and even, at one point, considered becoming a monk. He recalled one spiritual experience in particular when, at the age of fourteen, he accompanied his aunt on a pilgrimage to Moscow to tour the holy sites, take part in the services and see the numerous miracle-working icons and relics. There, in one of the chapels of the Uspenskii Cathedral in the Kremlin, he was shown and invited to kiss a particular relic which, it was claimed, was one of the nails with

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3 GARF f. 5802, op. 2, ed. khr. 1. ll. 1–6. Avtobiografiia. Burtsev wrote these autobiographical notes at the request of his defence counsel in preparation for his trial in London in 1898.

4 Akhmerova, Burtsev, p. 9.


6 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 9.
which Christ had been crucified and which still bore traces of the Saviour's blood. Burtsev described the effect this experience had on him as transformational, producing a feeling of boundless elation and pride which shook him to his very soul, but which, at the same time, left him with a dull sense of deep-seated pain and anxiety.

Some months after this Moscow pilgrimage he fell ill and was obliged to spend some time in the hospital of his high school. There he whiled away the hours reading D.I. Pisarev's famous article on Turgenev's Fathers and Sons and John William Draper's The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science. (He continued to read voraciously from then on, spending a great deal of time in the well-stocked school library and becoming acquainted with the works of, among others, Plekhanov, Nekrasov, Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid.) Initially, the atheistic viewpoints of these authors made no impact on his faith but shortly thereafter he recalls undergoing some kind of spiritual crisis, suddenly realising that in the Uspenskii Cathedral he had been deceived, that Christ's crucifixion nail was nothing but an ordinary nail, that the blood on the nail (if indeed it was blood) belonged to anyone but Christ and 'that "they" knew, that they had lied over and over to me, continuously, consciously, and that they had done so out of self-interest or for some other reason which was even worse.' This, according to Burtsev, was his first 'betrayal' and, as will be shown, he was to experience many more such deceptions in his life, with each in turn having a significant impact on the development of his personality and on his world-outlook.

With his religious beliefs now seriously undermined, the young Burtsev was also obliged, at this time, to review his faith in the tsar and his government. This was triggered by a series of rumours that started to reach his remote corner of the

7 Pisarev's article 'Bazarov' first appeared in Russkoe slovo (Russian Word) in 1862. In Draper, John William. History Of The Conflict Between Religion And Science. London: King, 1875, the target of the author's criticism was primarily the Roman Catholic Church. His argument that 'the history of Science is a narrative of the conflict of two contending powers, the expansive force of the human intellect on one side, and the compression arising from traditioanary faith and human interests on the other', ensured that the work was placed on the Vatican's 'Index Expurgatorius'.

8 GARF f. 5802, op. 2, ed. khr. 1. II. 1–6. Avtobiografiia.

9 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 14.
provinces concerning the arrest in various parts of Russia of ‘nihilists’, ‘socialists’ and other enemies of the tsar, and the reports of the numerous political trials that followed. Indeed, between 1871 and 1890 some 200 such trials took place. At this point it may be worth describing in some detail the events that preceded these trials and the political consequences that ensued, for such events most certainly exerted a major influence on the young Burtsev’s political outlook.

Political trials and the direct action policy of Narodnaia volia

In 1874 the mass ‘Movement to the People’ (khozhdenie v narod) by supporters of the populist revolutionary society Land and Freedom (Zemlia i volia) was brought to a halt by police action. By the end of the year, of the thousands arrested, some 700 young agitators had been arraigned. The tsar was determined to prove to the country at large (and to the rest of the world) the extent of the sedition uncovered and, to that end, decided on a show trial. His hope was that the Russian people would be so horrified by the godless nature and the tremendous scale of the conspiracy that they would be driven back into the arms of their ‘Tsar-Liberator’. The meticulous preparations lasted over three years, during which time the list of the accused was gradually whittled down to manageable proportions. By the time legal proceedings finally got underway in October 1877 only 193 defendants remained in the dock. All were charged with belonging to a single conspiratorial society, the aim of which was alleged to be the violent overthrow of the government and ‘the slaughter of all officials and of the rich’. The trial ended some three months later with harsh sentences being handed down to virtually all the defendants.

This ‘frivolous comedy’, as one of the key defendants termed it, proved to be of no benefit to the autocracy. Indeed, if anything, the event showed only how out of touch with his people Alexander II had become. International press coverage was

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11 ibid., pp. 38–39. Even though the court had found 90 of the defendants innocent, the tsar used his prerogative to send 80 of those into administrative exile. Meanwhile, those found guilty received sentences from the court of up to ten years in exile, prison or penal servitude. Among those exiled were F.V. Volkhovskii, later to become an influential émigré in London and a close friend of Burtsev.
12 I.N. Myshkin in his speech for the defence. Cited in Troitskii, Politicheskie protsessy, p. 36.
uniformly critical of the heavy-handed prosecution, the weakness of the evidence and the disproportionate punishments. The special correspondent of *The Times*, for example, reported that 'The judicial and extra-judicial administration have conducted this affair in such a way that very many people blame the authorities and sympathize with the accused.' The trial was, in his view, a 'public scandal'. Moreover, within Russia, the outcomes of this (and other similar trials) were causing widespread outrage among the population at large, driving some of the opposition to extreme positions and provoking certain amongst them to the adoption of organized terror and to the policy of 'propaganda by deed'.

In late 1879 Land and Freedom split into two factions, the first of which, the Black Partition (*Chernyi peredel*), stressed the importance of propaganda among the workers, while the second, the Party of the People's Will (*Partiia narodnoi voli*), adopted a policy of terrorist struggle and political assassination. Anna Geifman argues that, initially at least, members of the Black Partition were also not totally opposed to the use of terrorist tactics and in support of her argument cites Vera Zasulich's attempted assassination of F.F. Trepov, the Governor of St Petersburg, in January 1878 as an early example of just such a terrorist attack. However, although it is true that this act is often regarded as the first act of political terror of the period, it is clear that terror was not on Zasulich's mind at the time. Rather, she carried out the act simply to avenge the maltreatment of one of her imprisoned comrades.

Her example, however, inspired many to follow suit and sparked a series of assassinations, the motives of which were unquestionably terroristic. These attacks, in turn, prompted the Council of Ministers to issue a decree imposing closed military court trials for those accused of such offences and to pass a law giving Gendarmes increased powers to arrest anyone suspected of being linked to political offences or to 'assemblies and demonstrations of a political nature'. Those so arrested could then be 'administratively exiled' by the Third Section and the Minister of the Interior, who

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13 *The Times*, 22 December 1877, p. 8: 'The Winter Season in St Petersburg'.


15 Two months after Zasulich's trial, Captain G.E. Geiking of the Kiev Corps of Gendarmes was murdered. This was followed in August 1878 by the murder of the head of the Third Section, N.V. Mezentsev, by Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii (Stepniak).
were merely obliged to inform the Minister of Justice of the steps taken without any need to offer a justification for their actions.\footnote{Ruud and Stepanov, \textit{Fontanka 16}, pp. 44–45.}

These new measures, however, did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the People’s Will. In February 1879, the Governor of Khar’kov, Prince D.N. Kropotkin was shot by the assassin Grigorii Gol’denberg. Then, in March, an attempt was made on the life of the new Head of the Third Section, A.R. Drentel’n, followed the next month by Aleksandr Solov’ev’s attempt on the life of the tsar himself. This, the third attempt on the emperor’s life since his reign began, appeared to engender scant sympathy for him either at home or abroad. In Britain, for example, little interest was shown in his predicament.\footnote{Given the level of Russophobia in the country at the time, the lack of British sympathy is perhaps not surprising. There was a continuing belief that Russia still posed a threat to Britain’s interests in India and jingoism against Russia was still rife following the diplomatic crisis over the Near East of the previous year, even though relations had improved following the Congress of Berlin.} On the contrary, on 29 April 1879 in the House of Commons, to cries of ‘Hear, Hear!’ Sir Robert Peel (Third Baronet) asked whether,

\begin{quote}
Her Majesty’s Government will take any steps, in the interests of humanity, to mitigate the horrors and atrocities amid which a reign of terror is now being carried on in Russia over 80 millions of people.
\end{quote}

He raised the question, he said, not in expectation of a satisfactory answer, ‘but in order to excite the attention of the House and to strike a chord of sympathy in this country for those who were suffering’\footnote{\textit{The Times}, 30 April 1879, p. 9, and 2 May 1879, p. 8. The answer received was, as expected, unsatisfactory: Sir Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, replying that no communication on the subject of the prosecutions being carried on in Russia had been received and that, in any event, it would not be consistent with the government’s duty to interfere with the internal affairs of another country.}.\footnote{18}

Meanwhile, within Russia, support for the radical opposition also appeared to be on the increase. Following its first meeting on 26 August 1879, the Executive Committee of the People’s Will issued a chilling decree condemning the tyrant tsar to death. A secret, unpublished, programme drawn up by the Committee at the same time, \textit{Podgotovitel’naia rabota partii} (Preparatory Work of the Party), discussed in
detail questions concerning the planning of a coup d'état, and assigned a significant role to terror, terming it the ‘detonator of the uprising’ (detonator vosstanii). 19

Thus, the party set about preparing for the uprising by adopting a wide-ranging programme of terrorist activities, combined with the dissemination of propaganda amongst workers, officers and students. Denouncing the emperor as ‘the personification of a despicable despotism, of all that is cowardly and sanguinary’ 20 the Executive Committee made yet further attempts on his life, which in turn convinced Alexander of the urgent need to review his security arrangements. 21 Shortly thereafter, he appointed Count M.T. Loris-Melikhov as head of a new Supreme Administrative Commission for the Preservation of State Order and Public Tranquillity (Verkhovnaia rasporiaditel’naia komissia po okhraneniiu gosudarstvennogo poriadka i obschestvennogo spokoistviia) which assumed control of all the country’s security forces. In August 1880 the old Third Section was abolished to be replaced by the Department of State Police.

These new, centralised arrangements, together with the collaboration of such informants as Grigorii Gol’denberg and Ivan Okladskii, soon began to bear fruit. 22 As the number of terrorist arrests grew, the Executive Committee was forced to take the decision to concentrate its remaining resources on its primary target, Alexander II, and, on 1 March 1881, eventually achieved its goal when the ‘despicable despot’ was

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19 A few months later the party would publish a more moderate version of its programme in the third number of its journal Narodnaia volia (The People’s Will). See ‘Programma Ispolnitel’nogo Komiteta, in Narodnaia volia: sotsial’no-revoluietsionnoe obozrenie. No. 3, 1 (January 1880).


21 In November 1879, a group of terrorists set off a series of dynamite explosions under what they believed was the tsar’s train. In early February 1880, Stepan Khalturin, set off a huge explosion immediately below the dining room in the Winter Palace where the tsar was expected to be. It caused a number of deaths and injuries but again Alexander was not among the casualties.

22 Gol’denberg was arrested in November 1879 in connection with the plot to blow up the tsar’s train. In prison he was persuaded to inform on his colleagues but later, realising what he had done, he hanged himself by tying a towel around his neck and suspending it from the wash-basin in his cell. Some ten years later in an English prison Burtsev himself would experiment with just such a method of suicide. Okladskii, on the other hand, experienced no such remorse, remaining in the employ of the police right up until the February Revolution of 1917.
assassinated alongside the Catherine Canal in St Petersburg by the bombers N.I. Rysakov and I.I. Grinevitskii, assisted by the young Sofiia Perovskaia.

Within Russia the regicide was met with a national outpouring of grief and with a great spectacle of pomp and ceremony as the tsar's body was transported from the Winter Palace to the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul. However, the nation was by no means united in its anguish. In recent years Alexander and his officials had lost the support of many, for a variety of reasons: the educated classes, for example, regarded the outcome of the Congress of Berlin, with Russia having to surrender much of what it had gained under the Treaty of San Stefano, as a national humiliation. Added to this, as the historian S.S. Volk has pointed out, the summer of 1880 had seen a poor harvest, leading to a rise in the price of bread with consequent mumblings of discontent and dissatisfaction spreading amongst the peasantry and the urban poor.

Moreover, as mentioned previously, the growing number of political trials were not having their desired affect of restoring the people's faith in the tsar, while the increased propaganda activities of the People's Will were attracting more popular support for radical solutions to the nation's problems. Indeed, during this period many within Russia (including the young Burtsev himself) believed that acts of terror, even regicide, could be morally justified. As Burtsev recalled, both the Party of the People's Will at that time and its 'natural successor', the PSR's Combat Organization some twenty years later, attracted broad support among society at large:

The government, apart from its bureaucracy and army, which stood aside from politics, enjoyed no support and was estranged from the entire country. Its estrangement from society was such that even in law-abiding circles all and each derived malicious pleasure from whatever had the smallest bearing on state authority.

23 The Russo-Turkish peace treaty signed at San Stefano on 3 March 1878 expanded the boundaries of Bulgaria to include much of Macedonia and gave Russia the right of occupation for two years, thus handing her the balance of power in the Aegean. The Treaty of Berlin, which was ratified by all the major powers a mere five months later, revised or eliminated most of the articles of San Stefano, including those concerned with the creation of a Greater Bulgaria. Back in Russia news of these concessions led to a strengthening of feelings of resentment towards 'honest broker' Bismarck's Germany and the jingoistic Britain of Disraeli and Salisbury.

Although platonic, sympathy there undoubtedly was for the revolutionaries. This manifested itself in general sympathy for political terror and, specifically, for attempts on the life of the tsar. The terrorists expressed social protest. More than that — they embodied society's hope. People wanted and expected terror. News of attempts on the life of the tsar and the murders of the likes of Sudeikin and then Plehve, were greeted with unconcealed joy. Many who had nothing in common with the terrorists and the revolutionaries in general went to meet them halfway. Terror was welcomed, not only by extreme left-wing circles, but also by moderate ones.  

Burtsev’s views on the level of public support for terrorist acts are not shared by many scholars. Jonathan Daly, for example, argues that, following the assassination of Alexander II, the revolutionary terrorists were left 'without a shred of public sympathy'. Richard Pipes, on the other hand, believes that Burtsev’s judgement is supported by other evidence and, indeed, according to Vera Figner, former member of the Executive Committee of the People's Will:

Society saw no escape from the existing condition: one group sympathized with the violence while others regarded it only as a necessary evil — but even they applauded the valour and skill of the champion. Outsiders became reconciled to terrorism because of the disinterestedness of its motives; it redeemed itself through renunciation of material benefits, through the fact that the revolutionist was not satisfied with personal well-being... it redeemed itself by prison, exile, penal servitude and death.

Moreover, sympathy for the terrorists and an understanding of why they felt obliged to embark on a programme of political assassination was not confined within the borders of the Russian Empire but was spreading throughout Europe and, indeed, to North America. For example, following the execution of those arrested in connection with Alexander's murder, the Liberal Viscount Morley expressed his deep sympathy

25 Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 41-42.
26 Daly, Autocracy Under Siege, p. 6.
for the fate of one of them, Sofiia Perovskaia, the first woman in Russia to be executed for a political crime, describing her as a 'saint in the revolutionary calendar'. Morley, J. 'Home and foreign affairs', The Fortnightly Review, vol. 29, no. 173 (1881), pp. 669–670. Meanwhile, in France and elsewhere mass meetings were held in support of those sentenced to death. As the reaction continued, criticisms of the brutality of the sentences grew both at home and abroad and so too did support for the opposition to the rule of the new despot, Alexander III.

First arrest: Sudeikin

At this point in the battle between the revolutionaries and the autocracy the young Burtsev had already come to a firm decision on where his sympathies lay. Like many of his generation in his small provincial town he had already formed strong anti-monarchist views and had gained the reputation of being a non-believer, a socialist and a revolutionary. As the assassinations, arrests and trials continued, Burtsev moved, in 1880, to continue his studies at the Kazan` Imperial High School. Leaving there in the spring of 1882, he was then admitted to the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at St Petersburg University, where he pursued his studies from 31 August 1882 to 25 September 1884. During this period, however, circumstances did oblige him to take some time off.

On 11 November 1882 Burtsev was one of 91 students arrested for attending one of a number of meetings at the university to protest at the expulsion of a fellow student. The student, a certain Krylenko, had drawn up a petition to protest at a vote of thanks which had been offered in the name of all students to the millionaire-speculator S. Poliakov, who had donated some 200,000 roubles to the university for the construction of a new student hostel. The protest meetings were broken up by the police, even though no political issues were being discussed but, as Burtsev recalled, 'In those days the discussion of such issues as the expulsion of students from university was equivalent to expressing a desire to overthrow the existing state

30 For a detailed description of international reaction to this and other political trials of the period see Troitskii, Politicheskie protsessy, pp. 166–176.
31 Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstana (hereafter TSGA RT) f. 977, op. 1/d/d. 30803. f. 3(ob). Cited in Akhmerova, Burtsev, pp. 12, 56 footnote 17.
order. He was imprisoned for a few weeks without trial in the cells of the Aleksandrovskii police station and it was during his confinement there that, for the first time in his life, he came face to face with professional revolutionaries and learned directly from them about the true nature and strength of the opposition. At that time, the decimation of the People’s Will was continuing apace, thanks in chief to the tactics of penetration, provocation and psychological warfare employed by Colonel G.P. Sudeikin of the St Petersburg police. Sudeikin’s activities were to have such an impact on Burtsev’s fate, that it is worth making a brief digression here to describe them.

In the spring of 1878, following the murder of Captain Geiking, Staff Captain Georgii Porfir’evich Sudeikin, recently transferred from Moscow, took over as head of the Department of Political Investigation in the Kiev Gendarmerie. Described later by Burtsev as ‘the most brazen-faced provocateur’, he soon achieved remarkable success, thanks to his skill in uncovering revolutionary plots, with the arrest of large numbers of Narodovoltsy. Indeed, thanks to his efforts, by February 1879 the terrorist movement in southern Russia had virtually been wiped out. In July 1881, as a reward for his achievements, he was transferred to St Petersburg to serve under Chief of Police V.K. Plehve and quickly set about the creation of a secret department, the functions of which were:

1. To instigate, with the help of special active collaborators, quarrels and disputes among diverse revolutionary groups;
2. To spread false rumours to threaten and terrorize the revolutionary milieu;
3. To transmit accusations that the most dangerous revolutionaries were spying for the police and, at the same time, to discredit revolutionary

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32 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 21.
35 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 26.
36 Pipes, Degaev, p. 37.
proclamations and various printed organs by depicting them as provocations of the secret police.\textsuperscript{37}

Burtsev himself witnessed an example of Sudeikin’s working methods when, in late 1882, the latter distributed a hectographed appeal, under the name of ‘The Society for the Struggle against Terror’ (\textit{Obshchestvo bor’by s terrorom}), to all the student groups in St Petersburg. It called on them, quite simply, to spy on each other in return for pardons for previous crimes, or permits for subsidized travel abroad.\textsuperscript{38}

The most infamous of his ‘active collaborators’ was, without question, Sergei Degaev a member of the Executive Committee of the People’s Will who was ‘turned’ by Sudeikin following his arrest in 1882. Among the literally hundreds of revolutionaries Degaev betrayed during his ignoble career was Vera Figner, the only remaining founding member of the Executive Committee still at large, who was arrested on 10 February 1883. To all intents and purposes it was this arrest that spelled the end of the People’s Will as a significant force in the fight against tsarist tyranny. Degaev, however, was soon to fall under suspicion of collaboration and eventually made a full confession of his crime to those few comrades that remained. He was persuaded to make amends by assisting in Sudeikin’s murder and, after much procrastination, in December 1883 he succeeded in luring Sudeikin to his flat, where he helped two other revolutionaries carry out the execution before making his escape abroad.\textsuperscript{39} Sudeikin’s method of policing, however, continued to produce results even after his death and, consequently, the threat from the revolutionary opposition continued to recede. His influence and teachings were also kept alive by two of his ‘star pupils’, P.I. Rachkovskii and A.M. Gekkel’man, both of whom, as will be shown, were to have a major impact on Burtsev’s fate at a later date.

\textbf{Active political involvement: second arrest, imprisonment and exile}

In February 1883 Burtsev was readmitted to the university to continue his studies. According to his memoirs, however, he rarely attended seminars or lectures, preferring instead to spend days at a time at the Public Library reading up on the


\textsuperscript{38} Burtsev, \textit{Bor’ba}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{39} For a detailed account of the affair see Pipes, \textit{Degaev}. 
political trials and consulting back issues of journals such as *Vestnik Evropy* (European Messenger), *Zemstvo* and *Poriadka* (Order), so as to better acquaint himself with the history of the revolutionary movement.\(^{40}\) This passion was one which would remain with him for the rest of his life and which will be examined in greater detail in a later chapter.

Seven years later, in an article in the first number of his journal *Svobodnaia Rossiia*, Burtsev described how he and many others like him had become disillusioned with the so-called ‘Old Party’ of the People’s Will, which had been all but obliterated by Sudeikin, and which was now regarded as a weak and spineless organization devoid of revolutionary spirit.\(^{41}\) He described how in St Petersburg he joined a ‘workers’ circle’ (*rabochii kruzhok*) composed of around seventeen, mainly student, members, whose aim was to carry out propaganda amongst the workers and attempt to revive the Movement to the People. In this, his group took the side of the poet P.F. Lakubovich’s ‘Young Party of the People’s Will’ (*Molodaia partiia ‘Narodnoi voli’*), which espoused ‘agrarian’ and ‘industrial’ terror: i.e. the murder of landowners and factory bosses, rather than the political terror of the kind practised by the ‘Old’ People’s Will.\(^{42}\) That summer, however, having participated in another ‘movement to the people’, Burtsev realised the insignificance and irrelevance of the views of his St Petersburg working group to those living in the countryside and later came to reject non-political terror completely as a ‘study group tendency’ (*kruzhkovaia tendentsiia*).

In late September 1884 he asked to be excused from his course at St Petersburg University and moved to Kazan’, where he entered the Faculty of Law at the city’s university.\(^{43}\) A month later he received news of the arrest in St Petersburg of the old and much respected revolutionary German Aleksandrovich Lopatin, whom Burtsev had met for the first time the previous year when the former had returned from foreign exile and had travelled around various urban centres trying to recruit

\(^{40}\) Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, p. 30.


\(^{43}\) TSGA RT. f. 977, op. 1/d. 30803. l. 3 (ob). Cited in Akhmerova, *Burtsev*, pp. 12, 56 footnote 18. The entry in the archive reads ‘uvolen soglasno ego prosheniu’.
activists and sympathizers in an attempt to resuscitate the Party of the People’s Will.  
His arrest, however, led to the opposite result. Over the next few months it proved to have dire consequences for the opposition leading to the apprehension of 97 revolutionaries, one of whom was Burtsev.

The events that preceded his arrest are laid out in a Gendarmerie report for the period and are also described in some detail by Burtsev himself. They are worth recounting here, if for no other reason than that they give a rare early glimpse into Burtsev’s mental agility and cunning. He had previously given Lopatin a list of addresses of his acquaintances, which was confiscated by the police following the latter’s arrest. Then, in December 1884, Burtsev wrote pseudonymously and using chemical inks, to one of the names on the list, a Iuliia Ponosova, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, who at that time was in St Petersburg on revolutionary business. In his letter he detailed how the distribution of revolutionary propaganda in Kazan was progressing and asked for more material to be sent. He also referred to the arrest of Lopatin and others in St Petersburg and asked for more details. Due to his poor handwriting the pseudonym he used could be read as either ‘Vl. Korolev’ or ‘V.I. Korolev’. The letter, of course, was seized by the St Petersburg police and despatched back to Kazan where the local Gendarmerie, after a few fruitless weeks spent interviewing countless Korolevs, Vladimir Ivanovics and plain Vladimirs, eventually tracked Burtsev down, confirmed a hand-writing match, and took him into custody.

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44 Ulam, Prophets, p. 392.
45 Daly, Autocracy under Siege, p. 47.
46 TSGA RT. f. 199., op. 2. d. 14. II. 134–135. Obzor vazhneishikh doznaniy proizvodivshikhsia v zhandarmskom Upravlenii Imperii po delam o gosudarstvennykh prestupleniakh za vremia s 1-go ianvaria 1885 goda po 1-e ianvaria 1888 goda. Cited in Akhmerova, Burtsev, pp. 12, 56, 57, footnote 18. Burtsev’s version of events is to be found in Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 33–35.
47 According to a later newspaper account, Lopatin had tried to swallow the piece of paper but the arresting officers had prevented him from so doing by means of semi-strangulation. Another earlier account had Lopatin first attempting to stab himself and then trying to use poison before being throttled by the police. See Birmingham Daily Post, 10 January 1891, p. 7: ‘Russian Police and their Quarry: A Strange Story’. Also, The Times, 9 July 1887, p. 17: ‘The Nihilists in Russia’.
48 According to Burtsev’s revolutionary chronology, the arrest took place on 20 February 1885. See Burtsev, Za sto let, p. 124.
Rather than admitting to the authorship of the Ponosova letter, Burtsev devised a cunning plan which involved getting hold of some similar inks and paper and sending another letter to the same address. This communication, again intercepted by the St Petersburg police, described the arrests which were taking place in Kazan' including that of 'some Burtsev or other'. Subsequently a telegram was sent from the capital to Kazan' ordering Burtsev's release, as it seemed obvious from this letter that some mistake had been made. Burtsev mockingly recalls the perplexity of the investigating Gendarmerie colonel in Kazan' upon receipt of the second letter, the latter saying to him, 'You are either a completely innocent man, or an inveterate criminal!' Then, later, while trying to persuade another prisoner to betray Burtsev the colonel is reported to have exclaimed, 'No mercy should be shown to the likes of Burtsev – they should drown him like a pup!' 49

Unfortunately, in the end, the ruse did not come off – though why it failed is unclear. According to Burtsev, the police simply told Ponosova that he had confessed to being the author of the letter and at this news she gave in, admitted to her acquaintance with him and confirmed his authorship. According to the Gendarmerie report, however, the investigations into Burtsev and Ponosova had revealed that they were acquaintances of Lopatin who, when examined, admitted to knowing them and personally gave evidence that he 'had despatched Burtsev, on more than one occasion, with assignments of a revolutionary nature to various parts of the Russian Empire'. 50 If the latter version is correct, then it would lead one to conclude that Burtsev was yet again the victim of betrayal – this time at the hands of someone widely regarded as one of the most trustworthy and honourable revolutionaries of the period and, moreover, someone who, from 1908 onwards in emigration in Paris, would become one of Burtsev's closest collaborators and friends. It is, however, almost impossible to accept that someone of Lopatin's revolutionary pedigree would ever intentionally inform on a comrade. If, on the other hand, he did, then he received no reward for his help from Alexander III, for he was kept in prison without trial until 1887, when, at the famous 'Trial of the 21', he was given the death sentence, later commuted to life imprisonment. Lopatin was to spend the next eighteen years in solitary confinement in

49 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 35.

50 Akhmerova, Burtsev, p. 12.
the Shlisselburg (Oreshek) Fortress before being released following the 1905 revolution, a tired and broken man.

On reading Burtsev’s account of his arrest, one is almost left with the impression that he treated the whole affair as some huge game – even as he describes his transfer, after several months in prison in Kazan’, to a preliminary detention centre in St Petersburg he talks of his expectation of imminent release in an almost light-hearted manner. The tone of the narrative changes sharply, however, when he describes the horrors which he endured following his unexpected transfer, in the middle of the night, to the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress, where:

after being asked a few questions I was led into a room and, in the presence of the Colonel, the bastion overseer, a few Gendarmes and about a dozen convoy members, was forced to strip naked. They gave me slippers, placed me in the middle of the convoy and led me down the corridor to another room. Here they began a thorough bodily examination, combing through my hair, looking into my ears, probing around in my mouth and so on. I could feel how all of those present, some fifteen or twenty people, were attentively following the movements of the two Gendarmes examining me. What I experienced then I had never previously had to go through. I felt like some object which was being unceremoniously turned around in someone’s hands and studied. It was only then that I came to a full understanding of what it was to endure a strip search in the Peter and Paul Fortress, about which rumours had created legends. Resistance was, of course, out of the question. I simply had to grit my teeth and try to numb myself to the experience. The search ended. No ‘seditious material’, as they termed it, had been found. They dressed me in a convict’s gown and slammed my cell door shut.52

One senses not only the author’s disgust at his degrading, inhuman treatment at the hands of his captors, but also an inability to comprehend the reasons why he should be dealt with in such a manner. Even by the standards of the Russian police of the day the punishment seemed to be out of all proportion to the crime committed: that of distributing propaganda. Then, during one of the interrogations, all became clear when it was revealed that he was suspected of participating in the murder of none other than General Sudeikin:

51 D. P. Z. i.e. Dom predvaritel’nyi zakluchenie.

52 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 36.
I was astonished at the absurdity of the accusation, but at least it explained why they had transferred me with such caution. It turned out that the Gendarmes did not know the flat where the meetings between Degaev, Sudeikin’s killers, and Lopatin and the others had taken place. Then my landlady had testified, first from photographic evidence, and then by direct confrontation that all of these individuals had visited me in my flat. In fact, not a single one of them had ever paid me a visit.\footnote{ibid., p. 37.}

Thus, betrayed again and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, Burtsev managed to survive a full year of solitary confinement in the Trubetskoï Bastion ‘without any particularly dreadful consequences’.\footnote{‘bez osoboï lomki’ – Burtsev, ‘Iz moikh vospominaniia’, p. 55.} He was then sentenced to four years’ exile in Siberia and moved to the Butyrka transit prison in Moscow, where he spent the winter of 1886. In May of the following year he began his long journey, as part of a transport of political prisoners, to his place of exile, the village of Malyshevskoe, in Irkutsk province, where he was to arrive only in December of that year.

Burtsev’s memoirs contain little information on this period of exile.\footnote{He did, however, leave a brief description of his journey into exile in an autobiographical note ‘Iz Sibirskoi zhizni’, Svobodnaia Rossia, no. 3 (1889), pp. 18–20.} Suffice it to say that even before arriving he had made up his mind to escape and this he set about doing on 3 July 1888.\footnote{Burtsev, Za sto let, p. 132. Though daring, his escape was by no means uncommon. According to Russian government statistics, over the period 1866–1886, as many as twenty-four per cent of those exiled managed to escape. See The Times, 19 November 1886, p. 6: ‘Siberia as a Penal Colony’.} Dressed for one part of the journey as a high school student, he managed to make his way, using a variety of means of transport, through Tomsk, Tiumen’, Perm’, Kazan’ and Saratov to Odessa, where he met up with the revolutionary Iu. Rappoport and with him continued his journey across the border, passing through Cracow and Vienna and eventually arriving in Geneva in the autumn of 1888.\footnote{Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 39.}
In emigration in Switzerland

On his journey from Siberia Burtsev had made contact with a number of his compatriots along the way. One of these was Ol’ga Nikolaevna Figner, who was in exile in Kazan’ with her husband when Burtsev passed through. She and other members of her revolutionary circle in Russia asked Burtsev to take over the production of their journal Samoupravlenie (Self-government) upon his arrival in Switzerland. The previous year the journalist A.S. Belorusov and some of his revolutionary comrades had had the idea of setting up a free political journal abroad that would run articles sent from Russia and, with the assistance of V.K. Debagorii-Mokrievich in Geneva, numbers one and two of the journal had already appeared (in December 1887 and May 1888 respectively).

In February 1889, after a hiatus of almost a year, issue number three of Samoupravlenie appeared under Burtsev’s editorial control. Figner had given him permission to include additional materials from the émigré community and this he did. Both numbers three and four (the final number, which appeared in April 1889) contain contributions not only from revolutionaries within Russia, but also from émigrés such as Stepniak, Zasulich, Plekhanov, P.B. Aksel’rod, M.P. Dragomanov and I.I. Dobrovolskii. Burtsev was also one of the first to include translations of articles by the American explorer George Kennan, such as ‘Prison Life of Russian Revolutionaries’ (Tiuremnaia zhizn’ russkikh revoliutsionerov) and ‘The Final Declaration of the Russian Liberals’ (Poslednee zaiavlenie russkikh liberalov). As always, Burtsev was eager to demonstrate that the radicalism of the revolutionary opposition also received support abroad, citing Mark Twain, who, after one of Kennan’s lectures in Washington in the spring of 1889, declared that, ‘If a government such as the current Russian one can only be brought down by dynamite, then thank God for dynamite!’

While working on Samoupravlenie Burtsev had also started up his own journal, Svobodnaia Rossiia (Free Russia), which he co-edited with Debagorii-

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58 Figner (Flerovskii), O. N. (1865–1919) Youngest sister of Vera Figner.
59 Samoupravlenie, no. 3 (1889), pp. 3–13 and no. 4 (1889), pp. 13–18.
60 ibid., pp. 18–19.
Mokrievich and Dragomanov. The journal’s draft political programme appeared on the front page of issue number three of May 1889 and is worth examining here, for it not only gives some indication of Burtsev’s own political outlook at that time, but the very nature of the political demands outlined shows the extent of the oppression which the Russian people were enduring.

In their programme the editors demanded, firstly, the establishment of political freedom, which they saw as essential if Russia was to turn from a despotic state in which power lay in the hands of an unaccountable bureaucracy into a free state. To this end it was necessary to introduce a number of measures that could be termed either ‘transitional’ (perekhodnye) or ‘organic’ (organicheskie). There were six of the former:

1. The lifting of the current state of siege. (The abolition of the 1881 Statute on State Security.)
2. The return of rights to all those in administrative exile and the declaration of an amnesty for all political prisoners.
3. The dismantling of the State Police and the system of administrative exile.
4. The removal of all amendments to the Statute on Zemstvos and the Legal Statutes of 1864.
5. The reimplementation of the 1863 Universities’ Charter and the removal of all restrictions to the right to education by ministerial order and the removal of various constraints on grounds of religion or nationality.
6. The reinstatement of higher education courses for women.

The organic measures came under two headings:

I. The immediate publication of a range of laws guaranteeing individual rights such as:
   1. inviolability of the person or dwelling by police without a court order
   2. inviolability of letters and telegrams
   3. freedom to chose one’s place of habitation and occupation
   4. inviolability of national languages in private and public life
   5. freedom of conscience and religious belief

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61 Svobodnaia Rossiia nos. 1-3, (February–May 1889).
6. freedom of speech, of the press, and of education
7. freedom of assembly and freedom to petition
8. freedom of associations and societies
9. freedom to pursue civil and legal actions against all bureaucrats.

II. The following steps to be taken to allow the population to assume control of the behaviour of the current administration and to make possible the establishment of social self-government:

1. The immediate convocation of a conference of representatives from regional zemstvos to draw up proposals for administrative reform and changes to the Statute on Zemstvos of 1864.
2. The convocation of a conference of representatives from town dumas to draw up proposals for alterations to the Statute on Towns of 1870.
3. The summoning to the State Council of delegates from the above two conferences (with equal voting and speaking rights as the current members of the council) to embark on discussions of the bills drawn up by said conferences.
4. The introduction of zemstvo and town electoral organisations to all parts of the empire where these do not currently exist.
5. The granting of the right to all zemstvos to call joint conferences to decide on the implementation of measures of mutual benefit.
6. The setting of a date (by Imperial Decree) for the convocation of an all-state Zemskii Sobor with legislative powers to be composed of zemstvo and town duma representatives and also representatives from higher educational establishments.
7. Until such time as the Zemskii Sobor is established – the granting of the right to zemstvo and town dumas to petition the Supreme Power and the right to debate these requests in the State Council.
8. Following the establishment of the Zemskii Sobor, – ministers to be appointed by the Emperor independently from the Zemskii Sobor, but to be answerable to the Zemskii Sobor which will have the power to take them to court before a special Supreme State Court.
9. A State (Supreme) Court – to be composed of permanent members chosen by the Emperor from a list of candidates drawn up for him by
the Zemskii Sobor. It is this court which will deal with cases brought against ministers by private individuals.

All in all, the programme could hardly be termed 'radical' — or at least no more so than any other political programme to be found in any other émigré journal of the day. Nowhere is there to be found any threat of political terror or assassination. Indeed, there is not even a call for the tsar to abdicate. One can understand why such a programme would anger old Narodovoltsy, such as I.V. Dembo (Brinshtein), but it is unclear why it did not attract the support of the constitutionalists. In fact, Burtsev, as well as listing his demands for a constitution, had also wanted to publish a warning that if the government refused to meet these demands, then the consequence would be an open call to active revolutionary struggle. Both Dragomanov and Debagori-Mokrievich, however, were firmly opposed to such a statement, and it was clear that, with such a divergence in views on the editorial board, the journal could not continue for much longer.62 (In fact, Burtsev had already decided to leave Switzerland and try his luck in Paris and the events surrounding his stay in the French capital will be described in due course.)

The remainder of issue number three of Svobodnaia Rossiia was given over to a series of political letters from Turgenev (in the main to Herzen). Also included was Burtsev's reminiscence of his Siberian exile and an article entitled Krovooprolitie v Iakutske (Bloodshed in Iakutsk) dated 25 March 1889, which concerned the massacre of a group of political convicts by soldiers in Siberia.63 This report was based on an undated, anonymous six-page letter which Burtsev had received from Russia, the original of which is to be found in The Russian State Archive of Social and Political History.64 Burtsev's Free Russia article was the first press report of that tragedy which, the following year, was to cause outrage throughout the world.

62 Burtsev, Bor'ba, pp. 83–84.
63 Svobodnaia Rossiia, no. 3 (May 1889), pp. 15–20.
64 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 13. ‘Do vas, veroiatno, doshli slukhi ob uzhasnoi istorii, kotoraia razigralas', u nas v Iakutske 22go Marta 1889 goda.’
The Iakutsk massacre and Kara tragedy: British public outrage

On their arrival at Iakutsk a transport of some thirty administrative exiles received orders from the vice-governor that they were to proceed immediately to more distant places of exile. The exiles were aware that to undertake such a journey at that time of year without proper preparation and provisions would result in certain death for many and, therefore, drew up a petition of protest. Following confusing and contradictory orders from the police, the exiles refused to leave the house where they had been stationed. The police and soldiers apparently lost patience and opened fire, resulting in six deaths and numerous wounded. Those who remained alive were then court-martialled for insurrection. All were found guilty and sentenced to long terms of penal servitude, with the exception of three who were sentenced to death and subsequently hanged. Later that year Burtsev succeeded in getting the story into the foreign press, sending articles to, among others, Stepniak in London. On 16 December 1889, The Times carried its first report of the tragedy, describing it as 'one of the worst instances of arbitrary and cruel conduct to be found, even in the records of Siberian prisons'. Ten days later it carried a lengthy editorial in which it declared, 'It is a story which the Russian government cannot afford to pass over. Superior to public opinion as it professes to be, there is a point beyond which it cannot go in disregarding the verdict of mankind.' As Burtsev recalled:

All the English newspapers were full of indignant articles against the barbaric acts of the Russian government. The European press declared that it was impossible to reconcile oneself with such barbarism. General sympathy was on the side of the suffering exiles. I remember also articles in Clemenceau's Justice and reports in the Swiss press.

The next report of maltreatment of political prisoners to reach the press concerned the Kara outrage of November 1889. Following provocation from the Director of Kara...

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65 The Times, 16 December 1889, p. 5: 'Reported slaughter of Siberian Prisoners'; and 26 December 1889, p. 7: 'Editorial'.

66 Burtsev, Bor'ba, pp. 82–83. Indeed, the story was to travel even further afield. In February 1890, for example, the New York Times ran a story, based on evidence supplied by George Kennan, entitled 'Men Shot Down like Dogs; the True Story of the Yakutsk Massacre'. See The New York Times, 8 February 1890, p. 5.
prison in eastern Siberia, the former teacher and member of the People’s Will Nadia Sigida retaliated by slapping him in the face. For this offence she was stripped and given 100 lashes. As *The Times* reported ‘such infamies were not perpetrated on ladies of rank and position even in the time of the Emperor Nicholas’.\(^{67}\) Sigida died two days later and, in protest, three of the other women prisoners committed suicide. When news reached the nearby men’s prison, two of the inmates there followed suit.\(^{68}\)

As news of these atrocities spread, the level of public protest grew – in particular in England, according to Burtsev.\(^{69}\) A series of meetings was arranged in London, culminating, on 9 March 1890, in an angry protest march and rally in Hyde Park that attracted a great deal of supportive press attention. Russian exiles in London were invited to the demonstration with Burtsev himself paying a brief visit as a delegate from Paris.\(^{70}\) The public’s sense of outrage at these crimes was expressed by Algernon Swinburne in his ode to Russia, which appeared in the press later that year.\(^{71}\)

**Early Russian requests to Britain regarding émigrés**

These were dark days indeed for the tsarist government, which, throughout the 1880s, thanks (in large part) to the activities of the revolutionary opposition in emigration, had seen the gradual erosion of what little international support it had previously enjoyed. By crushing all opposition at home after the assassination of Alexander II the government had, effectively, created a rod for its own back by forcing the revolutionaries abroad, thereby removing them from the control and supervision of the Department of Police.

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\(^{67}\) *The Times*, 11 February 1890, p. 4: ‘Flogging and Suicide of Female Political Prisoners in Siberia’.

\(^{68}\) Some reports suggest that Sigida, weakened by a previous hunger strike, simply died of her wounds, while others believe she too had committed suicide by taking poison.

\(^{69}\) Burtsev, *Za sto let*, pp. 231–232.

\(^{70}\) *The Times*, 10 March 1890, p. 6: ‘Treatment Of Russian Prisoners’. Also, 25 February 1890, p. 3: ‘The Agitation Against the Russian Atrocities’. Burtsev’s attendance is referred to in a later report from Scotland Yard. See TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222/1a f. 3. ‘Nihilist Literature’.

\(^{71}\) Swinburne A. ‘Russia: an ode’, *The Fortnightly Review*, no. 284 (1890), pp. 165–167. It may be mentioned that the Burtsev archive at RGASPI contains an anonymous, undated translation of this ode ‘dedicated to V. Burtsev, tireless toiler for national happiness’. See RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 200.
The Russian government had for some time been concerned about the liberty that Britain was affording these political criminals and, as early as 1878, had shown its keenness to pursue its opponents beyond the borders of Russia. In October of that year Lord Salisbury, then Foreign Secretary, wrote to Home Secretary Richard Assheton Cross, passing on a request from the Russian chargé d’affaires in London, M.F. Bartolomei.\(^2\) The latter had approached Salisbury to enquire whether Howard Vincent, the assistant commissioner of the newly formed Criminal Investigations Department of the Metropolitan Police, might consider releasing some of his officers to assist temporarily in 'the watching of the refugees who congregate in London'.\(^3\) Bartolomei himself had received the request from the newly appointed head of the Third Section, General A.R. Drentel’n.\(^4\) Apparently, the latter had received information that certain Russian refugees in London were plotting the assassination of the tsar and he simply wished the St Petersburg police to be informed immediately the assassins set off for Russia. It is far from clear, though, who Drentel’n suspected.

In 1878 the centre of the emigration was still in Switzerland. It was in Zurich and Geneva that the likes of Prince Kropotkin, Vera Zasulich and Sergei Stepniak were to be found, while the old revolutionary Nikolai Chaikovskii had already left England for France and would not return until the summer of 1880. The general feeling among Russian refugees at the time was that England, separated from the mainland by the Channel, was simply too remote, while those who had experienced life in London shared Kropotkin’s first impressions of the English capital in 1875: ‘Life without colour, atmosphere without air, the sky without a sun, had the same effect on me as a prison. I suffered for air. I couldn't work.’\(^5\) On that occasion he had moved to Geneva as soon as his work would allow him. It was only in the 1880s, with Switzerland’s apparent new willingness to submit to any request from St Petersburg

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\(^2\) TNA, PRO HO 45/9473/A60556: ‘Instructions of Secretary of State as to course to be taken in event of application by Foreign Minister to Home Office re Russian Refugees.’ Salisbury to Cross 10 October 1878, ff. 3–6.

\(^3\) The CID had been founded by Vincent on 8 April that year.

\(^4\) That month Drentel’n had taken over from a temporary appointee, N.D. Seliverstov, who himself had only been in post since Stepniak’s assassination of his predecessor, General Mezentsov in August 1878.

for the expulsion of a refugee, that the centre of the emigration shifted back across the Channel.

Whoever these London conspirators were, Bartolomei’s request for direct contact with the CID caused alarm in the Home Office. Cross contacted his under-secretary, Godfrey Lushington, immediately, urging him to treat the matter with great caution and requesting that the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Colonel Sir Edmund Henderson, be informed of the situation forthwith and invited to offer an opinion. Henderson produced a memorandum on the subject that day, very much depreciating any direct communication between the Russian Embassy and the police, warning that such acts of political espionage were apt to cause ‘great animosity against the government among a large class of the people’ and advising that ‘any interference with the right of asylum in this country for political refugees is sure to arouse much feeling’.76 Lushington himself was of the view that:

Russian refugees could not be watched effectively or for any length of time without the fact being known. And if it did become known, no one can say how far the present feeling against Russia, and the long-established feeling on the subject of absolute government, right of asylum and secret police would not carry the public, when inflamed by political and social agitators.

Lushington also advised the Secretary of State against taking any middle measures, cautioning that:

having once begun, however moderately, it would be most difficult for you to stop. It would be impossible to draw the line between refugees conspiring against the life of the Emperor and other political refugees. Suppose, for instance, you agreed at first only to watch the refugees here, then, one of them, you learnt, was starting for Russia on a Nihilistic campaign – if you announced that to the Russian embassy, the result would be that the moment the man set foot in Russia, he would be arrested and either shot or sent to Siberia. Imagine the consequences in England if such a man was a Kossuth or a Garibaldi.77

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76 TNA, PRO HO 45/9473/A60556. f. 17. Henderson Memorandum 15 October 1878.

77 TNA, PRO HO 45/9473/A60556. ff. 10–15. Lushington to Cross 15 October 1878.
Taking these opinions into account, Cross issued the cautious order that, should any application be made by any foreign ambassador for the intervention of police to detect or prevent any crime against English Law, then the Treasury Solicitor should be consulted as to whether the information justified the interference of the English police and that his advice be acted on accordingly.  

Following the Home Secretary's ruling, it is unclear whether Bartolomei ever did make an official written request for police assistance: he appears to have favoured the informal (and rather pushy) approach – turning up at the Foreign Office a few days after his first communication to Salisbury 'expecting to be instructed to go over to the Home Office and there be informed with what officer he was to put himself into communication'. Lushington also expressed some concern about the extent of Bartolomei's personal friendship and the nature of his direct dealings with Assistant Commissioner Vincent, who had even invited him (Lushington) to dinner to meet the Russian chargé d'affaires. It would be wrong to infer, from Lushington's comments alone, that Vincent may not have been averse to bypassing standard procedures and doing some unofficial business with his Russian counterparts. However, as will be shown, in the years that followed there is no doubt that just such unofficial relationships were formed between the police departments of the two countries.

The foundation of the Zagranichnaia agentura

With or without the formal assistance of the British and the other European police forces, the Russian government deemed it essential that their fugitives be watched over and, where appropriate, sent back to face justice in Russia. With that in mind, in July 1883, the director of the Department of Police, Plehve, set up a Zagranichnaia agentura, (Foreign Agency) in the Russian Embassy in Paris, whence agents could be dispatched to any other European country, including Britain. The Agency was headed initially by Court Counsellor P.V. Korvin-Krukovskii, who, unfortunately, enjoyed

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78 ibid., ff. 8–9. Cross to Lushington 30 October 1878.
79 ibid., ff. 10–15 Lushington to Cross 15 October 1878. In June 1880 Bartolomei moved to Washington to take up the position of ambassador to America but was recalled eighteen months later following complaints about the 'irregular behaviour' of his English wife and sent to the Russian embassy in Japan. He died in 1895. See: http://www.telecom-f.ru/library/0/001/004/138/4.htm.
little success in the post and was replaced in the summer of 1884 by the former police
informant and close associate of Sudeikin, Petr Ivanovich Rachkovskii.

Following Sudeikin’s assassination, Rachkovskii had been sent to Paris to
track down Degaev’s wife, hoping thereby to discover the whereabouts of the
murderer himself. Unsuccessful in his task, he nevertheless stayed on in Paris, took a
French wife and, following his appointment to the Foreign Agency, gradually started
to put his stamp on it. In a letter of 1885 to a senior French policeman Rachkovskii
showed he was a true follower of Sudeikin, clearly spelling out his intentions thus: ‘I
am endeavouring to demoralize the radical émigré politically, to inject discord among
revolutionary forces, to weaken them, and at the same time to suppress every
revolutionary act in its origin.’ It was his view that Russia’s problems lay not with
Russians but non-Russians, ‘Jews, Ukrainians, Poles and other inhabitants of Russian
Lands’ and in the years to come he would provide yet more proof of these deep-
rooted racist and antisemitic beliefs.

The new head of the Foreign Agency quickly set about developing close
relationships with French police, politicians, publishers and journalists and recruiting
new operatives – usually local ex-policemen, such as Henri Bint, formerly a member
of the Sûreté who in 1881 had been persuaded by the Russian embassy in Paris to
become a full-time spy for the Foreign Agency’s precursor, the Sviashchennaiadruzhina (Holy Brotherhood). Bint was to remain a paid employee of the Russian
police in Paris through to 1917, during which time he had a number of encounters
with Burtsev. He it was who, in November 1886, as part of a group of agents acting
under Rachkovskii’s orders, was responsible for an audacious attack on the Geneva
printing press of the Vestnik Narodnoi Voli (Herald of the Party of the People’s Will).
For this act of sabotage, carried out in complete violation of Swiss laws, Rachkovskii
and his agents received increases in their salaries and were warmly praised by the

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80 HIA Okhrana archive 10/IIIA/7. Rachkovskii to Fragnon, 1885. Cited in Johnson, ‘The Okhrana
Abroad’, p. 28.

81 Following the assassination of Alexander II, a group of monarchists, including P.P. Shuvalov, I.M.
Vorontsov-Dashkov and S.A. Panchulidze, had set up the Holy Brotherhood in an attempt to combat
the revolutionary movement. It had attracted over 700 members by the time it was banned in November
1882, having become superfluous, thanks largely to Sudeikin’s successes in dealing with the People’s
Will. See Daly, Autocracy under Siege, pp. 32–33.
Russian Minister of the Interior D.A. Tolstoi. Glowing with success, on the night of 1–2 February 1887, they carried out a second equally successful and equally lawless attack on another revolutionary press.²²

Rachkovskii had also recruited, at an early stage, another of Sudeikin’s informants, Abram Gekkel’man (later known as Landezen and later still as A.M. Garting.) His and Burtsev’s paths were also to cross on a number of fateful occasions, with the latter claiming that he had first accused the former of provocation as early as 1884.²³ As a student in St Petersburg at the same time as Burtsev, Gekkel’man had been recruited into the Okhrana and, shortly afterwards, had left for Dorpat. There, suspected of provocation in connection with arrests of revolutionaries following the discovery of the printing press of Jakubovich’s Young People’s Will, he relocated in 1885 to Zurich under the assumed name of Landezen, a well-to-do student and son of a Polish banker.²⁴ There he made the acquaintance of the émigrés Tikhomirov, Lavrov, A.N. Bakh and E.A. Serebriakov and duly reported back on their activities to Rachkovskii in Paris. Under the latter’s guidance he helped wreck a range of revolutionary enterprises throughout Switzerland (including the Geneva printing press already mentioned) and it was there, in Geneva, in early 1889, that he was first introduced to Burtsev, a meeting which the latter described as ‘one of the most fateful of my life, the significance of which I came to realise only the following year’.²⁵ The far-reaching effects which this encounter was to have on the lives of a group of revolutionary émigrés in Paris will be described later in this chapter.

Rachkovskii and Landezen also showed themselves to be as masterful in the art of psychological warfare as their teacher, Sudeikin. For evidence of this one need look no further than the fall from grace of Lev Tikhomirov, renowned former member of the Executive Committee of the People’s Will and author of that group’s 1881 Declaration to Alexander III. Shortly after Rachkovskii’s arrival in Paris, Tikhomirov was placed under constant surveillance. Over the next few years he appears gradually to have been worn down by the persistent petty campaign waged against him by both

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²² Vakhrushev, ‘Russkie revoliutsionery’, pp. 53–70.
²³ Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 91.
²⁴ Ruud and Stepanov, Fontanka 16, p. 82.
²⁵ Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 90.
Rachkovskii and Landezen. Tikhomirov would find that his letters went missing, doctors would refuse to treat his child and money transfers were mysteriously held up at the post office while scurrilous telegrams under his name were sent to his acquaintances. A chilling example of the merciless attitude shown to his victim by Rachkovskii is to be found in the latter’s February 1887 report to the Department of Police:

Thus I have succeeded in reducing this previously unassailable revolutionary authority, surrounded by his aureole of a regicide, to the level of an ordinary scoundrel, who is mocked by the entire emigration and who has now completely lost any significance. Thanks to the measures which I have adopted, Tikhomirov has been driven, literally, to madness which in turn has led to a total mental and physical collapse. As things stand at the moment, there can be no doubt that the time will soon come when the Russian government will be able to take this regicide under its control without having to resort to any risks, but completely legally, as a Russian subject who has gone mad while abroad.

On 12 September 1888 a broken Tikhomirov sent off a petition to the tsar making it known that he wished to renounce the revolution, plead forgiveness and be allowed to return to Russia. By the end of the year Rachkovskii had helped finance and circulate a pamphlet by Tikhomirov entitled Pochemu ia perestal byt' revoliutsionerom (Why I Ceased to be a Revolutionary) that caused great anger, confusion and discord in the ranks of the revolutionaries both at home and abroad.

By now Rachkovskii had completely infiltrated and demoralised Russian émigré communities on the continent, but he still could not reach those living in

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Britain. There is an unsubstantiated claim that he made an investigatory trip to London in June 1888\(^9\) but he did not turn his full attention to the English capital until the early 1890s, when more émigrés, such as Burtsev, started to make their way over the Channel to what by then had become almost their only safe haven in Europe. At least in England, they felt, they could be sure of a sympathetic welcome.

**Early influences on British attitudes to Russia**

From the words of Sir Robert Peel and the comments of the civil servants Henderson and Lushington cited earlier, it is clear where British sympathies lay in the late 1870s with regard to Russia. These sentiments of sympathy and support for the oppressed subjects of the tsar were reinforced at the start of the next decade with the arrival in Britain of the likes of Petr Kropotkin and Stepniak, who were able to give first hand accounts of the plight of their countrymen. Kropotkin, expelled from Switzerland a few months after the assassination of Alexander II, at the insistence of the Russian government, had made his way to England, where he remained for the next thirty-odd years, with only one break of four years (spent mainly in a French prison). He attracted a great deal of attention from a broad range of the public both in Britain and on the continent for his scholarship and for his radical political views. In the course of the 1880s he contributed a series of articles on Russian prisons to the journal the *Nineteenth Century* and succeeded in developing relationships with a range of English Liberals, such as Edward Robert Pease and George Bernard Shaw, who were appalled at the stories coming out of Russia of the inherent unfairness and inhumanity of the tsarist regime.

Kropotkin was soon joined in his English exile by the old revolutionary Nikolai Chaikovskii, Vera Zasulich and Stepniak, whose influential book *Podpol'naia Rossiia* was first published to great acclaim in England as *Underground Russia* in May 1883. In the course of the 1880s Stepniak was to go on to produce three books and numerous articles, all highlighting the injustices of the Russian autocracy. Indeed,

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his contribution to the promotion of the case of the Russian revolutionary opposition should not be under-estimated. 90

Towards the end of the 1880s the number of British supporters of reform in Russia was greatly increased following the publication, in The Century Magazine, of a series of articles by the American explorer George Kennan, describing his impressions of his earlier visits to Siberia and his meetings there with exiled revolutionaries such as E.K. Brezhko-Brezhkovskaia and Feliks Volkovskii. 91 Kennan also lectured extensively in America, Canada and Britain, drawing large crowds, sometimes numbering in the thousands. As a result of this growth in awareness of the political situation in Russia, and following on from the horrific press reports of the Iakutsk Massacre and the Kara Outrage described earlier, a group of British liberals and radicals headed by Liberal MP Robert Spence Watson (and encouraged by Stepniak) decided on the pressing need to form a society to publicize the brutalities of life under the tsars. Thus was born the influential Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF). The importance of the Society and its journal Free Russia in increasing public awareness 'of the position of all Russia' in the course of the 1890s (and, indeed, through to its demise during the First World War) will be stressed in the chapters that follow, as will the activities of its Russian Free Press Fund (RFPF), which the SFRF had set up soon after its formation and whose initial purpose was the provision of aid for the support of escaped exiles. 92

At this stage, with Iakutsk and Kara very much in the news and with his government coming in for growing criticism in Britain and elsewhere over the policies of religious intolerance and Russification of K.P. Pobedonostsev, his Procurator of the Holy Synod, Alexander III must have been only too aware of his lack of friends on the international stage. There was, however, one important exception, for it was clear that for the British prime minister Lord Salisbury, at least,  

90 For a detailed discussion of Stepniak’s activities during this period see Senese, Stepniak-Kravchinskii, pp. 23–26.
91 Kennan’s articles appeared in book-form in December 1891 under the title Siberia and the Exile System (London/New York: Osgood and McIlvaine, 1891). The first Russian translations of his work had already been published by Burtsev two years earlier in his Svobodnaia Rossiia, with another collection, translated by his colleague I.N. Kashintsev, appearing in Paris and London in 1890.
92 Senese, Stepniak-Kravchinskii, p. 57.
the Anglo-Russian relationship was all-important and had to be protected. During his diplomatic travels Salisbury and his wife had made the acquaintance of several Russian ministers and civil servants and had become particularly close to the diplomatist Count Nikolai Pavlovich Ignat'ev. Whether at the request of the latter or for some other reason unknown, Salisbury wrote in early 1891 to his ambassador in St Petersburg, Sir Robert Morier, forbidding him from raising an official complaint with the tsar about the recent atrocities. These revolutionaries may well have attracted the support of some English liberals but their godless activities would never be condoned by the deeply religious Salisbury.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Agency attempted to limit the damage caused by ‘placing’ a story containing a different version of the Siberian events in the Daily Mail. Unfortunately for them, this version was so riddled with inaccuracies (confusing Irkutsk with Yakutsk, for example) that it was roundly ridiculed as clearly emanating from ‘the London lodgings of the Russian Secret Police’. Another distraction was urgently required and was conveniently found the following month, in May 1890, when, with Rachkovskii’s assistance, the French police dramatically uncovered a Russian terrorist bomb factory in the very heart of Paris.

The Paris bomb factory

Diplomatic relations between Russia and France had been in a very poor state since the Kropotkin affair of 1886. The Russian anarchist had been arrested by the French police four years earlier and charged with being a member of the International Working Men’s Association. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment but, following an outcry in the French press, he was amnestied in 1886 and returned...

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93 Roberts, Salisbury, p. 71. Roberts does not give his source but Salisbury’s letter was almost certainly written in response to Morier’s despatch no. 11 of 21 January 1891 in which he reports the suspension of the enforced return of Jewish artisans into the Pale and voices his opinion that this was due in large part to the outcry from abroad. See TNA, PRO FO 65/1397 ff. 116–119 and 143–143a.


95 For more on this affair see Cahm, C. Kropotkin and the Rise Of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. pp. 185–205. Also The Times, 22 December 1882, p. 3.
immediately to Britain. This amnesty was to put an immense strain on relations between Alexander III and France, to the point where the tsar was even considering severing diplomatic relations. This damaged relationship continued until, in 1890, the French found themselves with the opportunity to offer a new service to the Russian government. As the historian and secretary to the Senate Ernest Daudet recalled, on this occasion "the attitude of the French government revealed a praiseworthy determination in its zeal and its good intentions towards Russia".96

In March of that year Ernest Constans, the French Minister of the Interior, had received a police report that in Paris a group of Russian émigrés who had been under surveillance for some months previously were constructing bombs which they intended to use against the tsar. In May, Russian ambassador Mohrenheim demanded that those concerned be arrested before they had the chance to leave for Russia. On the orders of Constans, in the early hours of 29 May 1890, a band of thirteen Russian émigrés who had been testing their bombs in the Bois de Meudon, were rounded up.97 Burtsev, who was in Constantinople at the time, learned that a number of his comrades were among those detained and realised that he himself was most fortunate not to be one of them.

In July of the previous year, following disagreements amongst the editorial board of Svobodnaia Rossiia, he had left Geneva for Paris to try to drum up support for his latest project—a new journal, entitled Zemskii sobor (Assembly of the Land), which would ‘take a clear revolutionary line and at the same time would call for national unity’.98 He was by no means the only émigré to leave Switzerland during this period. Earlier that year in the Peterstobel woods near Zurich I.V. Dembo had


98 ibid., p. 88. Such an Assembly had first been called for in the 1860s by the revolutionaries Nechaev and Zheliabov. Then, in 1881, the ultra conservative Minister of Internal Affairs, Count N.P. Ignat’ev, proposed the convocation of an Assembly bearing the same name and fulfilling much the same role. See Naimark, N.M. Terrorists and Social Democrats: the Russian Revolutionary Movement Under Alexander III. Cambridge, Mass.: London: Harvard University Press, 1983. p. 21.
blown himself up while experimenting with explosives but before he died the Swiss authorities had managed to extract enough information from him to establish grounds for the expulsion of thirteen of his associates, many of whom then moved on to Paris.99

On his arrival in the French capital Burtsev took up residence in the flat of I.N. Kashintsev (Anan'ev) on the Boulevard St Jacques. As he later recalled, the flat was visited on a regular basis by numerous other members of the People's Will, some of whom, former associates of Dembo such as Boris Reinshtein and Aleksandr Lavrenius, asked if they might carry out some chemical experiments there. Burtsev is quick to point out that he himself was not a chemist, that he was merely an onlooker and not an active participant, though this could be seen as something of a nineteenth-century equivalent of the 'I smoked but didn't inhale' defence.100 But, whatever the actual nature of Burtsev's involvement was, the conspirators' experiments were doomed to failure from the outset for the simple reason that the group had long since been infiltrated by the informant Landezen, whose bona fides had been guaranteed, unfortunately, by Burtsev himself. The police spy had then attached himself to Reinshtein's group and become ever more deeply involved in its secret activities in the flat of the latter on the Rue de la Glacière.

The émigré group with which Burtsev was associated had been planning long before to try to cross back into Russia to regain contact and develop links with activists there. Burtsev, meanwhile, was keen to find backing within Russia for his projected journal Zemskii sobor and, in early May 1890, set off for Russia with his friend Iurii Rappoport, with whom he had left his homeland to begin his life in emigration only some eighteen months previously. Their venture, however, had no hope of success. As Burtsev later recalled, one of those who saw them off at the station was Landezen himself and so the Foreign Agency was aware of their every move from the start. Sensing they were being followed, Burtsev persuaded his companion that they should travel through Austria to Romania and try to cross the border there, but on arrival Burtsev still had forebodings and refused to cross. They

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99 France, Archives nationales (AN) F/7/12521/1: Suisse (1882—1909)] Order of Expulsion, 7 May 1889.

100 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 94.
decided, therefore, to go their separate ways. A few days later, Burtsev received news that his friend had indeed been arrested as he tried to re-enter Russia.  

In an attempt to throw the tsarist police off his track Burtsev travelled first down the Danube to Belgrade, then back into Romania. Next he boarded a steamer to Constantinople, in the hope of catching another steamer to Batumi. It was on his arrival in Constantinople that he learned of the arrest of his comrades in Paris. Landezen, however, was not reported to be among those held by the police. It was immediately clear to Burtsev that there was now no possibility of him crossing into Russia, that they had all been betrayed and that the informant could be none other than Landezen. He wrote at once to his comrades in Paris detailing his suspicions but initially found no one to support his accusations. Gradually, however, as those in custody also started to voice their doubts, Landezen’s guilt became apparent.

Earlier in the year, when the informer had reported back to the Foreign Agency concerning Reinshtein’s bomb-making experiments, Rachkovskii had not only encouraged him to become more closely involved, but had also informed the French Police, hoping that the granting of such a favour might pay dividends in the future. However, the trial of the nine accused, which was heard at the Assises de la Seine on 5 July 1890, was not as successful as Rachkovskii would have wished. Alexandre Millerand, who later served as president of France from 1920–24, acted as one of the defence lawyers for the accused and took the opportunity to expose the role not only of the police spy Gekkel’man-Landezen but also of his controller, the Head of the Foreign Agency himself. At the time the French press and public (and indeed the judge) fully supported Millerand in his accusations, so much so that Landezen was sentenced, in absentia, to the maximum term allowed of five years’ imprisonment while, of the others, two were acquitted and the remaining six received three-year sentences only.

101 ibid. p. 98.

102 There is another version: namely, that it was Landezen himself who had set up the group. See L.B. ‘Franko-russkoe shpionstvo i franko-russkii soiuz’, Byloe, no. 8 (1908), pp. 58–64. Cited in Brachev, ‘Master’, p. 297, 321 (note 45).

103 Those imprisoned were B. Reinshtein, A. Lavrenius, A.L. Teplov, M. Nakachidze, I.N. Kashintsev and E.D. Stepanov.
According to the historian Maurice Laporte, Millerand had been assisted in his exposure of this Russian police provocation by documents provided by Burtsev.\footnote{Laporte, M. \textit{Histoire de l'Okhrana. La Police Sécrète des Tsars, 1880–1917. Préface de Vladimir Bourtzev}. Paris: Payot, 1935. p. 190. For a description of the trial of 1890 see 'Le procès des nihilistes russes', a four-page supplement to \textit{L'Éclair}, 5 July 1890 (cited in Saunders, 'Vladimir Burtsev', p. 58).} However, not everyone was in agreement with this account of the revolutionary’s role in Landezen’s exposure. The émigré publisher M.K. Elpidin, for example, believed that Burtsev had been completely taken in by Landezen when they first met in Geneva and roundly criticized him for his inability to judge people. It was entirely Burtsev’s fault, according to him, that the Paris group had been infiltrated. Moreover, he declared that Burtsev had played no part in Landezen’s exposure, which, he said, had come about thanks only to the work of the ‘excellent and intelligent counsel for the defence’. It was Elpidin’s opinion that, ‘This is what comes of being unable to understand people. The fate of all those thus compromised must lie on the conscience of Monsieur Burtsev.’\footnote{Elpidin, M.K. \textit{Bibliograficheskii katalog. Profili redaktorov i sotrudnikov}. Geneva: M. Elpidine, 1906. p. 22.} Whilst acknowledging Burtsev’s great thirst for knowledge and his undoubted accomplishments in the field of literary publishing, Elpidin went on to criticize him further (and on a distinctly personal level), describing their first encounter at his home in Switzerland in the late 1880s thus:

His manners left much to be desired. For example, without permission he would climb up onto your book cases and scatter the books around; you’d tell him to sit down, be patient and wait to be given a catalogue; he would sit for no more than a minute and then he’d be up messing about again.\footnote{ibid., p. 24.}

The reason for the publisher’s criticism of Burtsev can be explained, however, since Elpidin himself had been recruited into the Okhrana by Henri Bint and had been on their payroll as an informer since 1887.\footnote{See Senn, A.E. ‘M.K. Elpidin: Revolutionary Publisher,’ \textit{Russian Review}, no. 41 (January 1982) pp. 11–23.} Meanwhile, as the Paris trial progressed, Burtsev had managed to shake off his police tail in Sofia. The respite was, however, temporary and, as the Russian police...
closed in, the pressure began to tell. Burtsev later recalled the state of depression he found himself in when, travelling down the Danube, he felt the full weight of his ‘dead end’ (bezvykhodnoe polozhenie) and described the torments he was enduring:

I was in a state of total spiritual collapse and felt that my most intimate and precious feelings had been insulted. I remembered the traitor’s [Landezen’s] words and promises, and imagined how, at that moment, he would be celebrating in the company of our enemies. As I thought of all the possible terrible consequences of his betrayal a radical means of escape suddenly came to me.

We were sailing along in such a way that at any time I could easily throw myself overboard and no-one would have the slightest chance of saving me. I walked up to the edge – one step more and my escape from this ‘dead end’ would be final. 108

Fortunately, Burtsev did not take that final step but, as his Department of Police dossier shows, his position at this point was perilous indeed.

‘The goods have arrived’

The role played by the Russian Department of Police’s Balkan Agency in Burtsev’s fate has escaped any serious examination by Western researchers to date. The Agency itself was set up in the late nineteenth century in Bucharest with an area of responsibility covering Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Austro-Hungary. 109 From 1890-1901 it was headed by General A.I Budzilovich and it is thanks, in large part, to his meticulous reports that the story of Burtsev’s pursuit through the Balkans in December 1890 can be revealed. 110 On 30 November the general had received

108 Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 140–141.

109 For further background on the Balkan Agency see: Vishniakov, Ia., “‘Unichotzhit’ vsiu kovarnuiu Evropy”. Avantiuristy i terroristy na Balkanakh v nachale XX veka’, Rodina, no. 1 (2007), pp. 39-43. Also, Peregodova, Politicheskii sysk, pp. 144–145. Peregodova mistakenly names the agency chief as Aleksandr Moiseevich Veisman. Based primarily in Sofia the latter was, in fact, simply an agent whose main occupation was the perlustration of the correspondence of the Russian émigré community.

110 GARF f. 102, d. 3, op. 88 (1890 g.) del 569: Po rozysku Burtseva, T. 3. (133 ll.) This volume of Burtsev’s police dossier contains, among other documents, a series of telegrams and daily reports from the Russian Consulates in Galaţi and Constantinople to St Petersburg and also a copy of Budzilovich’s final report on the affair to Durnovo, dated 26 December 1890/7 January 1891. (ll. 113–117.)
information that Burtsev had re-entered Romania and was now in the port of Galați on the Danube where he intended to board a freight ship bound either for Russia, or for Constantinople and England. He quickly telegraphed the news to St Petersburg and so triggered a remarkable sequence of events which is worth relating in detail here, for it demonstrates the full extent of Russian police operations and the all-pervading influence of the tsar's government in the area at the time. Moreover, it provides yet further proof of the determination of these authorities to recapture the renegade Burtsev at any cost.

Budzilovich had first received news of a possible sighting of his quarry in Ploiești on 27 November. Having earlier thrown the police off his track in Sofia, Burtsev had travelled via Plovdiv to Constantinople and then into Romania via the port of Constanța. Arriving next at Ploiești he hid at the home of the Romanian socialist leader Dobrogeanu-Gherea (Solomon Kats), where, amongst others he met a certain medical assistant named Fedorov. It was this latter, known to Budzilovich as agent 'Miku', who contacted his controller with the news of the mysterious arrival. Miku received a quick reply asking him to find out if the individual was indeed 'Volodia' and, if so, to telegraph immediately using the code: 'tovar' pribyl' (the goods have arrived).

The desired answer arrived two days later, followed by Miku himself who demanded 1,000 roubles for information concerning Burtsev's exact location, otherwise he would 'spoil it'. Hearing of this ultimatum, Chief of Police Durnovo angrily replied 'Let him spoil it then!' but quickly changed his mind. After all, the tsar himself was anxious that this dangerous fanatic should be dealt with and so his recapture had to be treated as a top priority. Urgent telegrams were therefore sent out to all heads of Gendarmerie at the Russian Black Sea ports telling them of Burtsev's possible arrival and ordering them to search meticulously all boats arriving from Constantinople and the Danube ports.

111 Burtsev, Bor'ba, pp. 99, 106.
112 GARF f. 102, d. 3, op. 88 (1890 g.) del 569: Po rozysku Burtseva, T. 3. l. 113. 'Tovar' pribyl'—code used in telegram of 17/29 November 1890 by agent 'Miku' in Ploiești, Romania confirming Burtsev's presence in the town.
113 GARF f. 102, d. 3, op. 88 (1890 g.) del 569, T. 3. ll. 9–11.
114 ibid. ll. 14–16.
Durnovo also wrote to A.I. Zinovev, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that, ‘bearing in mind the particular importance of Burtsev’s arrest’, he had decided to send Rotmeister Budzilovich to Constantinople to establish the fugitive’s whereabouts and to arrange for his arrest. He requested that the Russian General Consul be forewarned of Budzilovich’s arrival in the Porte and that he be sent copies of information received, together with a photograph of Burtsev. Budzilovich arrived in Constantinople on 8 December to the news that Burtsev, accompanied by his comrade, the Georgian anarchist V.N. Cherkezov, had boarded an English steamship, the S.S. Ashlands, the previous day and was now heading down the Danube bound for Constantinople and England.

However, portents of a troubled voyage ahead appeared almost immediately. The Times reported that the ship, under the command of a certain Captain Rees, ran aground in the lower reaches of the Danube and it was only by discharging part of the ship’s cargo that the captain succeeded in refloating her. Worse was to come for, on entering the port of Sulina and trying to turn the vessel, the captain managed to collide with the Greek lighter Ainos which sustained damage and sprung a leak. While such incidents may lead one initially to entertain doubts as to the seamanship of the unfortunate captain, as later events showed his navigational skills were, in fact, beyond question, as too were his moral rectitude and courage.

Meanwhile, unaware of the events unfolding at the mouth of the Danube, General Budzilovich, in a state of high anxiety, awaited the arrival of his important ‘goods’. Over the next twelve days he sent a series of telegrams to St Petersburg all to the effect that there was little or nothing to report. On 17 December, with the ship still nowhere in sight ambassador A.I. Nelidov reported from Constantinople that he had

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115 *ibid.* II. 6–7. Durnovo to Zinovev 20 November/2 December 1890. Ivan Alekseevich Zinovev (1835–1917) Head of the Asiatic Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

116 Cherkezov, Varlaam Nikolaevich (1846–1925) Former member of Nechaev’s circle, later collaborated with P.L. Lavrov. It is of interest to note that Burtsev makes no reference to him in his autobiography.

117 The Times, 9 December 1890, p. 11, and 12 December 1890, p. 9. ‘Latest Shipping Intelligence. Wrecks And Casualties.’ The Ashlands had only recently been launched in Hartlepool and, earlier in that same voyage, had already run aground above Galatz. Despite these various misfortunes she survived until 5 July 1900 when she was wrecked off Port Elizabeth. See Northern Echo, Monday 25 Aug 1890, p. 4.: ‘Shipping News’. Also, Birmingham Daily Post, 9 July 1900, p.4.: ‘News of the Day’.
informed the Sultan’s police of their intentions with regard to Burtsev and that they had agreed to cooperate. Nelidov had also arranged with a Russian trading organization for a launch to be made available for Budzilovich and had put the general in touch with the head of the Sultan’s secret police, Ahmed Pasha. The ambassador did, however, express his concern that, due to the poor quality of police surveillance in Sulina, they risked compromising themselves and the affair. It was his view that, if Burtsev had any contacts at all, they would doubtless have informed him long since that he was being followed and that he would therefore be unlikely to appear on deck.

Budzilovich, together with his Turkish hosts and a band of Russian agents dressed in Turkish police uniform, made daily trips up the Bosphorus in search of the elusive steamship. These outings passed without incident until 18 December, when the Turkish Minister of Police, Nazim Bei, himself arrived on a launch. Apparently, tensions existed between the secret police chief Ahmed Pasha and the minister, who, it was suspected, wished to spite his rival by capturing Burtsev himself.

That day, Burtsev did not show up but the following evening news was received that the Ashlands had dropped anchor at Kavak, at the entrance to the Bosphorus. Nazim Bei’s party headed out immediately on their motor-launch, sailed past the Ashlands and moored nearby. At midnight on the same day Budzilovich and his party set off on a Russian steamship, whose flag had been taken down and whose name had been painted out. Arriving at Kavak they too dropped anchor at a safe distance. The following day, 20 December, at 7.30 in the morning, the general set off back to Constantinople, constantly looking behind him through his binoculars for the Ashlands to appear, which it did at around 9.00 a.m. They kept to a kilometre’s distance in front of the ship while Nazim Bei’s party remained roughly the same

118 GARF f. 102, d. 3, op. 88 (1890 g.) del 569, T. 3. li. 113–117. Ahmed Pasha seconded two of his agents to work closely with the Russian police and, acting on information that Burtsev might try to come ashore before he reached Constantinople, had stationed agents at all possible landing places along the Bosphorus.

119 ibid., l. 60.

120 ibid., l. 115.

121 The Constantinople incident is also confirmed as taking place on 20 December 1890 by Foreign Office documents. See TNA, PRO FO 65/1409 f. 6: ‘British S.S. Ashlands’. 
distance behind. At 10.30 a.m. the *Ashlands* dropped anchor off Beşiktaş, opposite the Sultan’s palace, and started to take on coal and water. Then, in mid-afternoon the police got their first sight of their quarry walking on deck.

By 4.00 p.m., however, realizing that Burtsev was not going to risk going ashore, Budzilovich formulated a daring if somewhat unorthodox plan. He had approached a strong, athletic Greek man who had agreed, for payment of 1,000 francs, to board the *Ashlands* under the guise of a fruit-seller, walk up to Burtsev, grab him and jump with him into the Bosphorus where four boats would be waiting to pick them up. The Minister of Police Nazim Bei, however, prevented the general from putting his ingenious plan into effect for fear that the Greek might drown! Clearly, the death by misadventure of a Greek citizen would be a cause of some concern to the Turkish authorities, whereas that of a hapless Russian political refugee did not even merit comment! \(^{122}\)

Now, with his master plan scuppered, the general had to fall back on ‘plan B’. Captain Rees later gave his version of the events which then unfolded. \(^{123}\) While the captain was onshore, a Turkish pasha boarded the ship and offered one of the officers £160 if he would give up Burtsev. When Rees was summoned back, the offer was repeated with the hint that it could be increased to £500 or even more. The captain indignantly replied that, as an English gentleman, he would not countenance such an offer and, seeing the danger that faced his passenger, immediately enlisted him as a member of his crew. A veiled threat was then made to the effect that unless Burtsev was handed over, the ship would be detained and painstakingly searched from bow to stern, as had happened to two English vessels a few days earlier. At this, Rees declared that his ship was an integral part of British soil and refused to allow any such action to take place. The local British consul was summoned and in his presence the captain made a formal complaint regarding the ship’s detention.

It took over a week for news of Burtsev’s plight to reach London and it was only on 29 December that Robert Spence Watson of the SFRF, with the support of the Rt. Hon. John Morley, wrote to Sir James Fergusson, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office expressing, his concerns. The Foreign Office replied on 2 January that a telegraph had been sent to their ambassador in Constantinople asking him to look

\(^{122}\) GARF f. 102, d. 3, op. 88 (1890 g.) del 569, T. 3. l. 117.

\(^{123}\) *The Times*, 20 January 1891 p. 13. ‘Arrest of Russian Refugees in Turkey’. 
into the matter. By this time, however, the port commander in Constantinople appeared to have given up, asking Rees only if he would mind conveying ‘a poor man’ to Gallipoli. Rees agreed, though, suspecting the man to be a detective, placed him in the chart house while sending Burtsev to another part of the ship.

On their arrival at Gallipoli the ‘poor man’ was duly taken ashore but at this point a Turkish police launch came alongside and the interrogation of Rees with regard to his passenger began over again. The captain described how he kept them talking until his ship was in the right position and then boldly steamed astern at full speed carrying the police boat away in his wash. Then he gave the command for the engines to be reversed and steamed ahead at full speed, thus managing to get past the shore batteries which, he suspected, might have opened fire had the police managed to get back in time to sound the alarm. It was thanks to this skilful manoeuvre that the ship managed to continue its journey free from further molestation and arrive safely at Surrey Commercial Dock on Tuesday 6 January 1891.

Thus it was that Burtsev arrived at last in London, the new centre of the Russian emigration in Europe, which was to be his home, on and off, for the next fourteen or so years. Unfortunately, he was to find the initial experience of life in the English capital every bit as difficult as it had been for Kropotkin some fifteen years earlier. Burtsev later described those first few years as ‘the loneliest period of my life in emigration’, explaining:

The final years of the reign of Aleksander III were difficult for all Russians. The reaction had crushed all, both within Russia and abroad. There was no sign of any active revolutionary struggle nor any significant social protest. We had entered a time of ‘small deeds’.

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124 TNA, PRO FO 65/1409 f. 3 ‘Russian Refugee Bourtzev’ and FO 65/1409 f. 4: ‘British S.S. Ashlands’.

125 Many years later Burtsev was able to identify this ‘poor man’ as none other than Rachkovskii’s right-hand man, Henri Bint. See Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 108–109.

126 The Times, 7 January 1891, p. 4: ‘Latest Shipping intelligence’. In his letter to the Foreign Office Spence Watson mentioned that he had received information that Burtsev was due to arrive in England that same day. See TNA, PRO FO 65/1409 f. 11: ‘Refugee Bourtsev’.

127 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 109.
The extent of that reaction, and the nature of the ‘small deeds’ which Burtsev and his compatriots in emigration performed in their fight against it will be examined in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Two  1891–1893: A trip to the continent

Ce n’est pas en un ni deux mois, qu’on fait des choses d’une pareille importance. La preuve, c’est que voilà bien des années qu’on le poursuit.¹

That dark period of Burtsev’s life, encompassing the first few years after his arrival in London in January 1891, constitutes something of a black hole in his biography. Burtsev devotes no more than a sentence to it in his recollections, noting merely that during that time he travelled through Europe, attempting unsuccessfully to make contact with revolutionaries in Russia.² Most previous studies of his life have added little more information. However, the gap can be filled by reference to two collections of primary sources: the Hoover Institution’s Okhrana archive; and the Russian Department of Police files in GARF. It is the aim of this chapter to bring these two resources together and complement them with information from published works obscure enough to have escaped the attention of most scholars. Many of these sources can also be used to throw more light on the significant developments within the Foreign Agency of the Russian Department of Police during the period in question, in particular the expansion of its operations into London. Until now, scant attention has been paid to this period of the Agency’s history.³

The chapter also provides a fresh insight into Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations of the period, thanks to the discovery in the British national archives of a hitherto unpublished document – the so-called ‘Russian memorandum’ – which, according to the historian N.V. Ivanova, was drawn up by the Russian government in 1890 in an attempt to counter the influence on British policy of the recently founded

¹ HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Folder 2). P.I. Rachkovskii on the pursuit of Burtsev. Bullier to Rachkovskii, 10 (16?) December 1892.

² Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 110.

³ There are a few poorly referenced mentions of the foundation of an agency in London in Taratuta, E.A. Etel’ Lilian Voinich. Sud’ba pisatelia i sud’ba knigi. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964 (hereafter Etel’ Lilian Voinich), pp. 102–103. It is likely that Taratuta’s information came from a file previously held at GARF, namely, f. 102. d. 3. op. 89. (1891) Del. 3. ‘Ob ustroistve agentury v Londone’. Unfortunately, during a trip to GARF in April 2007 I was informed the file no longer exists.
Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. In addition, thanks to the discovery of previously unpublished Russian archival documents, new light can be thrown on the levels of assistance which a number of major European powers were prepared to offer the Russian government in its pursuit of political fugitives such as Burtsev.

**From Paris to London**

Reports of the *Ashlands* incident had preceded the ship’s arrival in London with enthusiastic follow-ups continuing to appear in the press for some weeks to come. In mid-January, at the National Liberal Club, an illuminated address, signed by a number of MPs among others, was presented to Captain Rees as a token of appreciation for ‘the great service rendered by him in the assertion of the English right of asylum’. Meanwhile, the London émigré community had already made a collection and dispatched a deputation, headed by Feliks Volkovskii, to the docks. There the delegates boarded the ship and presented a silver cup to the captain ‘in recognition of his conduct and skill in saving the refugee Bourtzev’. Volkovskii had already met Burtsev on his arrival and, in an attempt to elude the attentions of the tsarist police, had whisked him off to his home in North London. It was clear enough that the young émigré had gained the reputation of being something of a prize in St Petersburg and his move to London had by no means guaranteed his safety. Burtsev was, of course, aware of his predicament, though it would appear that he had no idea of the notoriety he had achieved, nor of the level of interest which was being shown in his case in the very highest of circles in Russia. As he was hounded throughout Europe, Minister of the Interior I. N. Durnovo sent regular progress reports of the pursuit to Alexander III.

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5 See, for example, Birmingham Daily Post, 10 January 1891, p. 7: ‘Russian Police and their Quarry. A Strange Story’. Also, Reynolds’s Newspaper, 18 January 1891, p. 8: ‘Refusal to surrender a refuger [sic].’

6 The Times, 13 January 1891, p. 3: ‘English Sympathy for Russian Refugees’.

7 The Times, 19 January 1891, p. 7: ‘Tribute to Captain Rees, of the Steamship Ashlands’.

8 Ivan Nikolaevich Durnovo (1834–1903), Minister of the Interior 1889–1895. (Not to be confused with Director of the Department of Police P. N. Durnovo: see below, footnote 10.)
himself and it is noteworthy that the latter considered Burtsev’s arrest important enough to merit the addition of his own manuscript ‘imperial resolutions’ to these reports. One such resolution reads ‘I hope that he will be caught’, while another records the tsar’s indignation at the news that Burtsev had again eluded capture.⁹

Despite Volkhovskii’s best efforts, however, the Department of Police did not remain in the dark for long with regard to the whereabouts of its prey. As Rachkovskii wrote in his report to Chief of Police P.N. Durnovo¹⁰ of January 1891:

From newspaper reports Your Highness will already be aware of Burtsev’s triumphal arrival in England. However, despite the popularity obtained in such an exceptional manner he has quickly faded into the background, settling in one of the distant regions of London, 130 St John’s, Upper Holloway, under the pseudonym Smith.¹¹

In the same report, the head of the Foreign Agency detailed Burtsev’s contacts with members of the RFPF – Stepniak, Volkhovskii and Kelchevskii¹² – and described the contents of his correspondence with those few of his colleagues still remaining in Paris. This information had not come into Rachkovskii’s possession via some Russian agent on the ground in London but from a letter sent by Burtsev a few days after his arrival to an old associate in Paris, M.I. Gurovich.¹³ This was not the first time his letters to Gurovich had fallen into Rachkovskii’s hands: during his unsuccessful attempt to cross back into Russia the previous year Burtsev had written to Gurovich twice from Sofia.¹⁴ All three letters in the Okhrana Archive are copies rather than originals, which fact might point to them having been ‘perlustrated’ (intercepted en...

¹⁰ Petr Nikolaevich Durnovo (1843–1915) Director of the Department of Police 1884–1893.
¹¹ HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Folder 2). Rachkovskii to Durnovo, Department of Police 31 Jan/12 Feb 1891. Report no. 12.
¹² In fact, Burtsev had yet to meet Stepniak, who, at the time of his arrival, was still touring America. Ivan Kelchevskii was the pseudonym of Wilfred Michael Voinich (1865–1930), a Polish nationalist who had escaped from Siberian exile and had arrived in London shortly before Burtsev.
¹³ HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Folder 2). Burtsev to Gurovich, 9 January 1891, copy.
¹⁴ ibid., Burtsev to Gurovich. Sofia, undated, copy; and, Burtsev to Gurovich. Sofia, 27 September 1890, copy.
route and opened). However, this is unlikely, given what is known of Gurovich's later career. Mikhail Ivanovich Gurovich - real name Moisei Davidovich Gurevich - was arrested in 1880 for his involvement in the revolutionary movement and exiled to Siberia. Following his release in 1890, he was recruited almost immediately into the Department of Police in St Petersburg as a secret agent. It is therefore more than likely that Gurovich, the latest in the long line of Burtsev's deceivers, would have passed on his letters to Rachkovskii on receipt.15

In his letter to Gurovich from London Burtsev yet again returned to the theme of the need for a unified opposition and deplored the Parisian émigrés' criticisms of Stepniak and the Free Russia group, pointing out that the latter was run not by Russians but by their British sympathisers. He also expressed his regrets at having to remain in London but feared that an early return to Paris would result in his arrest on the grounds of his supposed involvement in the bomb factory affair of the previous spring. Indeed, since that affair the attitude of the French government and public towards the émigré community had cooled noticeably and, later that year, relations were dealt yet another blow when the former head of the Russian police, General N.D. Seliverstov, was assassinated in the heart of the French capital.

The general, who had only held the post temporarily following the assassination of Mezentsev in 1878, was shot in his hotel room on 18 November 1890 by a certain Padlewski, a Polish socialist agitator.16 No one at the time was quite sure whether Padlewski's motive was personal or political, but that did not prevent Russian ambassador Morenheim demanding of Monsieur Loze, the Prefect of Police (and, since the bomb factory affair, his 'dear, true and excellent friend'), that he take a tougher stance on the refugees.17 Loze was happy to oblige, immediately withdrawing

15 See Agafonov, V.K. Parizhskie tainy tsarskoi okhranki. Moscow: Rus', 2004 (hereafter Parizhskie tainy), pp. 335–336. Also, Praisman, Terrorism, pp. 95, 271. Gurovich succeeded in establishing links with the St Petersburg Social Democrats and became editor of the first legal SD journal Nachalo (The Beginning). He was exposed in 1902 and the following year was appointed head of the Galician and Romanian branch of the Foreign Agency. He then returned to St Petersburg, where he worked closely with Rachkovskii. He retired in 1906.

16 Stanislaw Padlewski, the pseudonym of Otto Hauser Dyzek (1857–1891). The murder was reported in The Times, 22 November 1890, p. 11.

17 Immediately after the trial of the bombers, Mohrenheim was gushing in his praise of Loze. The Préfet also received a costly work of art from the tsar, as a mark of the latter's gratitude. Letter
the license of the Franco-Russian Club, a dance hall in the Rue Royale where Padlewski had worked and which Seliverstov had been known to frequent. At the same time, steps were taken to expel a number of foreign radicals. Two such unfortunates were Stanislaw and Maria Mendelssohn, an elderly Polish socialist couple. Following a relentless campaign of harassment by the French police, Stanislaw Mendelssohn had first been detained (for four weeks) at the time of the bomb factory plot and then again following Seliverstov’s murder. *The Times* was in no doubt as to who was responsible for their persecution and expulsion, stating that ‘Mr Mendelssohn’s experiences of French justice constitute a striking illustration of the subservience of the French authorities to the exigencies of the Russian Embassy’. Interviewed on his arrival in London, Mendelssohn indicated his suspicions with regard to the assassination, reporting that, the previous year a deputation of refugees had called on the Prefect of Police to warn him that,

if he did not take measures to check the aggressions and persecutions directed against Russian refugees by the Russian police detectives and *agents provocateurs* in Paris, some step would be taken, something would be done, which it was in the interest of the French Government to prevent. There would have been no question of bombs and General Seliverstoff might still be living if M. Lozé had taken better note of this warning.18

Indeed, much later, Minister of the Interior Plehve would accuse Rachkovskii of direct involvement in Seliverstov’s murder.20 But, whatever the exact nature of Rachkovskii’s role in the incident, the assassination marked the end of Paris as a safe

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18 *The Times*, 27 December 1890, p. 8: ‘Mr Mendelssohn and the Franco-Russian Police’.

19 *ibid.*, p. 8.

20 The Minister of the Interior wrote his ‘confidential note’ of 13 July 1903 for the attention of Nicholas II in an attempt to have Rachkovskii dismissed from the service. The full list of his accusations against Rachkovskii are detailed in ‘Kar’era P.N. Rachkovskogo’, *Blyoe*, no. 2 (30) (February 1918), pp. 79–87. It has been argued that the Head of the Foreign Agency had ordered the assassination, believing that his position was threatened by the general’s visit. See Brachev, ‘Master’, p. 298.
haven for the Russian political emigration. Only a handful of émigrés chose to stay on in the French capital (among them L. Shishko and N. Rusanov), while the only one of any real stature who remained there was P.L. Lavrov and he, according to E.A. Taratuta, was deemed 'off limits' due to his fame.

Now, thanks to a combination of the anti-émigré policies of the governments of Austria and Germany and Rachkovskii’s and Landezen’s ruthless efforts in Switzerland, the revolutionary emigration found itself with nowhere else to turn but London, where life would prove to be considerably more difficult for them, not only because of the higher cost of living, but also due to the simple fact that few of their number could speak English. With his enemies thus conveniently corralled, Rachkovskii now deemed it time to cross the Channel himself and to expand his operations into the British capital.

The London agency is born

A mere three days before Burtsev’s arrival in London, the Vienna correspondent of The Times filed an intriguing report that purported to describe in detail the structure of the Foreign Agency in Europe:

I learn on good authority that since the assassination of General Seliverstoff the foreign section of the Russian Secret Police has been reorganized. The central office continues to be in Paris, but sub-agencies have been created at Zurich, Berne, Geneva, Mentone, and Montpellier. In each of the sub-offices agents may be commissioned directly for special work, and 84 new agents have been added to the large staff which previously existed. There is a London agency but it is controlled by that in Paris. In Germany and Austria it has not been found necessary to establish agencies, as the governments of those two countries are known to keep a sharp look-out over political suspects of all kinds. Consequently these lands are not favourite places of residence with Russian refugees. Italy also is not much patronized by Russians at war with the ‘Third Section’.


22 Taratuta, Etel' Lilian Voinich, p. 102. Apparently, all Rachkovskii could do to Lavrov was ‘cause him endless petty unpleasantnesses’ – no doubt, similar to those he had used successfully some years earlier against Tikhomirov.
Unfortunately, for the costly system of espionage which the Russian Government considers essential to the maintenance of its authority, it appears that all the proceedings of the foreign police bureaus, and the features of the principal agents, are thoroughly well known to the revolutionary committees. While the police try to introduce spies among the committees, the committees seem to have plenty of secret friends among the police.  

This report demonstrates the truth of the principle that one should not believe everything one reads in the press, even if the newspaper in question happens to be The Times. The suggestion that 'the large staff which previously existed' had been supplemented by a staggering 84 new agents simply beggars belief and cannot be substantiated from the archives. Although the reminiscences of certain revolutionaries (among them Kropotkin) might lead one to believe that a tsarist spy lurked on every street corner of every European city, the reality is that, at the time this report was written, the Foreign Agency comprised of very few employees. R.J. Johnson estimates that even at the height of its operations, in 1914, the Agency could boast of no more than forty detectives in Europe. Iain Lauchlan, meanwhile, puts the figure at forty detectives and twenty-five secret agents or 'internals', while an official report on the Foreign Agency dating from 1913 lists a total of only twenty-three active secret agents. One can be sure that in 1891 there were far fewer operatives on the street. Moreover, what The Times' correspondent meant by his reference to 'sub-agencies' is far from clear. While the Russian Department of Police might indeed have felt it desirable or prudent to have an agent in all the major centres of the emigration in Switzerland and France, it is doubtful that resources would have allowed them to establish and run 'commissioning sub-offices' in these locations.

One should, therefore, question either the reporter's sources of information or his motivation. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the reliability and the anti-Russian tone of this particular journalist's despatches had, for some time already,

23 The Times, 3 January 1891, p. 5: 'Russia'.

24 Johnson, 'The Okhrana Abroad', p. 25; Lauchlan, Russian Hide-and-Seek, p. 103.

been a matter of concern to Sir Robert Morier, Her Majesty’s ambassador to St Petersburg, who, in a secret despatch to Lord Salisbury, wrote:

As regards the Vienna correspondent of The Times I have taken much trouble for the last three years to test the accuracy of the sensational news with which he poisons public opinion in Europe by systematic mendacity. In no single instance have I succeeded in detecting him speaking the truth.26

And indeed, the Vienna correspondent’s assertion that the Russian secret police had an agency in London is yet another example of his erroneous reporting. Direct proof of this can be found in Rachkovskii’s reports of the period to his superiors in St Petersburg.

Although, as mentioned earlier, there is some uncertainty as to whether the head of the Foreign Agency had previously visited London, there is no doubt that it was not until the spring of 1891 that he crossed the Channel with the express intention of investigating the ‘establishment of special surveillance’ in the British capital. He reported then that Burtsev, Volkovskii and Voinich were staying at 13, Grove Gardens, St John’s Wood (the home of Stepniak at that time) and also described a meeting he had had at the Russian Embassy with the chargé d’affaires, Butenev.27 In St Petersburg, director of police Durnovo continued to receive progress reports from his head of European operations throughout the year and even made a trip to Nice for a meeting with him in April to discuss the expansion of Foreign Agency operations. Immediately after that encounter the police chief wrote back to St Petersburg reporting that a kruzhok had formed in London and detailing the funds which would


be required to enable surveillance operations to be carried out effectively.\(^\text{28}\) He reported then that Rachkovskii had already placed three agents in the capital at a cost of 2,250 francs per month, with operations being run by a former French agent recommended by Lozé. This individual alone (as yet unidentified) received 1,200 francs per month for his services.\(^\text{29}\) Durnovo now recommended that a further 2,000 francs per month be made available to enable the employment of a further three ‘external’ (naruzhnye) agents.\(^\text{30}\) It would appear that these funds were forthcoming, for, by September of that year, Rachkovskii was already reporting the successful foundation of an agency in London and, moreover, was boasting of the infiltration of an agent into the local emigration, declaring that now, ‘All the London émigrés and all those who have dealings with them are under our complete control.’\(^\text{31}\)

In the years that followed, more agents were recruited as business expanded and, fortunately, more is known of them than of the illusive first head of London operations. In the spring of 1892, for example, a certain Bolesław Maliankewicz, writing from Pell St. in the heart of the East End, offered his services as a spy to St Petersburg, saying he had gained the trust of Kropotkin, Lavrov, Stepniak, Volkhovskii and others in the London emigration. The true extent of Maliankewicz’s service will be examined in detail in the next chapter, as will the contributions of later London agents – such as Beitner, Milevskii and Farce – but for the moment, suffice it to say that by the time Rachkovskii left his post as head of the Foreign Agency eleven years later, in 1902, the cost of his London operations had grown to 6,000 francs per month. This was roughly a third of the total Agency costs, three times that of the Swiss Agency and more than double that expended in Galicia.\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^\text{28}\) GARF. f. 102, d. 3. op. 89. (1891). del. 4. Vypiski iz pis’ma Direktora ot 21 Aprelia iz Nitsy’. ll. 45–49. He listed the members of the kruzhok as: Volkhovskii, Burtsev, Kelchevskii, Rybakov, Rombro, Baranov (Garmidor), Kravchinskii and a certain unidentified ‘Gallon’.

\(^\text{29}\) Fredric Zuckerman has advanced the opinion that the agent was ‘undoubtedly the ubiquitous Henri Bint’ but offers no evidence for this assertion. See Zuckerman, The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad, p. 141.


\(^\text{32}\) Agafonov, Parizhskie tainy, p. 65.
The Russian memorandum

Such apparently rapid successes on the part of the Russian secret police did not augur well for Burtsev and his beleaguered associates on the banks of the Thames and worse was to come, for, almost immediately, the Russian government opened a second, political front against them. Tsarist ministers had, of course, expressed their anxieties concerning political fugitives to the British government on numerous earlier occasions.

As described above, in 1878 Bartolomei, the envoy of Alexander II, had unsuccessfully proposed police collaboration on the surveillance of known radical refugees in London. Then, almost ten years later, and shortly after the thwarted attempt on the life of Alexander III (1 March 1887, the sixth anniversary of his father's assassination), ambassador Morier reported that, according to the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs de Giers, the Nihilists were now more active again and that 'meetings have been held in foreign capitals, among others in London, urging persistency on the part of the conspirators'.33 In a telegram the ambassador alerted Salisbury to rumours circulating in St Petersburg that yet another plot against the tsar's life was being hatched in the British capital. This information was passed on to the Home Office for communication to the Chief Commissioner of Police.34 Assistant Commissioner James Monro of the Criminal Investigation Department duly replied with a potted history of foreign 'nihilist' activity in the capital since 1880.35 On the subject of Russian refugees he mentioned the arrival of the would-be perpetrator of regicide, Leo Hartmann, in London, following his expulsion from France in late 1880.36 Hartmann, he reported, rarely visited the 'nihilist clubs', being more

33 TNA, PRO FO 65/1296 Sir R. Morier's Despatches nos. 82 and 111 of 14 March and 1 April 1887.
34 ibid., FO 65/1310 ff. 106, 111, 162. Foreign Office to Home Office, 22, 26 March and 12 May 1887.
36 Lev Nikolaevich Hartmann had been one of those who had made an attempt to assassinate Tsar Alexander II in November 1879. He had then fled to Paris, where, at the request of the Russian government, he was arrested in February 1880. Initially, prime minister Charles de Freycinet's government was agreeable to his extradition but after support was mobilized amongst the French press and the Russian émigré community Freycinet was obliged to reconsider. Later that year Hartmann was expelled from France and came to London.
frequently at the British Museum with Prince Kropotkin and Chaikovskii. Monro added that although the last of these had addressed a meeting on 12 March 'in celebration of the assassination of the [late] Tsar of Russia' there was no evidence of any plot being carried out in London on the life of Alexander III.

By the 1890s the situation had changed, with the tsar's ministers adopting a more aggressive attitude towards those countries that offered sanctuary to Russian political émigrés. An indication of St Petersburg's new, belligerent foreign policy came shortly after Burtsev's arrival in London, when ambassador Morier reported another conversation with de Giers in which the latter had described a circular issued to all tsarist representatives in Europe (including Baron E. de Staal, ambassador in London). The circular criticized Bulgaria for its apparent willingness to harbour known 'nihilists' and named thirteen of them:

De Giers added that the Russian government did not ask for their extradition but wished to signalize [sic] to the governments of Europe the state of things in Bulgaria and the dangers which would flow there from if Bulgaria became not only the city [sic] of refuge for the anarchical elements expelled from elsewhere but a centre where honourable and lucrative employment was secured to criminals escaped from penal servitude, if they could establish their qualifications for office by complicity in projects for the assassination of the Czar.

It was clear that this scarcely-veiled threat was directed not only at Bulgaria but at any other European state that chose to offer sanctuary to these renegades and so it would have come as no surprise when, in London, on 5 March 1892, de Staal called upon Lord Salisbury and communicated a detailed memorandum to him 'complaining of the increasing numbers and activity of Russian anarchists in England and requesting that they may be placed under police surveillance'. This, the so-called 'Russian

37 TNA, PRO FO 65/1310/A46747/4 Munro to Home Office, 17 May 1887. f. 176.
38 ibid., ff. 177–178.
40 ibid., FO 65/1429 f. 94–96. E. Barrington to Sir E. Bradford, 5 March 1892. 'Russian Anarchists in England'.

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memorandum', was first mentioned by N.V. Ivanova in her 1967 essay on the Russian political emigration in England and then, some twenty years later, by Donald Senese in his biography of Stepniak. Neither of these scholars, however, had had sight of the memorandum itself but knew of its existence only by references made to it in other archival documents. During a visit to GARF in April 2007, however, I was fortunate enough to discover a draft version of this important document. Moreover, I have also located a transcription of de Staal’s spoken communication in the National Archives at Kew. The contents of both are worth describing in detail here.

The memorandum was not written in 1890, as both Ivanova and Senese have asserted: containing references to publications which appeared later, it can be dated to around January–February 1892 at the earliest. It began thus:

The number of Russian revolutionaries and nihilists based in England, which was already considerable, has acquired, during these past years, a number of recruits expelled from Switzerland, France and elsewhere. The activities of this emigration, under the aegis of the ‘right of asylum’ have grown in intensity and are currently conducted by such coryphées of terrorist revolution as Prince Kropotkin, Chaikovskii, Kravchinskii (the assassin of General Mezentsev, known under the name of Stepniak), Felix Volkovskii, Vladimir Burtsev, Michel Voinich (Kelchevskii), Michel-Moise Harmidor (Baranov), Hesper Serebriakov, Stanislaw Mendelsohn and his wife Marie, Aleksandr Lavrenius and many others besides.

The memorandum then described the support given by the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom to the named individuals. This support, it alleged, had allowed them

41 Ivanova, 'Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia', pp. 96–97; and Senese, Stepniak-Kravchinskii, pp. 95–96.
42 Ivanova's source is Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiskoi Federatsii (AVPR). f. Kantseliariia, 1892 g. op. 470, d. 58. Senese, as well as citing Ivanova, also refers to FO 65/1430. Sir E. Bradford to E. Barrington, 26 March 1892.
43 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op 89. (1891). del. 4. 'Svedenia po Londonu', ll. 52–63. The document has blue ink corrections in Durnovo's hand with the instruction that two copies should be provided. It carries a date of February 1892 (also in blue ink).
44 TNA, PRO FO 65/1429 ff. 87–92. Memo communicated by M. de Staal, 5 March 1892: 'Russian Anarchists in England'. See Appendix (p. 256) for a full translation of the document.
to publish in their journal *Free Russia* ‘the grossest calumnies against the Russian government which are received with only too much credulity by a public unfamiliar with Russian affairs’. De Staal was all the more appalled by the fact that the SFRF was open only to British subjects and that a number of its members occupied positions of honour. Indeed, he underlined the fact that, of the thirty-nine members on its committee, ten were members of parliament and four were clergymen!

Among the examples of anti-Russian propaganda delivered on a regular basis at the SFRF’s lectures and meetings, de Staal cited a lecture given by R. Maynard Leonard at the Hounslow Liberal Club in which, according to the ambassador, the author ‘directly incited to revolution’. De Staal was also able to list the names of a number of Polish revolutionaries, who, from their base in London, ran a relief fund for political refugees in Poland. Committee members included the aforementioned Mendelssohns and ‘Alexandre Dembski, who was involved in bomb-making in Zurich’. De Staal also chose to draw to Salisbury’s attention the fact that said Dembski, in addition, served on the committee of a subsequently established society of Polish political émigrés.45

He also described how *Free Russia* No. 8 (1891) had carried an announcement in Russian informing the public that five émigrés (namely, Volkhovskii, Kelchevskii, Stepniak, Chaikovskii and Shishko)46 had organised a society entitled ‘*Fondes litteraires Russes*’, for the publication of revolutionary works in Russian.47 The memorandum drew attention to the first publication of that society: Stepniak’s brochure *What We Need and the Beginning of the End*,48 in which the author laid out the programme of the future revolution. Both Ivanova and Senese have made reference to this brochure, which contained certain phrases of a particularly incendiary nature and which de Staal was anxious to draw to Salisbury’s attention. Without sight of the original memorandum, however, neither commentator could

45 The society referred to was probably the Związek Zagranicznych Socjalistów Polskich first founded in Paris in 1892. For more on the Polish emigration in London see Wierzbianski, B. *Polacy w świecie*. Londyn: Wydawnictwo Światowego Zwiąiku Polaków z Zagranicy, 1946. pp. 90–104.

46 The latter would soon return to Paris to become the Fund’s representative there.

47 The Russian Literary Fund was soon renamed the Russian Free Press Fund (*Fond vol’noi russkoi pressy*).

point to the specific phrase which caused the ambassador such alarm. As can now be revealed the passage in question concerns Stepniak’s direct specification as legitimate means of action of ‘les complots militaires, l’assaut nocturne du palais, les bombes, la dynamite’.49 (The precise importance of this phrase to Burtsev’s fate will become clear shortly.) Ambassador de Staal was appalled too that such seditious works should be freely available in a number of London bookshops and helpfully supplied addresses in Hammersmith and in the East End where they could be obtained. The memorandum ended thus:

This succinct exposé should serve as proof that the activities of the above-mentioned groups are not limited to socialist theory, but are rather given over in the main to direct revolutionary propaganda and that these groups will overlook no means which may help them achieve their ends.50

Salisbury assured the ambassador that he would bring the matter to the attention of the police but explained that no steps could be taken to prevent the preaching or publication of revolutionary doctrines except in cases where there was direct incitement to assassination. However, as Salisbury’s private secretary Eric Barrington noted (as he forwarded a copy of the memorandum to Sir Edward Bradford of the Metropolitan Police), it appeared that Stepniak had indeed used language which would bring him within the law.51 Commissioner Bradford, though, was not quite of the same opinion. His overall view was that,

There is no doubt that these men are plotting schemes of war and violence against the authorities in Russia, but police vigilance hitherto has failed to obtain proof of any overt act such as would bring them practically within the criminal law. Indeed the moral support which they receive from many public men in England, as noticed in the memo leads them to maintain an appearance of moderation as to their aims & projects. I have examined both the earliest numbers of their journal ‘Free Russia’, and I find nothing that we would take notice of. In fact, the attacks on the Russian

49 TNA, PRO FO 65/1429. ff. 90–91. Underlined in the original.
50 ibid., f. 92.
51 ibid., f. 95. E. Barrington to Sir E. Bradford, 5 March 1892: ‘Russian Anarchists in England’.
government are characterised by moderation as compared with what is published with impunity in English papers against the government of our country.

I had Stepaniak's 'What is wanted' read by a competent person whom I directed to furnish me with a translation of any passages of a dangerous kind. As a result he has given me the very same sentence that is quoted in the memo. This doubtless is thoroughly bad, and it is possible that although it stands alone the gentlemen of the Committee might on account of it refuse to allow the pamphlet to be recommended by 'Free Russia'. 52

This document bears an additional manuscript note to the effect that Lord Salisbury did not think it worth communicating Bradford's remarks to de Staal. The First Minister did, however, send a response to the Russian embassy in which he echoed Bradford's opinion with regard to the relative moderation of the attacks and also played up the restraining influence which the SFRF exerted on the refugees. 53 It is interesting to note that Salisbury did not choose to comment on de Staal's indictment of Stepaniak, nor to agree that the latter's call for 'military plots, nocturnal attacks on the palace, bombs and dynamite' 54 was 'thoroughly bad' and might rightly be regarded as incitement to murder. It is even more interesting, therefore, that some six years later it would be the repetition of this very phrase in Narodovolets that would lead to Burtsev's conviction in an English court!

From Salisbury's response it would appear that, at this stage at least, Britain was not prepared to give in to the Russian government's demands concerning the suppression of anti-tsarist activities on its territory, as other European states had done. According to de Staal, however, the head of Her Majesty's government was at least prepared to issue an order that 'these Russian émigrés and their English minions' (prispeshniki) should be placed under police surveillance'. 55 And, indeed, British

52 ibid., FO 65/1430. Sir E. Bradford to E. Barrington, 26 March 1892: 'Remarks on memo communicated by M. de Staal, 5 March 1892'.


54 The full Stepaniak quote reads: 'My revoliutsionery ne tol'ko do priamogo narodnogo vostania, no do voennykh zagovorov, vtorzhenii vo dvorets, do bomb i dinamita'. Cited by Burtsev in his Editor's introduction to Narodovolets no. 1, April 1897, p. 11.

55 Arkhiv vneshei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii f. Kantseliariia, 1892 g. op. 470, d. 58. l. 259. Cited in Ivanova, 'Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia', p. 96.
government archives show that Salisbury was prepared to offer some assistance in this respect. While still drawing the line at passing on intelligence concerning the activities of Russian politcals on British soil, the government was willing to forward any information it had concerning their activities abroad. For example, on 8 June 1892, a mere three months after de Staal’s visit, Salisbury secretly contacted the Russian embassy to forward a Home Office letter that detailed the movements of one of those named in the memorandum. He informed de Staal that the ‘Russian nihilist’ Alexandre Dembski had recently left London for the continent and that British Foreign Office representatives in Berlin and Copenhagen had been instructed to inform the local police authorities. Moreover, their interest in Dembski did not stop there. In January the following year he was a member of a group of five Russians who were spotted by the port police in Dover disembarking from the Calais steamer and tracked all the way to the home of Mendelssohn in West Kensington.

So, the Russian request for police collaboration first made to Foreign Secretary Salisbury by chargé d’affaires Bartolomei some fourteen years earlier had at last been approved, in part, by First Minister Salisbury, with Scotland Yard being given the go-ahead to commence surveillance of foreign radicals on British soil. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the British government had started to show a willingness to co-operate (in matters of foreign intelligence at least) at an even earlier date. In September 1891 the Foreign Office had received news from Paris that the Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch had been approached by ‘two Nihilist Delegates’ who,

asked for a subvention of one million francs in furtherance of their new plan of action. They had decided to desist from any attempts in Russia itself where they felt they were now powerless and intended to watch for purposes of assassination of all the members of the Imperial family who might be travelling abroad. Cannes, Monte Carlo, Algeria were mentioned as places where this could be successfully practised.

56 TNA, PRO FO 65/1429 ff. 124–125: ‘Russian Nihilist Dembski.’ Foreign Office to de Staal, 8 June 1892. The Home Office letter referred to is as yet unidentified.
Salisbury quite rightly suspected this to be 'a plant of some kind', noting that 'the Nihilists are not such idiots as to have told their real plans to Hirsch', but he duly passed the information on to St Petersburg and received a note of thanks from Foreign Minister de Giers, who thought it either

a simple bit of bravado on the part of the nihilists, or they may wish to put the Russian police off their guard against attempts on the lives of the Imperial Family in this country, or they may have been honest in what they told Baron Hirsch they intended to do in the future.\textsuperscript{59}

Another (perhaps more likely) alternative not mentioned by the minister was that the two mysterious 'Nihilist Delegates', describing such an alarming expansion of their foul terrorist campaign into the very heart of Europe itself, may well have been Foreign Agency provocateurs who were simply carrying out Rachkovskii's bidding.

Why the British government's attitude to Russian political fugitives should have changed at this time is not immediately clear. Certainly, the tsar's government had for some time been pressing a number of countries to enter into more wide-ranging extradition treaties that would not treat 'political' criminals as exceptions to the law. Russia had already agreed such treaties with Austria and Germany and more recently, to the great horror of western liberals, they appeared to be on the brink of an agreement with the United States.\textsuperscript{60} Britain, however, had held back. Although an Anglo-Russian treaty for the mutual extradition of fugitive criminals had been agreed in 1887, it allowed only for the expatriation of 'ordinary' and not 'political' criminals. And, indeed, the National Archives contains evidence that, on more than one occasion, the Russian ambassador availed himself of the opportunity afforded him under the terms of this convention to apply for the extradition of certain Russian

\textsuperscript{59} ibid., FO 65/1399 ff. 67–69. Howard to Salisbury, 19 September 1891: 'Reported Nihilist plot'.

\textsuperscript{60} A draft treaty with Washington, in which attempts at murder of the Head of State or of members of the Imperial family were classed as ordinary crimes, was signed in March and put up for ratification by the Senate in May 1887. It resulted in a number of protest meetings. Stepniak was one of those to send messages of support to the protestors. See The Times, 21 May 1887, p. 9. The full treaty did not come into force until mid-1893.
criminals. The London 'politicals', however, despite these encouraging signs of British compliance, continued in their vocal opposition - safely beyond the reach of Alexander III, and much to his dismay. To silence them would require a different approach entirely.

The secret agent and the lovesick terrorist

Despite the increase in the number of Foreign Agency spies on the streets of London, Burtsev somehow managed to go unmolested for most of this his first year in the capital. Of his movements during the year we know only that on 6 March 1891, like so many émigrés before him, he was drawn to the riches of the library of the British Museum and, giving his address as 6, Shouldham St W1, was issued with his first Reader’s Ticket. Much more will be said in the next chapter of Burtsev’s love affair with this remarkable institution and of the complex role it was to play throughout his life in emigration. For the time being, however, let us assume only that, for most of the year that followed, he was a regular visitor to Great Russell Street, where, under the great dome of the Reading Room, he diligently pursued his historical studies.

The next documented reference to his movements is to be found in a Foreign Agency report of February 1892, which describes a brief visit he made to Paris under the assumed name of Kvaskov. In response to a query concerning Burtsev’s whereabouts from chief of police Durnovo in early 1892, Rachkovskii provided yet more evidence of his cosy relationship with the Prefect of Paris, Monsieur Lozé:

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61 See, for example, TNA, PRO FO 65/1429 ff. 322–325. De Staal to Foreign Office, 26 April 1892 and 6 May 1892: requests for the extradition of two Russian subjects under the terms of the Convention.

62 The tsar showed his displeasure at the failure of the ‘Russian memorandum’ to achieve a more satisfactory outcome, noting on de Staal’s report ‘This is not a very comforting result’ (Eto malouteshitel’nyi rezul’tat). Cited in Ivanova, ‘Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia’, p. 98.

63 BMA, Volumes of Readers’ Signatures, 6 March 1891, no. A42912.

64 There is documentary proof that he also carried out research in the Reading Room on behalf of others. The German anarchist and historian Max Nettlau was one for whom Burtsev ordered up materials and made notes. See, for example, International Institute for Social History, Max Nettlau Archive (hereafter IISH, Nettlau) Collection 2177.

I have the honour respectfully to report that the émigré Burtsev referred to, having arrived in Paris in November last lived here at 13 Rue des Beaux-Arts until 15 January and then returned to London where he has now settled at no 43 Frederick Street, Gray's Inn Road. During his stay in Paris he met up with the local revolutionaries recommending to them the necessity for unified action against the government. As a result of this and, deeming the activities of this émigré unquestionably harmful, I approached the Prefect of Paris with the request that he be expelled from France, this measure, however, was not put into effect, for Burtsev, noticing that he was being watched, fled Paris leaving behind his effects with the landlady at the hotel.66

It was while staying at this hotel on the Rue des Beaux-Arts in the heart of the Latin Quarter, that Burtsev first made the acquaintance of a certain Madame Charlotte Bullier, who, 'acting on the best of intentions', helped him escape from the French police who, at Rachkovskii’s bidding, had come to arrest him.67

The exact details of how the two first met and of how his escape was effected are unknown, but the end result of their encounter was that Burtsev fell head over heels in love with this French enchantress. The ensuing affair, packed as it was with passion, intrigue, jealousy, betrayal, abandonment and remorse, would put any 'Mills and Boon' romance to shame, and its recounting here might be seen as somewhat out of place were it not for the fact that the story also throws new light on a number of topics central to the present study, such as the methods used by the police in their surveillance of Russian political émigrés and the extent of international police – and, indeed, governmental – co-operation in these activities. Moreover, the impact which this affair had on Burtsev's character has not, hitherto, been examined in any detail. Indeed, as previously mentioned, his relationship with Bullier has been described only once in a short chapter by an obscure author included, apparently as an afterthought, in an equally obscure booklet published to mark the tenth anniversary of the fall of the autocracy and containing essays dealing exclusively with the liberation of

66 ibid., Rachkovskii to Durnovo, Dept. of Police 10/22 Feb 1892. Report no. 30. This was in response to Durnovo's telegram of 3 February 1892: GARF f. 102, d. 3. op 90. (1892) del. I T. 1. l. 38.
67 Gogol', 'Sharlotta Biul'e', pp. 210–211.
revolutionaries from tsarist prisons and exile. It is difficult to imagine a more incongruous environment in which to place the story of an émigré love affair. Moreover, the essay in question is incomplete, being based solely on Department of Police documents held in the Russian archives. Now, drawing also on the Okhrana archive held at the Hoover Institution, a fuller account of the relationship and its significance can be offered.

According to the novelist Iurii Davydov, certain background details on Bullier are to be found in her Department of Police dossier in the Moscow archives. From this source we learn that, at an early age, Mademoiselle Charlotte married Monsieur Bullier, a fairly well-to-do wine merchant of Marseilles. For reasons unknown, the couple then left for Paris, where they settled in the Rue des Beaux-Arts. Apparently, Monsieur Bullier died soon afterwards, leaving Charlotte to carry on with the business. Shortly after their encounter on the Left Bank of the Seine, Burtsev and Bullier entered into what was to become a lengthy and passionate correspondence that was to last until the summer of 1893. Unbeknownst to Burtsev, however, Bullier had simultaneously entered into dealings with the Russian Department of Police in St Petersburg and, in due course, relations of a professional (and perhaps even personal) nature with the head of the Foreign Agency in Paris, to whom she faithfully forwarded Burtsev’s every communication. A huge file of some 200 pages containing, in the main, Burtsev’s letters to Bullier and hers to Rachkovskii, together with correspondence between the latter and his masters in St Petersburg, forms a part of the Hoover Institution’s Okhrana archive. They offer, on the one hand, a fascinating insight into Burtsev’s closely guarded personal life and, on the other, a glimpse into the murky world of tsarist secret intelligence operations in Europe.

In one of his earliest letters to Bullier, Burtsev stated his lack of concern at the increased presence of Russian agents in London: ‘In England there is no danger for me; I am known here under my own name and although Russian spies see me they

69 Davydov, Bestseller, pp. 52–54. Frustratingly, Davydov does not supply full references. The dossier in question is apparently called ‘Circular 3124’ and is held in GARF. Davydov also makes the (unsubstantiated) claim that Bullier was the cousin of none other than Henri Bint, one of the Foreign Agency’s longest serving employees, inferring that it may have been he who assisted her entry into the world of espionage and who introduced her to his superior.
can do nothing to me under English law."\textsuperscript{70} Six years later he would realise his mistake in treating the Russian secret police with such flippancy. Indeed, on the very day he wrote thus, mocking the powerlessness of Russian spies, his new amour was writing to the head of the Department of Police in St Petersburg informing him that she knew of Burtsev's whereabouts, claiming that she could deliver him up to them and inquiring 'what reward she might receive for this service'.\textsuperscript{71} This rather set the tone for the exchanges to come. Durnovo quickly placed Bullier under Rachkovskii's control and, as Burtsev's letters started to roll in to the offices of the Foreign Agency in the basement of the Russian Embassy in Paris, Rachkovskii and his new agent began to draw up their plans for the final capture of the elusive refugee.

Whether Bullier was initially driven to her acts of betrayal simply by the prospect of monetary gain is unknown. In one of her early letters to Rachkovskii, while clearly showing her business acumen, she also gave a rather confusing picture of where she stood politically with regard to Russia:

\begin{quote}
I do not know your government, Sir. So far I have not seen much evidence of its liberalism, but in spite of that we must come to an agreement and set out some conditions before going any further. I believe that, thanks to my intelligence, I merit your confidence and, if I succeed to do what until now no one has succeeded in doing, not only will I think I have proved myself, but also that I have been of merit to Russia.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Under Rachkovskii's guidance Bullier quickly set about cementing her relationship with Burtsev. In the light of his recent experiences in Paris the latter was, understandably, still wary about setting foot outside of England and so Bullier

\textsuperscript{70} HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVId/1A. (Folder 2). Burtsev to Bullier, London 9 April 1892. Cited in Saunders, 'Vladimir Burtsev', pp. 40 and 57 (Note 14).


\textsuperscript{72} HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVId/1A. (Folder 2). Bullier to Rachkovskii, Paris 6 June 1892. Bullier addressed most of her letters to Rachkovskii to a 'Madame Joly, 36 Boulevard Arago', a flat rented by the Foreign Agency since at least 1886. See Agafonov, Parizhkie tainy, p. 41. Bullier would also send the occasional missive direct to a Monsieur Melzer, one of Rachkovskii's assistants in the Russian Embassy at 79, Rue de Grenelle.
travelled to London to try to lure him abroad. Returning after a second visit in July 1892, she reported:

I have persuaded Burtsev to come with me for a holiday to Switzerland. He will stop working. He still has another eight days of work to get through, then he will belong to me. From Switzerland we will make an excursion to wherever you wish. I would only ask that you telegraph me with instructions on what I should do. Today I have great hopes of success.\(^{73}\)

As will be shown later, Rachkovskii’s intention was to lure Burtsev to some country where the authorities were more sympathetic to the Russian government, and where, without too much fuss, the police might be willing to hand him over to their Russian counterparts. The Switzerland trip, however, did not come off (doubtless, as a result of Burtsev’s caution) but Bullier persevered, reporting the following month that she had persuaded him to come to Paris. Unfortunately for her, that visit too came to nothing.

In general, Burtsev’s letters to her contain little of a political nature. Although one does occasionally pick up the odd piece of information on his whereabouts or some vague remarks about his future plans (written, it should be said, in very poor French) this is hardly the level of information the Russian police would have been either expecting or willing to pay for. Moreover, Bullier’s letters to her ‘control’ contain, in the main, nothing of substance but rather are peppered with irrelevant asides of a somewhat personal nature. These letters do, however, occasionally allow one to glean some information on her relationship with Rachkovskii. Thus, in one she thanks him for the pretty bouquet he has sent and hopes he has fully recovered from his indisposition; in another she mentions a box of grapes she has sent him, which she trusts he will enjoy. Later, she complains of headaches, bronchitis, a need for a rest cure and so on and, later still, one senses that her relationship with Rachkovskii might have developed into something more than strictly professional. In short, the correspondence is pervaded by a sense of rank amateurism. Nowhere, at this time, is any mention made of payments being received for services rendered – at least not until mid-September 1892, when Bullier, apparently aggrieved at the lack of attention

\(^{73}\) ibid., Bullier to Rachkovskii, 4 July 1892.
she was receiving, decided to write directly to Alexander III, informing him that, seven months earlier, she had put a proposal to the chief of police in St Petersburg who had charged her with an extremely important and delicate task and that, since then, 'out of a sense of love for Russia and the sovereign for whom she was prepared to give up her life', she had spared neither effort nor money and had even risked her own safety. Finally, she asked that she be summoned to St Petersburg so that she might 'personally impart some information of direct relevance to his Imperial Majesty'. Her impertinence elicited a speedy response from police chief Durnovo, who sent Rachkovskii a copy of her petition to the tsar, asking what, if any, 'indications of a political character' the petitioner had in her possession and what recompense she merited. Rachkovskii sent his opinion on the terms she should be offered (300 francs a month, if she could lure Burtsev abroad) and, a few weeks later, received Durnovo's assent, with the comment that 'her demands for [an additional] 1,000 francs should not be entertained (all the more so because I don't really believe her promises)'.

Bullier had made her request for these funds partly to compensate her for the monies she had been sending to Burtsev, hoping in this way to entice him back to Paris. One can sense her increasing exasperation as the year 1892 drew to a close and yet, despite her best efforts, her quarry still refused to cross the Channel. In late November she made another brief and fruitless trip to London; then, in December, suggested he come to Paris just for twenty-four hours, but still he demurred. At the same time she was aware that doubts were creeping into Rachkovskii's mind that she could deliver on her promises and so she attempted to reassure her employer with a note in which her frustration is only too evident:

Already nine months have passed since we have been together, working for the same cause. I have put myself at your government's disposition by putting myself at yours. I hoped to succeed in a short space of time but as you said to me – one does not

75 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVII/1A. (Folder 2). Durnovo to Rachkovskii Doc. no. 70 (Reference no. 54), 17/29 September 1892
76 ibid., Rachkovskii to Durnovo, Report no. 82. 8 October 1892; and Durnovo to Rachkovskii, Doc. no. 83 (Reference no. 66), 13/25 October 1892.
accomplish things of such importance in one or two months. And the proof of that is – you have already been pursuing him for years. You said to me once, that if I could deliver B. to you then I would no longer have to worry about my future and that I would be well looked after. I believed you when you said there would be a fortune for me and I was very happy. But, despite all the desire to make money and all the devotion which I have for you personally I repeat to you – I cannot wait!

Finally, Bullier’s efforts seemed to have paid off when Burtsev relented and agreed to come to Paris to greet his old friend A.L. Teplov, who was due to be released from prison.77

As the date of Burtsev’s arrival approached Bullier felt more confident in her demands for payment from Rachkovskii:

Your silence tells me that ‘they’ have refused what I asked for. They might at least give me 200 francs till February. I have belonged to you for ten months and you know that I am the only one who can deliver B. to you. Give me an advance. I am ill, perhaps even gravely…”79

And Burtsev’s letters too became all the more passionate, playful and expectant:

Dear Madame, It is very likely that you will scold me again! Of course, I am always at fault before you: It has already been two days since I last wrote to Paris! Yes, scold me, Madame, I am a criminal not only before the Russian state but before you. Two whole days! For that I should be hung at least, like this –

And here, at the bottom of the page, Burtsev, ‘formidable apostle of the revolutionary gospel’ and lovesick fool, has inserted a small drawing of a hanging man with the note, ‘le gibet - c’est Mr. B. pour qu’il ne répondrais à la lettre de Mme B’.80 Two

77 ibid., Bullier to Rachkovskii, 10 December 1892.
78 Teplov was the last of those accused in the Paris bomb factory affair to be released from Angers prison. Of the others, Lavrenius had been released early on grounds of ill health, while Nakashidze, Stepanov, Reinshtein and Kashintsev were freed in late 1892. See The Times, 8 October 1892, p. 5.
79 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVII/1A, (Folder 2): Bullier to Rachkovskii, 21 January 1893.
80 ibid., Burtsev to Bullier, 17 February 1893.
days later N.I. Petrov, the successor of the unfortunate and unsuccessful Durnovo at
the Department of Police in St Petersburg received a triumphant telegram from
Bullier declaring, 'Burtsev is with me. I await orders. Devoted as ever'. Rachkovskii
and his agent could now set about putting their plan into effect.

**Bullier's 'Combination no. 1'**

The plan, in essence, was for the Department of Police to fund a 'European tour' for
Bullier and Burtsev that would take them to the South of France, onwards through
Italy and arriving finally in Austria, where, it was anticipated, a responsive police
force would effect Burtsev's return to Russia. Bullier, having obtained a false passport
for Burtsev (thanks, ironically, to the good offices of the Foreign Agency), duly set
off on her travels with her charge in early April 1893 (22 March old style) and it is
curious indeed that, even as they departed, the Russian police had no idea how this
ultra-cautious revolutionary was to be persuaded to cross the final border into Austria
– a country that he would have known all too well had friendly relations with Russia.
Bullier, however, seemed confident of success but at their first stop in Montpellier her
plans had already started to unravel. It was here that Burtsev noticed a fault in his
passport: the number '2' had been so badly composed in one instance that his age
looked more like '47' than '27'. This worried him greatly and he expressed his
unwillingness to continue but Bullier persuaded him that she would arrange for a
replacement to be sent on to them at a later stage of their journey. This seemed to set
his mind at rest and they moved on. Meanwhile, she contacted Rachkovskii in a fury,

> Ah, if only I could help you to get a move on with the passport and get the '2'
> redone! I do not understand this negligence. And of course, you should be aware,

---

81 Nikolai Petrovich Petrov (1841–1905) took over as Director from Durnovo on 10 February 1893. Durnovo had held the position since 1884 but his successors were not stayers. Petrov lasted till the summer of 1895 when he was replaced by N.N. Saburov, who in turn was replaced the following May by A.F. Dobrzhinskii. He only lasted until the appointment of S.E. Zvolianskii in August 1897. The latter managed to last the course till the summer of 1902, when the position was filled by A.A. Lopukhin, who remained in the post till 1905.

82 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890 g.) Del 569. *Po rozysku Burtseva.* Tom. 4. Petrov to Rachkovskii. 20 February 1893. 1. 2.
Monsieur, it is not a sheep that I am leading here: he has given us a hard enough time already.83

The two travelling companions called next at Cannes, where Burtsev had hoped to introduce himself to the old émigré Petr Fedorovich Alisov, with whom he was sure he had much in common.

A man of some means, Alisov had found himself in emigration and in opposition to the Russian government from the 1860s. Like Burtsev, he did not belong to any revolutionary organization but published numerous articles in Obshchee delo ('The Common Cause') and elsewhere. Then, from the 1870s onwards, he published, at his own expense, a series of broadsides against successive tsars and their governments.84 In July 1893, at the prompting of 'a comrade', he brought his thoughts on terrorism together in a short volume entitled simply Terror. Letter to a Comrade.85 As the historian O.V. Budnitskii has pointed out, the 'comrade' in question was none other than Burtsev, who felt that such a volume 'would be very useful at the present moment'.86 As will later become clear, many of Alisov's extreme political views were shared by Burtsev. Alisov preached pure terror – decentralized and systematic – believing that the People's Will had made the mistake of spending too much time on propaganda rather than engaging full-time in terroristic activities.87 On the other hand, he, again like Burtsev, supported his comparatively moderate Free Russia comrades in London and congratulated them for drawing to the world's attention the horrific events in Russia, believing that it was thanks to their reporting of the Iakutsk murders and the death by flogging of Nadezhda Sigida that the Russian government had been obliged to pass a law expressly forbidding the use of the whip even for common

83 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XV/IIle, (Folder 3), ff. 664–666. Bullier to Rachkovskii: Nice, 10 April, 1893.
86 Burtsev himself admitted as much some thirty years later. See Budnitskii, Terrorizm, p. 94.
87 Alisov, Terror, pp. 2–3.
criminals. Later, together with Kashintsev and Zhuk, Alisov would work closely with Burtsev (the 'chief troubadour of terrorism in the émigré press' as Budnitskii has called him) contributing a number of articles to his Narodovolets. 89

However, Alisov's association with Burtsev was not destined to begin with the latter's arrival in Cannes in the spring of 1893. Realizing he did not have Alisov's address, Burtsev had wished to stay on until he had sought his soul-mate out but was again persuaded by his demanding sputnik to continue their journey. Passing through Nice they arrived in Genoa on 12 April, by which time Burtsev's passport had been corrected and sent on. During their three-day stay in Genoa Burtsev began to regret his failure to meet up with Alisov and decided to write to him, care of a bookshop in Cannes that would be sure to know his address. Requiring a response, he demanded of Bullier the address of the Nice representative of her wine company who, he suggested, could receive Alisov's reply and forward it poste-restante to Milan, for Burtsev to pick up the following week. It was at this point that a most astonishingly convoluted and contrived plot as to how to deliver Burtsev into the hands of the Russian police started to take shape in Bullier's head. It is of some significance that, despite Rachkovskii's reputation as a master provocateur and his impressive track-record in bringing a range of political fugitives to justice, there is little evidence to suggest that he played the leading role in drawing up plans for Burtsev's recapture. As documents from the Okhrana archive show, both now and later it was Bullier who showed the initiative, took centre stage and, simultaneously, directed the action. She described the details of this, her first plan, in a letter to Rachkovskii from Genoa. 90

In short, the plan involved her first giving Burtsev a fictitious name and address for her Nice representative. Thus, if Alisov did receive Burtsev's letter his reply would never get back to Burtsev. Next, knowing that Burtsev had never seen Alisov's handwriting Bullier dictated a letter under the latter's name, which she had Rachkovskii translate into Russian. She also sent him a draft letter in French under the

88 The Isakutsk and Kara tragedies were the subject of a long article in the first number of Free Russia in June 1890, while the first two pamphlets published by the Society that same year were entitled The Slaughter of Political Prisoners in Siberia and The Flogging of Political Exiles in Russia. See, Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom', p. 55.

89 Budnitskii, Terrorism, pp. 105–107.

90 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XV/IIIe (Folder 3): Bullier to Rachkovskii, Genoa 12 April, 1893.
name of her fictitious Nice representative with the instruction that Rachkovskii despatch one of his best agents as quickly as possible to Cannes and then to Nice to put the respective letters into the post, and then to continue to Vienna to await her arrival. The Alisov letter referred to his imminent departure on a tour of Europe. Rachkovskii was then to produce another letter purporting to be from Alisov. This was to be posted from Vienna and would ask Burtsev to come there. Thus, Bullier hoped, her young amour would be suitably mollified by Alisov’s presence in the Austrian capital to cross the border, there to fall into the hands of the waiting police. Rachkovskii duly assigned his longest serving agent, Milevskii, to the task.91

On 17 April, Rachkovskii received a telegram from Bullier in Milan, confirming that Burtsev had received the first Alisov letter and that they were moving inexorably closer to the Austrian border – next stop Verona.92 Meanwhile, Rachkovskii had dutifully been reporting back to St Petersburg with progress updates. Director Petrov himself had not been idle and described to Rachkovskii an ‘arrangement’ which had been arrived at with the Austrian government:

Concerning the possibility of the detention of Burtsev in Vienna and his secret transfer to us, our chargé d’affaires has entered into a confidential arrangement (voshel v doveritel’nyia snosheniiia) with the Austrian government whereby Count Kálnoky has announced that the Viennese police will issue a warrant for Burtsev’s arrest, but that his expulsion across our border may be problematic if he is found to have in his possession a passport or money and cannot therefore be considered a vagrant.

Consequently, I would ask you to enquire of Bullier if she might before (or else immediately upon) their arrival in Vienna, take Burtsev’s personal documents from him, and if possible his money too, and then arrange it so that Milevskii points Burtsev out to the police at the moment he is in that position which meets those conditions which would make it necessary for him to be expelled and sent back over the border to us. Send me a telegram about the outcome as a matter of urgency.93

91 Vladislav Milevskii had served as a police agent since 1873.
92 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XV/IIIe (Folder 3), f. 670: Bullier to Meltzer, Milan 17 April 1893.
93 ibid., (Folder 2): Director of the Department of Police (i.e. Petrov) to Rachkovskii, Doc. no. 35 (Reference no. 19), 6/18 April 1893.
That Count Gustav Kálnoky, the Austrian Foreign Secretary, should have been prepared so blatantly to enter into such a dishonest agreement with St Petersburg in order to secure the arrest of a refugee who had, in fact, committed no crime under international law, almost beggars belief. That he suggested the use of the underhand means of arresting Burtsev as a vagrant rather than enforcing the existing extradition agreement with Russia suggests a rather cowardly wish to avoid any risk of a public outcry. However, in 1880–81 Kálnoky had served briefly and successfully as ambassador to St Petersburg and, since that time, his Russophile tendencies had been well-known. His willingness to deliver Burtsev up to the tsar was simply another example of his eagerness to please. The Russian government’s underhand approach to Kálnoky also offers further proof (if such were needed) of its determination to bring Burtsev to justice and of the price which Alexander III had placed on the young revolutionary’s head. Indeed, the lengths which the Russian government were prepared to go to in order to secure his capture were truly excessive, as recently discovered Russian archival documents show.94

The plot to lure Burtsev to Austria had, in fact, been in preparation since as early as July of the previous year, when chief of police Durnovo had written to K.A. Gubastov, Russian General Consul in Vienna, explaining their plans to entice their quarry to the Tyrol and asking him if he could approach the Austrian government to seek its help in transferring Burtsev to them.95 At that time Kálnoky had replied wishing the Russians success in their project and saying he had passed the request on to Minister-President Count Eduard Taaffe. He warned, however, that due to the length of time it would take to transport the prisoner from the Tyrol to the Russian border it was likely the press would get to hear about it and cause problems for the government. In Kálnoky’s view, the affair might be simplified considerably if Burtsev could be captured in Vienna, whence he could be transferred to Russia in one night. St Petersburg also kept Rachkovskii informed of developments.96 For a time no further progress was made; then, following Durnovo’s dismissal in early 1893, Rachkovskii contacted N.P. Petrov the new head of police to explain Burtsev’s relationship with Bullier – ‘he is in love with her!’ – and from then on kept him informed of their

94 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890 g.) Del 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. Tom 3–4.

95 *ibid.*, Durnovo to Gubastov. 1/13 July 1892. Tom 3. l. 131.

96 *ibid.*, Gubastov to Durnovo. 8/20 July 1892. Tom 3. ll. 132–133.
progress as they slowly made their way to the Austrian border.\textsuperscript{97} Meanwhile, Petrov renewed contact with Gubastov in Vienna:

\begin{quote}
In view of the serious revolutionary significance of Burtsev who has not ceased his harmful agitation in France and England I would beg your Excellency to enter into a confidential arrangement with the President of the Viennese Police and ask for his assistance in Burtsev’s arrest and secret transfer to the Russian border.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

However, complications set in. It transpired that even if Burtsev could be arrested as a beggar, under Austrian law, he could only be expelled via a border-crossing of his own choosing. Following a flurry of telegrams, Minister of the Interior I.N. Durnovo became involved, writing in strict confidence to Deputy Foreign Minister N.P. Shishkin\textsuperscript{99} and asking him to do all in his power to persuade his contacts in Vienna ‘to hand Burtsev over in secret even if it transpired he had passport and money on his person when arrested’.\textsuperscript{100}

But even this intervention was of no use: Kálnoky reported that he could not persuade Taaffe to hand Burtsev over to the Russians in view of recent ‘interpellations parlementaires’. Instead, he would be expelled at the border crossing nearest to Vienna, namely, Oderberg (i.e. Bohumín, now in the Czech Republic), which lay on the border with Imperial Germany. As the two travellers edged ever closer to Austria a frenzied new correspondence therefore sprang up between Petrov and D.V. Kazarinov, Russian consul in Berlin. The former wondered – could the Germans be persuaded to hand the refugee over? Since the secret Reinsurance Treaty with Bismark had been allowed to lapse and Russia had begun to move towards a full military alliance with France relations between St Petersburg and Berlin were certainly not as friendly as they had been; but, as Petrov remarked, the Germans had

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{97} \textit{ibid.}, tom 4. Rachkovskii to Petrov. 8/20 January – 16/28 April 1893. ll. 1, 6, 10, 29–31.
\item \textsuperscript{98} \textit{ibid.}, tom 4. Petrov to Gubastov. 19/3 1 March 1893. 1.8
\item \textsuperscript{99} Nikolai Pavlovich Shishkin (1827–1902) Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1896–1897.
\item \textsuperscript{100} GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890 g.) Del 569, tom 4. I.N. Durnovo to N.P. Shishkin. 6 April 1893. 1. 15.
\end{footnotes}
been of assistance in the past. 101 Then, at last, on 22 April, success appeared to be within their grasp. A telegram was received from Kazarinov informing them that Prussian Prime Minister Count Botho zu Eulenburg had signalled his willingness to do the deed! 102

Under such circumstances, one cannot help but sympathize with Burtsev’s plight and marvel at how, with the police and governments of all Europe seemingly in pursuit, he managed to escape capture for so long. And, indeed, on this occasion too, he succeeded in evading arrest. Petrov was informed of the news in a telegram from ‘Leonard’ (Rachkovskii’s Paris pseudonym) dated 19 April 1893 (new style) that read: ‘Our enterprise concerning the travellers can be considered as having failed. Vladimir refuses to enter Austria from Verona’. 103 Burtsev, appearing to sense danger ahead, had decided to extend his stay in Italy and refused point-blank to cross the Austrian border. Bullier urgently telegraphed the Russian embassy in Paris for guidance and received the advice that she should suggest Salzburg as a safer alternative to Vienna. Burtsev, however, had decided to head for Switzerland to visit friends in Zurich, apparently promising to join up with Bullier in Salzburg for a brief visit at a later date. Having arrived in Salzburg, though, and having sent Burtsev details of her address, Bullier then received the reply that her companion had hurt his leg and now could not join her. Fearing her plans were about to disintegrate she rushed to Zurich, where she found Burtsev in the company of some émigrés, two of whom happened to be women. In a jealous rage she left immediately for Paris but by the time that she reached the railway station had calmed down sufficiently to promise Burtsev that she would send for him from Paris. 104

Little is known of Burtsev’s activities and contacts during this brief stay in Zurich other than his own recollection that it was there, in the flat of the student Konstantin Grankovskii, that he had his first fateful encounter with a certain Lev Dmitrievich Beitner who befriended him and who, from that moment on (as will later

101 ibid., N.I. Petrov to D.V. Kazarinov. 15 April 1893. ll. 18–21. According to the police chief it was thanks to the assistance of the German authorities that Burtsev’s companion Iulii Rappoport had been successfully captured as he attempted to cross the border some three years earlier.

102 ibid., D.V. Kazarinov to N.I. Petrov, 22 April 1893. l. 27.

103 ibid., Rachkovskii to Petrov. 7/19 April 1893. f. 29.

104 Gogol’, ‘Sharlotta Biul’e’, p. 213.
be described) devoted his life to his friend’s betrayal. At this stage, however, the newly recruited police informer could do nothing to prevent the collapse of Rachkovskii’s and Bullier’s enterprise.

Whereas Petrov and his associates in the Department of Police must have been hugely disappointed in the outcome of their scheme, Minister of the Interior Durnovo was philosophical. On 3 May he wrote to his foreign minister asking him to pass on his warmest thanks to Count Eulenburg for his willingness to hand Burtsev over. In the same letter he laid out proposals for closer co-operation between the departments of political police of both countries and pointed out that there was nothing new in such collaboration, citing Paris and Brussels as examples. In this context, therefore, the Burtsev incident (or non-incident!) can be considered to be of some significance to the wider issue of co-operation between the ministries of the interior and the political police forces of Europe. Even at such times when, in general terms, diplomatic relations were strained common cause could be found in the pursuit of political refugees.

Bullier’s ‘Combination no. 2’

The lovesick revolutionary had returned to London in early May 1893 but his ardour was soon re-aroused when, true to her word, Bullier called him to Paris and he, with great excitement, started to make arrangements for their next rendezvous. Burtsev’s letter to Bullier of 19 May reveals a rare glimpse of his passionate side:

You say I am not thrifty? Who says so? Madame? ha! ha! ha! I am dying of laughter. I know that very well. You are too terrible! If Madame goes to London for two weeks it would cost her 2,000 francs. It is I who should buy a big stick, and I will. You will see. Yes, you will see how it is after I give you some blows with my stick [coups de baton]. I give you my word of honour! I hope to receive 20 francs tomorrow and consequently will leave London on Sunday at 9 o’clock in the evening, and I will arrive on Monday at around 8.30 – 9.00 when you shall be, as is your wont, in bed.
A bientôt, Votre Vladimir.

105 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 117.

P.S. I have just reread your letter and I am beside myself. Oh, yes! You shall see!  

The following day Bullier dutifully forwarded this *billet-doux* to Rachkovskii, callously commenting, ‘My brother is truly in high spirits!! I have erased one line which is only of personal interest to me. – please excuse me – it would have made you laugh too much!!!’  

Butsev duly arrived, wide-eyed and expectant, in Paris on Monday 21 May 1893 and moved into the flat which Bullier had rented for them just around the corner from Rue des Beaux-Arts, at 21 Rue Bonaparte. She had already devised another plot to capture the unsuspecting refugee but suddenly received the devastating news from Rachkovskii that, following the fiasco of the European trip, the Department of Police no longer wished to have any dealings with her. Bullier’s immediate and angry response, which she sent direct to Petrov in St Petersburg, detailed with astonishing frankness her true feelings for Butsev and the remarkable lengths to which she had been prepared to go in her deception. It is difficult to believe that some of the methods used to obtain information from her victim were her own invention. For example, the idea that she should drug Butsev and then copy out his papers while he slept must surely, one feels, have come from Rachkovskii. Bullier’s letter is worth quoting here at length:

[I was informed] today that you have lost almost all confidence in me and that you will issue no further orders on this case.

I understand that over the years you have dispensed a great deal of money on B. without result, and the sacrifices you made for our trip are no more than a grain of salt in comparison to the sums you have spent in the past. I too have made many sacrifices, and will continue to do so since I am persuaded that this man is doing harm to his country and that his time will come... God will not protect him. As I write, he lies there asleep, completely at peace and with not a care in the world.

To attract this thoroughly suspicious man to me I have made the greatest sacrifice a woman such as I could make. Let there be no doubt about it! He does not possess a single attractive trait... I swear to you! Horribly filthy, full of vermin, I have stripped him naked and washed him, I have dressed him, fed him, sheltered him.

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108 *ibid.*, Bullier to Rachkovskii, Paris, 20 May 1893. (One line in the letter is, indeed, heavily crossed out.)
and much, much more besides, without mentioning the amount of money which for
the past seventeen months I have put towards the cause. I have abandoned everything
and devoted my life to this. Often, as B. slept, I have with trembling hands taken his
letters and papers to read and copy. I have even traced them myself.

In other words, Monsieur, I have exposed myself to danger on numerous
occasions for, if he suspected that I was giving him narcotics, I would be at his
mercy, for we both live together completely on our own. I am his confidante. He tells
me political things which are so appalling I hardly dare believe them.

But there we are. He is still with me and by rights he should be with you. It is
not possible for me to abandon my work. I have been involved in it for so long and he
has abused me so much that I cannot simply let him go like that. 109

Bullier then confidently proceeded to outline the details of her next outrageous plan
for Burtsev's capture:

I have just returned from Marseilles where I went to draw up an agreement with a
captain of a merchant ship with whom I am acquainted. I offered him 5,000 francs
and he has accepted. I can count on his devotion and discretion. So, B. and I shall go
to Marseilles because he wants to go to Romania by sea; I shall recommend this ship
to him – the captain can promise him what he likes but instead of plotting a course for
Romania he will set sail for Russia or Constantinople. En route B. will be kept below
deck. It is not the first time the captain has carried out such work. His boat only
carries merchandise and no passengers which is what B. absolutely insists on – he
always prefers to travel this way. Now, if on arrival in Marseilles he changes his mind
I will suggest we take a short boat trip which he adores and, with the help of the
captain and two of his sturdy crew, we'll send him on his way in any event. I can
report that the boat is moored in an isolated spot so that its night time departure will
be seen by no one.

I would ask you for an advance to offset the initial expenses and for one of
your policemen to accompany the boat. I would willingly go myself but I suffer
terribly from sea-sickness and, besides, I think a man would be better for the job. On
arriving at the destination the captain should be given what I promised him. I have no
personal interest in these 5,000 francs. This is the way I wish it to be.

109 ibid., Bullier to Director of Police (Petrov), Paris, 10 June 1893 (copy).
Could I ask you sir, as soon as you have read my letter, to telegraph me with instructions on what I should do, and give orders to the relevant person. I would ask you once more to do all this as it would almost serve to recompense me for all the troubles he has caused me, and for all the devotion I have put to the service of His Majesty, the Emperor of Russia.\footnote{ibid.}

Petrov forwarded the letter to Rachkovskii, expressing his doubts as to the likelihood of success of Bullier’s latest proposal:

I attach herewith a copy of a declaration from C. Bullier outlining a new combination whose aim is to effect the capture of V. Burtsev. May I ask you to tell the lady in question in future not to send any declarations to St Petersburg but that all instructions and explanations should be received locally from you.

In addition, I find it necessary to add that if Madame Bullier was to come up with any really sensible proposition which might lead to some tangible results then you might inform the Department of this; otherwise, all fantastic projects, such as the present one, should be declined.\footnote{ibid., Director of Department of Police (Petrov) to Rachkovskii, no. 64. Alt. ref. no. 36, 5/17 June 1893.}

However, for whatever reason – possibly Rachkovskii’s intervention – the chief of police seems to have had a rapid change of heart, for the ‘fantastic project’ was set in motion and, perhaps somewhat remarkably, four days later, Petrov received the news that Burtsev had been detained in Marseilles and was locked in the cabin of the said steamship whose captain now required payment.\footnote{Gogol’, ‘Sharlotta Biul’e’, p. 214.}

At last, it seemed, the elusive fugitive was within Rachkovskii’s grasp. On receiving his 5,000 francs the captain would sail across the Mediterranean to Constantinople, where Burtsev would be transferred to a Russian ship. Unfortunately for him, however, Rachkovskii’s nemesis was fated to slip through his fingers yet again. As the head of the Foreign Agency explained in a telegram to St Petersburg on 29 June 1893, Bullier had not acted according to his wishes and he had therefore been obliged to send agent Milevskii to Marseilles to bring this ‘foolish undertaking’
(legkomyslennoe predpriiatie) to an end. It had transpired that the steamship was not powerful enough to make the journey to Constantinople without calling to refuel at ports such as Messina and Piraeus, where strict quarantines were in operation and where scandal was sure to ensue if the imprisoned Burtsev was discovered. Rachkovskii, therefore, resigned himself to the fact that he would have to free his quarry, but regretted so bitterly having to carry out this action that, the following day, he sent an urgent telegram to the Department of Police: 'To release [him] is unthinkable. Burtsev is threatening to create a huge scandal. Hard labour will be on the cards for many.' Rachkovskii at this point seemed to have lost all sense of reason, demanding that a steamboat be immediately dispatched from the Black Sea to Marseilles. He received the reply, however, that no such ship was available (although, apparently, Petrov himself had to be dissuaded from sending a warship!) The game was up.

It is perhaps surprising that, on his release from captivity, the misused revolutionary did not seize the opportunity to 'create a huge scandal' and round on Rachkovskii and his masters in St Petersburg with accusations of gross incompetence and profligacy. Rachkovskii, however, was not surprised by his opponent's silence. He had already reassured Petrov that it was unlikely there would be repercussions and that, if the story ever did come into the open, he had reliable friends in the French press (and indeed in government circles) who would spin the whole episode into some elaborate affair which had been manufactured jointly by Burtsev and Bullier.

In all the years that followed, Burtsev never once made mention of his European encounters with the Russian secret police during this period, nor of his association with his deceptive French mistress. It has been suggested that he remained

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113 According to one source the steamship was unable to make the journey due to prolonged bad weather. See Praisman, Terroristy, p. 267.

114 Gogol', 'Sharlotta Biul'è', p. 215.

115 ibid., p. 216.

116 In the course of the affair 7,000 francs were paid to Bullier and her associates in Marseilles. Rachkovskii claimed and received 1,000 francs for his troubles while his two agents Milevskii and Bint put in an additional expenses claim of 900 francs. See GARF f. 102, d. 3. op 90. (1892) Del. 4. 1. 34: Raschet izderzhannykh deneg po delu Burtseva-Biul'è, 5 July 1893.

117 ibid., p. 216.
silent simply out of embarrassment that he, the ultra-cautious revolutionary conspirator, should have so nearly fallen into Rachkovskii's hands. However, it is perhaps more likely that he maintained his silence for the simple reason that to do otherwise would have obliged him to relive the pain which his betrayal at the hands of his first love had caused him.

Thus ended Burtsev's association with his French adventuress. There is, however, a coda to the Bullier tale. A year after the Marseilles debacle, Rachkovskii received the following communication from Petrov:

Charlotte Bullier, who is known to you, while visiting St Petersburg in May this year, delivered a petition regarding payment for the services in the case of the capture of Vladimir Burtsev.

Although the services rendered by the petitioner in this case produced no tangible results, nevertheless, however, in view of the material expenses she has incurred and in view of her willingness to be of service to our government Mme. Bullier, by order of the Minister of Internal Affairs has been awarded 5,000 francs as a final settlement. On receipt of these monies Bullier personally signed a declaration that she would now refrain from making any further claims or demands.

In passing this information on to you I would ask that you enter into no further dealings with said personage.\textsuperscript{118}

What became of Bullier thereafter is unknown, though Iurii Davydov tells the romantic tale (again unsubstantiated) of her visiting Burtsev in prison in London and, some years later, dying (in an appropriately operatic and tragic manner) of galloping consumption before finally being laid to rest in the Russian cemetery at St Geneviève des Bois on the outskirts of Paris (which was also, fittingly, the final resting place of Burtsev himself). In the Davydov version, Bullier, on her deathbed, gave instructions that a final message be passed, word for word to 'Monsieur Burtsoff':

I am guilty. You are guilty. But we loved one another. Nothing else is worth a centime. Farewell!\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118} HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIId/IA. Director of Department of Police (Petrov) to Rachkovskii, no. 3657. Alt. ref. no. 69, 1/13 June 1894.

\textsuperscript{119} Davydov, Bestseller, pp. 72–73, 310.
Unsubstantiated or not, such an ending more than fits the bill for such a tale of passion!

Following his release from the cabin of the Marseilles steamship an emotionally-bruised Burtsev headed back to Zurich to tend his wounds. There he lived quietly for almost a year under the assumed name of 'Livschits', the pseudonym he had adopted some years earlier when he had boarded the SS Ashlands in Romania. Little is known of his life during this period. According to information in his Okhrana file (passed on, no doubt, by his Swiss 'friend', Beitner) he lived at 29, Kanonenstrasse, occasionally corresponding with contacts in Russia using another of his noms de plume, 'Levintis' and, in early 1894, was responsible for setting up an independent kruzhok whose members occupied themselves with the despatch into Russia of the publications of the London-based revolutionaries.120 There he may have remained indefinitely had he not received a call to action in the spring of 1894 from Egor Lazarev and his comrades in the RFPF. He was being summoned back to London to assist in a new literary undertaking and Lazarev, aware of Burtsev’s other love affair – that with the Library of the British Museum – would have been perfectly confident his invitation would not be rejected.

120 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVII/1A. Spravka. no. 19. ‘Burtsev, Vladimir L’vov’. p. 2. See also GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890 g.) Del 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. Tom. 4. l. 59–73.
Chapter Three 1891–1894: the London trials of ‘Monsieur Richter’

Burtsev returned to London on Sunday 10 June 1894 and took up residence near the British Museum at 29, Francis St, Tottenham Court Road – or ‘Tottengame Court Road’ as Rachkovskii transcribed it in his report to his superiors in St Petersburg. This document forms part of a four-volume Department of Police dossier devoted to the investigation of Burtsev held at the State Archive of the Russian Federation. Although incomplete (sadly, volume one is missing) the remaining three volumes contain over 600 pages of agents’ reports, inter-departmental correspondence, circulars, copies of letters obtained by illegal interception and a wealth of other materials covering Burtsev’s activities during the period 1890 to 1897. Although copies of some of these documents are to be found in the Hoover’s Okhrana archive, many are not and, if the consultation sheets attached to the GARF files are to be believed, they have, until now, escaped the attention of Western scholars.

Drawing on this and other Department of Police files held at GARF, the present chapter charts the difficult growth of the London Agency and examines the methods employed by Rachkovskii in his continuing fight against Burtsev and the London ‘Nihilists’. Moreover, thanks to the recent discovery of a set of previously unpublished letters, the origins and extent of unofficial Anglo-Russian police collaboration during the period can be established for the first time. The effect of this collaboration on the public perception of political refugees is examined, as are the joint surveillance operations which were carried out at the most popular émigré haunts in London, such as the Reading Room of the British Museum. The latter, it will be shown, played a major role in the lives of the Russian political emigration in general and in the fate of Burtsev in particular.

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1 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. T. 4. Rachkovskii to Petrov. Report no. 70. 31 May/12 June 1894. l. 148.

2 Certain archives require the researcher to complete a form for each file consulted, indicating which pages have been read and what sort of notes have been made. Unfortunately, not every researcher obliges, especially when microfilms are being consulted.
An unlikely mole

In Burtsev’s absence Rachkovskii had succeeded, eventually, in consolidating his position and tightening his hold over the London emigration. Thanks to the involvement of chief of police Durnovo, he had obtained additional financing from St Petersburg; he had also established links with embassy and consular officials and his staff and operations in the British capital had expanded. Moreover, there were signs in mid-1894 that he was at last beginning to win the propaganda war against the revolutionaries. As Department of Police files show, however, the task had been far from easy. Despite Rachkovskii’s earlier boasts to Durnovo about his successful establishment of a London Agency and his claim that ‘all the émigrés in London and their associates were under his complete control’, it is clear from other reports of the period that he had underestimated considerably the difficulty of his assignment. As early as March 1891, he was begging Durnovo to contact N.K. de Giers, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to arrange for him to enter into the same relationship with the London embassy as he enjoyed at that time with the French embassy:

Till now I have not seen the need to have dealings with our diplomats but no doubt in the very near future I will be obliged to do so. Such an arrangement might in extreme circumstances ease the great difficulty I will face in fulfilling the orders you have placed upon me.

Arrangements were duly put in place, though the exact nature of the ensuing relationship is unclear: it is unknown, for example, whether the Russian embassy in London provided office accommodation for Rachkovskii’s agents, as was the case in Paris. It is known, however, that the Russian Ministry of the Interior maintained a secret fund from which it regularly and directly reimbursed London (and other) consular staff for expenses incurred on ‘agency business’. The same source also

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5 ibid. op. 91. (1893) del. 369. Chast 4. ‘Ob otpuske deneg na agenturnye nadobnosti Rossiiskomu General’nomu Konsulu v Londonе’. II. 1–9. Unlike the annual claims for 2,000 francs made by his Parisian counterpart, those made by A.A. Fal’bort, Russian General Consul in London, were never so
provided Rachkovskii with funds for ‘dépenses extraordinaires’ for his agency activities in London (to the tune of some 14,000 francs in 1892 alone!) The financing of his new operation was, then, not likely to have been a concern for the head of the Foreign Agency but, initially, the recruitment of suitable agents was.

Although Rachkovskii maintained that he had infiltrated an agent into the local emigration as early as October 1891, there is no archival evidence to back this claim up: his reports from the period contain little of substance and, indeed, it was not until the arrival of the Polish informer Boleslaw Maliankewicz the following spring that matters appeared to take a turn for the better. Unfortunately, this latest recruit proved to be a bitter disappointment to his control and it is worth pausing at this point to examine the debacle in detail for, as well as offering a glimpse into the life of the political emigration in London, it again demonstrates the almost feverish desperation that seemed periodically to seize the highest ranks of the Russian Department of Police and led them blindly to trust anyone who happened to come along claiming they could help tackle the ‘great émigré threat’.

Born in Warsaw in 1867, Boleslaw Maliankewicz joined the ranks of the revolutionary opposition in his youth and in April 1884 gained a certain notoriety when he threw a bomb at Cracow Police Headquarters. In his own account of the affair, however, he neglected to mention that he had thrown the bomb at a window but missed, with the result that the device bounced back off a wall and blew up injuring no one but himself. As a result, the unfortunate bomber was immediately arrested. Much later, following his imprisonment, he left the country and settled in the heart of the radical emigration in London’s East End, where, in the early 1890s, he appears to have ‘lost the faith’. In the spring of 1892 he wrote to St Petersburg declaring that he had realised the error of his ways and now wished to offer up his services to prevent

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extravagant, an example being his claim of 8 August 1893 for the princely sum of three shillings: the cost of two Fundist publications purchased at the request of the Chief of Police (six pence), plus the two shillings and six pence expended travelling around London trying to find them! The Department showed its largesse by despatching a cheque to him for two pounds. ibid. II. 6–7.

6 ibid. op. 90. (1892) del. 41. ‘Ob otpuske deneg na soderzhanie agentury v Parizhe, Londone i Shveitsarii’, II. 6–7, 9–10, 14–15.

7 See The Times, 23 April 1884, p. 7.
any future terrorist atrocity being committed. He had already approached a British police inspector (almost certainly Inspector William Melville of Scotland Yard) who fobbed him off, suggesting he contact the Russian embassy. There too he was snubbed, his letter to chargé d'affaires Butenev going without reply. Chief of police Durnovo, on the other hand, ignoring these earlier rebuffs, was most excited at the apparent riches the informant had to offer. Maliankewicz's first two letters contained information on no fewer than 72 émigrés and the Department of Police immediately set about drawing up a list of the names mentioned, meticulously comparing them against files already held.

Maliankewicz also provided detailed information on the various Russian and Polish émigré revolutionary groupings in London and Paris, pointing out, for example, that members of *Free Russia* met twice monthly at the Mendelssohns' (where proceedings were conducted in French) and describing how, at a previous meeting, Kropotkin and 'Mendelssohn in particular' had affirmed that 'only murders would produce the desired electrifying effect on the masses in Russia'. He recorded that only Stepniak had opposed them. In addition, he supplied the Russian police with a secret code and key used by the revolutionaries, in return for which he asked only that he be given a small pocket camera to help him in his endeavours and that he be contacted only under the pseudonym, Wiktor Wierbicki. One can understand Durnovo's excitement at the prospect of securing the services of such a rich source of inside information but in his enthusiasm the chief of police overlooked certain signs which indicated that Maliankewicz might only be as competent a spy as he was a bomb-thrower.

Even in his first letters one can detect a lack of balance in some of Maliankewicz's judgements: in his report of the *Free Russia* meeting, for example, he claimed that a particularly cruel stance was adopted by none other than the artist William Morris, whose rejection of the violence of anarchism was already widely-known at the time. It is evident too, from his derogatory comments, that Maliankewicz was driven by an excessively bitter personal hatred of Stanislaw Mendelssohn: 'mon mortel antagoniste', as he called him. Then, in the letters that

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8 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 90. (1892). del. 318. 'Po zaiaavleniiu prozhiavaushchego v Londone Boleslava Maliankevich'. ll. 4–5, 15 April 1892, and ll. 10–15, undated (received St Petersburg, 2 May 1892.)

9 *ibid.*, ll. 17–28. It is interesting to note that Burtsev's name does not appear in Maliankewicz's list.
followed, a sense of panic and paranoid suspicion started to creep in. In July Maliankewicz imagined he sensed hesitation on the part of his Russian contact and wrote to ask if this was because of his past or because of 'la recommendation de Mr Melvile [sic], avec lequel j'ai refusé nettement de colaborer. Avec la police Anglaise je ne peux pas, ils sont indiscrets et je les ai offencé'.

Durnovo chose to turn a blind eye to these ravings and wrote to Rachkovskii urging him to make a trip to London at his earliest convenience to recruit the new informant. The following week, the head of the Foreign Agency reported that he had made such a journey but had been unable to find Maliankewicz at his old address and that he too was beginning to have doubts about the whole business. A few weeks later he did eventually succeed in tracking the elusive Pole down and recruited him into the London Agency at a starting salary of 200 francs a month. The honeymoon, however, was short-lived. A mere two weeks later, Rachkovskii reported that his new agent was ignoring orders and was 'engaged in an enterprise which is bound to compromise us, especially if one takes into consideration his age, lack of self-control and desire to be different'. He ordered the new recruit to have no further dealings with people in whom the Agency was not interested. Shortly afterwards Durnovo was obliged to agree that, due to Maliankewicz's 'insolence and unscrupulousness in choice of resources' his services would no longer be required, but that if Rachkovskii wished to transfer him to Paris, where he could be kept under closer control, then he had his consent, but he should be given much less money.

Sadly, the Maliankewicz comedy was to end in tragedy. His Department of Police file shows that he was indeed transferred to Paris, where, for a number of years, he lived quietly and in considerably straitened circumstances under the pseudonym Victor Thiessen. Then, suddenly, in May 1897, possibly in an attempt to escape his crushing poverty, the unfortunate tried to offer his services as a spy again,
this time in a letter to the Kiev Gendarmerie.\textsuperscript{14} Nothing came of this proposal, as is evidenced by the fact that shortly afterwards he was obliged to move into an asylum for the poor run by Polish nuns. Rachkovskii's reaction to his ex-employee's gambit is not recorded but the file does contain his response to a final query from St Petersburg in July of that year concerning the reported suicide of Maliankewicz who, it was rumoured, had confessed to the Paris émigrés that he had been in the employ of the Russian secret police and had then promptly shot himself. The Head of the Foreign Agency replied with a brusque telegram, coldly stating that the deceased had indeed worked for him for a time, that he was sacked because he was 'useless' (bezpoleznyi) and that he had committed suicide solely as a result of his critical financial embarrassment.\textsuperscript{15} This was yet another example, if such were needed, of Rachkovskii's callous indifference to the suffering of his fellow man, be he friend or foe.

\textbf{Monsieur Richter finds a friend}

Added to the difficulties he was encountering in recruiting suitable 'internal' agents Rachkovskii was also having 'perlustration problems'.\textsuperscript{16} Unlike Paris, where agents found it relatively easy to bribe a concierge to hand over an émigré's post the redoubtable landladies of London were proving to be another matter. One Russian 'external' agent operating in London at a later date bemoaned his lot complaining that,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{ibid.}, 1. 75. \textit{Journal de débats}, 13 August 1897. 'Entre Polonais'; and 1. 76. Kiev Gendarmerie to Department of Police, 30 May 1897.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{ibid.}, 1. 74. Rachkovskii to Department of Police. Telegram. 5 August 1897.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} In his study of the correspondence between Kropotkin and the anarchist Maria Goldsmith, Michael Confino states that no West European country presented the Okhrana with greater problems in getting its hands on the mail that interested it than Great Britain. This, to Confino, is a matter of some regret, for while Kropotkin’s Okhrana file contains copies of many of his letters to Goldsmith in Paris, it has none of hers to him in England! Kropotkin, had his suspicions that his mail was being opened, wondering whether 'Nos lettres ne se promenent-elles pas ailleurs?' See Confino, M. 'Pierre Kropotkine et les agents de l'Ohrana: Étude suivie de treize lettres inédites de P. Kropotkine à M. Goldsmith et à un groupe anarchiste russe', \textit{Cahiers du Monde Russe}, vol. 24 (1983), nos. 1–2, pp. 98–99.
\end{itemize}
without money or contacts all one can do here is report on who visited who and at what address. If you knock on the door and make up some story to try to obtain further information 99 times out of 100 the door will be shut in your face and you will be reported to the tenants. Here, unlike Paris, there are no door-men whose souls can be bought for 100 sous. 17

This report came from the pen of 'the principal Russian agent in London' at the turn of the century, Edgar Jean Farce, a French national employed first by Rachkovskii and then by his successors, Rataev and Garting. 18 Unfortunately, judging from his copious and regular reports, the quality of information he was able to supply was every bit as poor as that provided by his predecessors. 19

Besides this irritation, Rachkovskii had many more concerns, which he listed in a later report. Describing how Kravchinskii's attempts to unite with the Parisian émigrés had turned into a fiasco, with neither the young nor the old Populists wishing to join him, Rachkovskii issued a warning that the London émigrés had, as a result, turned their attention to Russia, to where 'when it came time to act they would transfer the centre of their revolutionary weight (tiazhest') for the practical implementation of their plans'. 20 According to him, the London group at that time was composed of around a dozen individuals but he forecast an increase in numbers in the autumn with the release of the Paris bombers (Reinshtein, Kashintsev, Stepanov, Nakashidze and Teplov) and their expected expulsion to Britain. 21 He warned too that

18 TNA, PRO KV 6/47, 8 December 1904 (274/B). Farce (and his English wife) took up residence near the headquarters of the Russian Free Press Fund in Hammersmith and was assisted over the years by former Detective Sergeant at New Scotland Yard, Michael Thorpe, who transferred his services to the Russian Department of Police around 1900 on a salary of £450 p.a. and who retired several years later on a comfortable pension from the Russian government.
19 HIA Okhrana archive 54/VI/k/23c. On average Farce filed a weekly 5–6 page report which often contained no more than descriptions of the daily comings and goings of RFPF members, announcements of political meetings, or direct translations of stories from the British press.
21 In this instance Rachkovskii's prediction was correct. The Department of Police files at GARF list a total of twenty émigrés who were under investigation by the London Agency in 1891. The following
the revolutionaries were now well-funded, thanks to Kravchinskii’s ‘prudent budgeting for that moment when the time would come to take direct action in Russia’. Describing how the SFRF only dispensed enough funds to cover its usual publishing activities and to support the well-being of its Committee members (around £10–20 per month to each individual), he also outlined the group’s plans for a new journal that would be moderate enough to escape the attention of the Russian censor. Monies for this venture were being obtained via subscription, the revolutionaries persuading their fellow countrymen and their allies to sacrifice anything, no matter how small, for the liberation of Russia. This subscription, Rachkovskii pointed out, was producing spectacular results, thanks in large part to the support of the British public. The émigrés, he reported, were attracting favourable attention both in the press and amongst members of parliament who, to his evident disgust, ‘receive them as they would respected visitors and do all they can to encourage them in their criminal activities’. 22 He then launched into an astonishing diatribe against the British:

Bearing in mind the fact that, on the one hand, the British are a self-seeking and dishonest nation which recognizes no boundaries when it comes to achieving its ends and on the other, that the combined agitation of the British and our own revolutionaries has one sole objective – the violent overthrow of the Supreme Power – and that, in order to realise this plan, they are constantly trying to find recruits not only abroad, but also in Russia itself, it is essential, if I may be so bold as to suggest it, that, independent of any police action, we mount a strong propaganda campaign in the press both at home and abroad against the British and those Russian revolutionaries who have sold themselves to them.

In such a country as England, where currently both governmental and public opinion are inflamed by hostile propaganda against us, where our professional evil-doers are not only not prevented from carrying out their criminal acts, but, on the contrary, are, completely openly and with the assistance of members of parliament, indulged and aided in their revolutionary intrigues, we cannot rely on our complaints or protests being satisfied through legal channels. Moreover, it would be a great mistake not to attach any significance to this ongoing agitation and to calm oneself

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with the belief that the combined efforts of the British and some mad émigrés could never lead to them attaining their desired ends. We must attempt to, at least partially, paralyze this emerging movement and show the true extent of the vile provocations of the British. We must demean the émigrés in the eyes of the Russian intelligentsia and show how they have prostituted themselves to become nothing more than a weapon of vengeance in the hands of their protectors. And in this the press can perform a great service for us, all the more so since the Englishman cherishes the majesty (velichestvo) of his homeland and fears European public opinion above all else. Thus, if we act persistently and systematically we will in the end give the British themselves cause to reflect.  

This outburst shows the importance that Rachkovskii accorded to the press and his anxiety that a propaganda front be opened up at the earliest opportunity. But by the end of the year no progress had been made. In his report to Durnovo of November 1892 Rachkovskii’s growing cynicism was apparent, as he again bemoaned his lot and the failure of the British police to co-operate with him:

It must be said that even if we were to discover in London (hope upon hope!) a bomb factory or a printing press of counterfeit currency it is unlikely we would be able to expose the revolutionaries and confront them with full proof of their crimes so long as the current general conditions remain unchanged (i.e. the fact of England’s moral and material support for our revolutionaries). The British authorities would make use of the information we gave them not to arrest these ‘political refugees’ but to warn the culprits that in future they should not allow themselves to be openly caught in a scandal which would oblige them [the authorities] to do a service to the Russian government. May I remind your Excellency of the example of the Swiss government, which acted exactly in this way when, officially, it agreed to hand over Kravchinskii, but secretly let him know and so gave him time to make his escape.  Similarly, the London émigrés at the present moment can get involved in whatever undertaking they care to, and the reaction to it on legal grounds, on our initiative will, by force of circumstance, result only in fruitless alarms and unpleasantness on the part of the

23 ibid., II. 62–63.

24 This is a reference to Stepniak’s flight from Geneva to London in 1884.
British who always seem to manage to find some way of undermining our best intelligence.25

Following his successes in Paris, where, with considerable ease, he had struck up excellent relationships not only with the heads of police but also with several senior politicians and cabinet ministers, this frosty reception from the British authorities must have come as a bitter disappointment. Moreover (and again in stark contrast to Paris, where he had developed an impressive portfolio of friendly newspapers), he was finding it impossible to make any inroads into Fleet Street.26 In this he was certainly hampered by his poor command of English; though, as the following story shows, even when he enlisted the help of a friendly translator he fared no better.

To date, no mention has been made, in any study of the Foreign Agency, of one of Rachkovskii’s key contacts in London, a certain Leon Jolivard, the editor of the French weekly *Le Mémorial diplomatique*, who had been resident in the British capital for some years and who clearly shared Rachkovskii’s views on Russian political renegades.27 Shortly after the London Agency had been set up, in the spring of 1891, Jolivard agreed to translate a piece, which Rachkovskii had penned, criticizing the London nihilists and try to get it published in the British press. The results of this venture are detailed in a previously unpublished letter held in the State Archive of the Russian Federation which makes for fascinating reading.28

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26 The editor of the Parisian *L’Éclair*, for example, had been granted a Russian Imperial order for his coverage of the 1890 Russian anarchist trial. See Johnson, ‘The Okhrana Abroad’, pp. 33–34.

27 Jolivard appears in the 1881 British Census, wherein his age is given as 42 and his address as 62, Godolphin Road, London. In fact, he had been resident in Britain and expressing pro-tsarist sentiments as early as August 1877. See *The Times*, 11 August 1877, p. 10: ‘Russian Atrocities’. Jolivard was later to become attache to the Imperial Ottoman Embassy in London and to receive the title of Chevalier. He died in London on 12 April 1912 aged 73. See *The Times*, 13 April 1912, p. 1.

28 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 89. (1891). del. 4. ‘Svedeniia po Londonu’. ll. 80:1 — 80:5, 17 May 1891 – 24 May 1891.
On 24 May 1891 Jolivard wrote to a ‘Monsieur Richter’ (Rachkovskii’s London pseudonym),\(^{29}\) echoing the views of the latter on the present hostility in Britain towards Russia. He had tried incessantly for four weeks to get his careful English translation of Rachkovskii’s article published in various newspapers but without success.\(^{30}\) One approach by an associate to the *Globe* newspaper resulted in what Jolivard described as, a ‘disgusting’ reply from the editor who claimed that the article contained nothing new, that it was not written impartially and that some of the facts were exaggerated. Moreover, Jolivard had also received the following brief and brutal rebuff from the editor of the *Evening News and Post*:

> Dear Sir,
> I beg to return your article on Nihilists written as if it had been sent from St Petersburg. This paper cannot adopt the pro-Russian policy and though we agree with this able article in the main, we are quite able to deal with this subject from our own point of view editorially as we have done from time to time.
> Yours Truly, the Editor.\(^{31}\)

Jolivard could not deny that he was totally discouraged, mentioning in passing: ‘*j’ai dépensé plus de cent francs a tâcher de me rendre agréable a ces idiots!*’ It is unknown whether he received any compensation from Rachkovskii for his efforts but he certainly deserved an enormous vote of thanks from him for the final service rendered, which he described in the last paragraph of his letter:

> If it is of any consolation, luck has given me the opportunity to be of great use to you in another way. I am now in a position where I can give you better information on the

\(^{29}\) On the original letter one can only just make out the faint words ‘*moi pseudonim*’ pencilled in in Rachkovskii’s hand immediately after the salutation ‘Cher Monsieur Richter’. This is not visible on the microfilm copy and may explain why the importance of this letter has been overlooked. The same file contains a brief note that Richter was the name to be used when contacting Rachkovskii concerning London operations. *Ibid.* f. 1. It is a strange coincidence (but no more than that) that Richter was also the chosen pseudonym of V.I. Ul’ianov (Lenin) when he came to London for the first time in 1902.


London Nihilists than you could ever get yourself. Ask me anything you like and I will be able to give you the most detailed answer.

I have made the acquaintance of Inspector Melville of the political police .... He has offered me his services complaining that his superiors at Scotland Yard act too feebly with regard to the Nihilists. Do not pass up on this chance, my friend, it will not come your way again.

Thus, for the first time, we can establish how and when contact between Rachkovskii and the future head of the British secret police came about. There can be no doubt that the former, for so long unable to establish a foothold in London, would have seized on Jolivard’s offer and would have arranged a meeting with Inspector Melville forthwith. Moreover, he would have found the police inspector an agreeable companion, all the more so since the latter, having recently spent some five years in France, had an excellent command of the language. It is easy to imagine the two in conversation: Rachkovskii perhaps lamenting his current powerlessness in face of a hostile English press; Melville, meanwhile, bemoaning the ‘feeble’ attitude of his superior, Chief Inspector John Littlechild, towards the anarchist menace and perhaps also offering to share his contacts in the London press with his new Russian acquaintance.

The degree to which the two policemen collaborated at this early stage in their relationship is, however, open to question: there are no Scotland Yard files on the matter and the only correspondence between the two uncovered so far dates only from the last years of the century. It is, nevertheless, a matter of some interest to examine the events which unfolded in Britain immediately after their first encounter and to speculate as to whether the hand of Petr Ivanovich Rachkovskii can be detected therein.

32 ibid. II. 80: 1–2. 24 May 1891.

33 A year after Jolivard’s letter, a French Sûreté agent in London briefly mentioned that Melville had been willing to assist the Russian government ‘particularly in the matter of Russian refugees’ but had been prevented in so doing by his superiors. See AN B/A 1508, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris., Typed, unattributed report. London, 3 May 1892. ‘Anarchistes en Angleterre jusqu’en 1893’. Cited in Cook, MI5’s First Spymaster, p. 99.

34 HIA Okhrana archive 35/V/e/ Folders 1–4 ‘Relations with Scotland Yard’. The earliest letter in the file is one from Rachkovskii to Melville dated 3 January 1897.
The Walsall anarchist affair: a copy-cat conspiracy

Whether Rachkovskii and Melville discussed the 1890 Paris bomb affair and the role of the informer Landezen as agent provocateur is unknown. It is, however, remarkable that an almost identical affair would shortly play itself out in the West Midlands, gripping the attention of the British press and having a marked affect on the public’s perception of the ‘Nihilists’ in their midst.

Between 7 and 14 January 1892, ‘under instructions from the authorities in London’, Inspector Melville, assisted by members of the local police, apprehended six men associated with a socialist club in Walsall and charged them with possession of explosives under the 1883 Explosive Substances Act. The police had been shadowing the suspects since August of the previous year but had never managed to discover any explosives as such: in the end, the prosecution could come up with no more incriminating evidence than a sketch of a bomb, a ‘plaster model of an egg-shaped thing’, a brass bolt and a bottle of chloroform. No further exhibits were required, however, since two of the accused offered confessions. One of them, a clerk by the name of Frederick Charles, claimed he was told the bombs were intended for use in Russia and of course, at the time, as Bernard Porter has pointed out, ‘Russian despotism was thought to excuse or even justify almost any revolutionary means’. In any event, Charles believed, the affair was ‘a police-made plot’. Another of the accused, Joseph Deakin, also suspected the involvement of an agent provocateur (though he assumed it to be his co-defendant Charles). Yet another of the defendants, an Italian by the name of Battolla, admitted to being an anarchist ‘but not of the violent kind’ and insisted the group had been set up by a certain Frenchman, ....

35 The Times, 9 January 1892, p. 7: ‘Alleged Anarchical Conspiracy’.
36 ibid., 31 March 1892, p. 8: ‘Trial of the Alleged Anarchists’.
37 Porter, Origins, p. 127.
38 The Times, 5 April 1892, p. 8: ‘Trial of the Walsall Anarchists’. Charles compared it to a plot described in “Souvenir d’un Préfet de Police” published in 1891 in Paris, where there appeared a statement by the author that he had personally arranged some explosions at St Germain. The reference is to an edition of Andrieux, L. Souvenirs d’un Préfet de Police. Paris: J. Rouff, 1885.
39 ibid., 1 April 1892, p. 8: ‘Trial of the Alleged Anarchists’. 

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August Coulon, a fellow member of the anarchist Autonomie Club in London, who had ordered all the bombs and who, à la Landezen, had then vanished from the scene. When Inspector Melville took the stand he admitted to having known the Frenchman for two years but when the Counsel for the defence quizzed him as to whether Coulon was his source of information or whether he had paid him in the course of the investigation Melville declined to answer and, moreover, was supported by the trial judge in his refusal to do so. It has recently been revealed by an ex-member of the Special Branch, Lindsay Clutterbuck, that Coulon was in fact on the payroll of that police department from 1890 to 1904 and received extra payments at the time of the Walsall case in the spring of 1892. Unfortunately, the trial jury was unaware of this police complicity and, after a brief recess, returned to declare four of the six defendants guilty. The judge, Mr Justice Hawkins, handed down harsh sentences: three of ten years and one of five.

Coulon, meanwhile, got off scot-free: he was never called as a witness, neither was a warrant for his arrest ever issued. In this he fared better than Landezen had done in Paris two years earlier, though in most other respects the two 'conspiracies' do bear striking similarities. That Coulon had acted as agent provocateur at Melville's behest is almost beyond doubt and it is tempting too to speculate that the latter's newfound Russian friend, drawing on his past experience, had helped him concoct the whole business. But, as Bernard Porter has emphasized, we cannot know the details of the affair for certain and probably never will, 'at least not until someone finds Melville's Confessions in an old tin box in an attic somewhere!'  

Sadly, the 'tin box' remains undiscovered, though there is plenty of circumstantial evidence that it was a 'put-up job' and Porter lists three convincing motives. Firstly, shortly before the first arrest was made, Home Secretary Henry Matthews had decided to cut the budget of the Special Branch, believing that the

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41 Porter, Origins, p. 142.
terrorist threat had passed.\textsuperscript{42} If nothing else the Walsall case would be seen to prove
the contrary and might perhaps lead to a reversal of this decision (as indeed
happened). Secondly, foreign pressure was again being brought to bear on the
government in relation to its relaxed treatment of political refugees but there was
nothing to be done so long as the latter continued to be received sympathetically by
the British public. If, however, a conspiracy was suddenly uncovered demonstrating
that foreign terrorists posed as much a threat to Britain as they did to continental
Europe then public opinion might waver and allow the government to adopt a firmer
stance. Finally, Melville himself had much to gain in terms of personal prestige and,
indeed, his decisive strike at Walsall was widely reported (in both the British and
European press) as his own personal triumph. It was this affair, in fact, that launched
him into the public eye and secured his rapid promotion to the rank of Chief Inspector
of Special Branch.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, just as Rachkovskii had fabricated the Paris bomb plot to
his immense and lasting benefit, so Melville, for some time to come, would obtain
great satisfaction and advantage from his underhand dealings in the West Midlands.

A few days after the trial the English anarchist David Nicoll took to the press
declaring, in the main anarchist journal the \textit{Commonweal}, that the whole affair was a
blatant act of police provocation and denouncing the three main culprits who, to his
mind, were, ‘Hangman Hawkins’, ‘the Jesuitical monster at the Home Office’ (i.e.
Secretary of State Matthews) and ‘the spy Melville who sets his agents on to concoct
the plots which he “discovers”’. ‘Are these men fit to live?’ he asked and, for daring
to pose such a question, was arrested on a charge of incitement to murder, found
guilty under the Offences Against the Person Act and sentenced to eighteen months
hard labour.\textsuperscript{44} Moreover, it was not long before the \textit{Commonweal} itself was forced to
close down. Following Walsall, a new harshness had crept into the British system of
justice and, crucially, the British public did not appear to mind.

\textsuperscript{42} Indeed, Special Branch staff numbers had already been cut: from thirty-one London-based officers in

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{ibid.}, p. 141. Melville took over from Littlechild on 20 March 1893.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{The Commonweal}, 9 April 1892, p. 57.
Russian memorandum redux

Suddenly, the country appeared to wake up to the new threat in its midst. There were lengthy debates in parliament on such topics as whether or not groups of dangerous individuals such as the so-called ‘Freedom Group’ should be allowed to assemble in Trafalgar Square and perpetrate outrages such as the hanging of the Home Secretary in effigy. Meanwhile, articles critical of foreign anarchists began to appear in the press with a greater frequency. Perhaps the most famous of these was a rather odd, jointly-authored article entitled ‘Anarchists: Their Methods and Organization’, which appeared in the January 1894 issue of the New Review. The first part, ‘Methods’, was an attack on all terrorists in London, irrespective of their nationality, and called for their immediate expulsion. The author, an Englishman who signed himself ‘Z’, rather unwisely drew attention to the anarchist Johann Most’s bomb-making instruction manual, ‘this noxious handbook which should be forthwith repressed,’ and issued an ominous warning of the reaction which would follow the commitment of any foul deed: ‘after the first “revolutionary” act there would be such reprisals as none of these desperadoes have as yet the faintest idea’. As we shall see later in this chapter, the author did not have long to wait for this act to occur.

The second part of the article, ‘Organization’, was signed ‘Ivanoff’ and was concerned with the Russian political émigré community in particular and their British supporters within the SFRF. Ivanoff named the most dangerous of them: Kropotkin, Chaikovskii, ‘the murderer of General Mezentseff’ (i.e. Stepniak), Volkhovskii, Voinich, the Mendelssohns, Moses Harmidor (Baranov), Aleksandr Lavrenius (recently expelled by the French government, following his release from prison) and, of course, Burtsev. It was, in fact, no more than a rewrite of the famous ‘memorandum’ which de Staal had delivered to Lord Salisbury two years earlier. From the detailed biographical content it was clear that the article could only have been penned by a Russian police agent and, indeed, there is documentary proof that it

45 See, for example, the report of the House of Commons debate in The Times, 15 November 1893, p. 6: ‘Anarchists in Trafalgar-Square’. The previous weekend there had been a mass rally held to commemorate the death of the ‘Haymarket Martyrs’, labour activists who had been hanged in Chicago on ‘Bloody Sunday’ 1887, for a murder they did not commit.

46 ‘Anarchists: Their Methods and Organization’, The New Review, no. 56 (January 1894) pp. 1–16

47 ibid., p. 8.
was written by the head of the Foreign Agency himself. Moreover, it is almost certain that the ‘Ivanoff’ article was an update of that same piece which Jolivard had unsuccessfully hawked around Fleet Street some three years previously. It has also been conjectured that ‘Z’ was none other than Rachkovskii’s ‘brother in arms’, Chief Inspector Melville.

While the identity of ‘Z’ may have been unclear at the time, the émigrés had no doubt whatsoever as to the identity of his co-author. Stepniak, who had been the main target of Ivanoff’s attack, countered with an article in the same review the following month, declaring that ‘it is clear at a glance that this article is fathered by the Russian police.’ But this was all grist to the mill to Rachkovskii, for whom, thanks no doubt to Melville’s assistance, the doors of the British press were now wide open. He seized the opportunity, sending off further scurrilous articles on Stepniak and on the émigré community in general to newspapers such as the Daily Mail and Morning Advertiser. He now felt it necessary to restate his earlier views on the importance of the press, in a more measured way, to Durnovo’s successor at the Department of Police, Petrov:

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48 Rachkovskii admitted his authorship in his report (no. 12) of 16 January 1894, where he mentions he succeeded in placing the article ‘with the help of one of his collaborators’. See Taratuta, Etel’ Lilian Voinich, pp. 109–110.

49 Senese, Stepniak-Kravchinskii, p. 106, note 43. Senese assumes Melville’s authorship because ‘the article bears the hallmarks of his fustian style and professional preoccupations’. If true, it would not have been the first time a senior British police officer had used his influence in the media for partisan ends. In 1910 a former head of CID, Robert Anderson, confessed that he had been the anonymous author of articles in the Times implicating the Irish national leader Parnell in the Phoenix Park murders in 1882. See Porter, Plots and Paranoia, pp. 111–113.


51 ibid., p. 216.

52 A letter in the Morning Advertiser of 20 February 1894, (p. 3) headed ‘Prisons and Prisoners in Russia’ and signed ‘A Loyal Russian’ was, according to E.A. Taratuta, the work of Rachkovskii. As well as attacking Stepniak the author also cited ‘a Russian document of official source entitled ‘Russian Memorandum’ (November 1892) which contains charges of the gravest description against some of the Nihilist refugees in London.’ See also Taratuta, S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, p. 474.
At the present time when the counter-agitation we have undertaken in France has been of such indisputable service to us, I foresee the necessity of organizing something similar in London where the British press, in creating public opinion, also obliges the powers that be to take notice of it.\footnote{Rachkovskii to Petrov. Report no. 30. 26 February/10 March 1894. Cited in Taratuta, S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, pp. 473–474.}

An indication of the success of his propaganda campaign can be shown by the critical reception to Stepniak’s next publication. In November 1894, the former darling of English liberalism issued a book under the same title as his \textit{New Review} article, \textit{Nihilism as it is}\.\footnote{‘Nihilism as it is’. Being Stepniak’s Pamphlets, translated by E. L. Voynich, and F. Volkhovskii’s ‘Claims of the Russian Liberals’. With an introduction by Dr. R. Spence Watson. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894.} Collecting contributions by both Stepniak and by Volkhovskii and with an introduction by Robert Spence Watson of the SFRF, the book comprised a compendium of pamphlets whose main purpose, according to its anonymous reviewer in \textit{The Times}, was ‘to satisfy English readers that the Nihilists are not so black as they are sometimes painted’. The reviewer then proceeded to dismiss it for being ‘vague, visionary and full of the inflated commonplaces of what is known as Social Democracy’. He reserved his real venom, however, for Stepniak and his call for the forceful overthrow of the Russian government. It is perhaps no surprise that this hostile reviewer succeeded in finding that very same phrase of Stepniak’s which was quoted by de Staal in his ‘memorandum’ two years previously concerning ‘military plots, attacks upon the palace, bombs and dynamite’. The reviewer wondered how it was possible that such an important public figure as Spence Watson could lend his support to ‘this humane and high-souled apologist’ who sought to justify these ‘anti-human operations of the Nihilists’:

\begin{quote}
We confess we find it difficult to understand how so feeble and flimsy an apology for dynamite can pass muster even with the so-called Friends of Russian Freedom in this country; and we certainly think it behoves Dr. Spence Watson to consider whether his public position as a prominent party leader is consistent with the patronage and
\end{quote}
countenance of Russian exiles who openly avow their implacable hostility to the
government of a friendly power and their readiness to use dynamite against it.\textsuperscript{55}

Now, then, it was not only the émigrés who were coming under attack but anyone
who dared support them. During the period in question, public opinion was further
inflamed thanks to a spate of terrorist murders and explosions in France and Spain
that also reverberated, to a greater or lesser degree, on the streets of London. Some of
these \textit{attentats} received mass coverage in the British press – thanks again to the heroic
involvement of Chief Inspector Melville. In one such incident, on the streets of the
London borough of Poplar in October 1892, he succeeded in dramatically capturing
the French anarchist Jean-Pierre François, who was wanted for his involvement in an
earlier explosion at a French café. Two years later, on the Farringdon Road, the Chief
Inspector caught the anarchist François Polti, with bomb in hand, apparently on his
way to blow up the Royal Exchange. There is evidence to suggest that Melville had
formed the opinion that he now had the authority to use his own initiative and make
arrests wherever he saw the need without reporting his actions to his superiors. Thus,
for example, in a note of 19 April 1894 Home Secretary Herbert Asquith was barely
able to conceal his annoyance when he learned of the arrest of an anarchist from a
newspaper report and asked why he had not been informed earlier.\textsuperscript{56} The press and the
public, however, were unconcerned. In their eyes the Chief Inspector could do no
wrong.

Nor, apparently, could Rachkovskii, whose star was now in the ascendancy
and was set to rise still further as a result of another of his alarmist reports to the
Fontanka. This is a fine example of his ability to strike terror into the heart of the
Director of the Department of Police and, in so doing, consolidate his own position
and ensure a steady stream of finance and support from St Petersburg to Paris.\textsuperscript{57}

On this occasion he reported on certain rumours circulating amongst the
London and Parisian émigrés concerning the imminent return of eight revolutionaries

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The Times}, 29 November 1894, p. 4: `Books of the Week'.

\textsuperscript{56} TNA, PRO HO 144/545/A55176/2. f. 26. Report of 19 April 1894. The arrest was almost certainly
that of Polti.

\textsuperscript{57} GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. \textit{Po rozysku Burtseva}. T. 4., Rachkovskii to Petrov. Report
no. 37, 26 March/7 April 1894. l. 77.
to Russia, possibly with the intention of making an attempt on the life of the hated K.P. Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, or even the Emperor himself. In an attempt to back this absurd claim up he attached one of Burtsev’s illegible letters to a certain V.D. Perazich in Vienna, together with an equally illegible transcription. Decipherment reveals, however, that, like most of Burtsev’s letters, this contained little more than requests for bibliographic material. Rachkovskii included a postscript pointing out that it was only the Populists who were involved in the plot and stressed that the Social Democrats had nothing to do with it. According to him, the latter did not even have the means to print their usual material and had scarcely enough to live on: Aksel’rod, Plekhanov and Zasulich, he said, were ‘on the point of starvation’. As a result of Rachkovskii’s report, a memorandum was sent to all border crossings in Russia warning of the imminent arrival of Egor’ Lazarev, Ivan Kashintsev, Evgenii Stepanov, Aleksei Teplov, Mikhail Garmidor, Vladimir Burtsev and David Soskice. But, as with so many of Rachkovskii’s predictions, this band of villains never did appear. The border-guards again awaited their arrival in vain.

Undeterred, Rachkovskii dashed off another report giving further details about the plot but this time stretching his credibility to the limits. According to him, Burtsev had written to the London émigrés proposing that Pobedonostsev be assassinated and asking for money to assist him in the deed. Apparently, the émigrés refused but support was forthcoming from three liberals in Russia, among them Korolenko. Then Lazarev arrived and criticized Stepniak who in turn apologized to Burtsev for his refusal. Rachkovskii followed this nonsense up with another report warning that the

58 ibid., l. 78. Rachkovskii seems to have decided that, while he was at it, he might as well take another pop at his ‘untouchable’ enemy, Lavrov, reporting that the latter was also involved in the plot and strongly urging that his Paris flat be searched.

59 Burtsev later claimed that from the early 1890s the Russian government and its Department of Police pursued a deliberate policy of leniency towards the Social Democrats, believing they did not represent any great danger but rather could act as a counterbalance to the real threat – the Populists. See Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 147–151.

60 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. T. 4, Department of Police memorandum, 7/19 April 1894, l. 85.

61 Rachkovskii to Petrov. Report no. 30, 26 February/10 March 1894. Cited in Taratuta, S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, p. 472. Taratuta also gives further examples of the unreliability of information in many of Rachkovskii’s reports and his habit of plucking terrorist plots out of thin air.
group which was about to cross the border had now grown to some twenty strong! 62
Again, Petrov appeared to accept this arrant twaddle without question, sending out yet
another memo to the border-crossings. 63

It is interesting to note that Rachkovskii’s contact with St Petersburg did not
always take the form of official reports and that, on the odd occasion, he even
reported some hard facts. The Department of Police archive at GARF contains a
tantalizing excerpt from a private letter from the head of the Foreign Agency to Petrov
dating from this period and concerning the political situation in London. It shows the
rather fawning attitude which he adopted towards his superior:

Your Excellency is correct to note the recent animation amongst the emigration
which could take a dangerous turn. Thanks be to God, however, that I have arranged
it so that not one of the major figures can make any undertaking without our knowing
of it. I hope I will be able to accomplish everything and show you I am worthy of
your trust and your truly father-like concerns about my own personal fate.

Let me say a few words about the state of affairs abroad. I will give you a full
report on my London trip within a few days; in which the internal life of the London
émigrés, their undertakings and future plans are described in exhaustive detail. 64

Infuriatingly, there is no trace to be found in the archive of said report. One can only
assume, therefore, that it found its way into the missing file on the setting up of an
agency in London referred to earlier. 65 Rachkovskii’s letter did, however, point to a
marked improvement in his London intelligence. Referring to his ‘reliable sources
within that group’ he reported on attempts to discover valuable information about the
group’s links with Russia and on a meeting to be held in September after which
Lazarev intended to return to Russia. Finally, he referred to another ‘combination’
which he had in mind but with which he was currently encountering difficulties.
When he had overcome these, he promised, he would report on the outcome.

62 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. T. 4. Rachkovskii to Petrov, 8/20 June 1894. l. 154.
63 ibid., l. 156.
64 GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. T. 4. 10/22 June 1894. Excerpt
from private letter of P.I. Rachkovskii to Director of Police, Petrov. l. 161.
65 See supra p. 87 footnote 3.
The exchange of information was by no means one way. St Petersburg would regularly copy Paris into any materials it received and which it deemed relevant to the investigation in hand. An excellent example of this is a letter dated 29 January 1894 and postmarked Zurich which was intercepted in St Petersburg. Written in chemical inks, there is archival evidence to suggest that the Department of Police took over two months to produce a legible copy of the letter but the resulting information obtained was certainly worth the effort.\textsuperscript{66}

**The Shishakin letter**

In April 1894, Petrov contacted the Paris office with the news that the Department of Police had received \textit{`agenturnym putem'} (i.e. by perlustration) a copy of a thirteen-page letter from Burtsev in Zurich to a certain young student, Evgenii Shishakin, who lived at 43, Simbirskaya ulitsa on the Vyborg side of the Russian capital, but who, at that time, was actually in police custody.\textsuperscript{67} The very presence of this letter in the files of the Okhrana supports the view that Burtsev was up against a formidable opponent indeed. Petrov attached a copy for Rachkovskii’s information and added,

the personage to whom Burtsev sent the letter for transmission to Shishakin has informed Burtsev that Shishakin is unwell but has suggested that the correspondence should continue.\textsuperscript{68}

This provides yet another illustration of the apparent hopelessness of Burtsev’s position – even those contacts back in Russia to whom he entrusted his mail were police informers! The letter itself, however, suggests that he and his comrades in emigration, far from being disheartened, were enthusiastically engaged in the struggle. Since escaping from exile, he had consistently advocated a much closer working relationship between the emigration and the revolutionary movement in Russia and was therefore delighted at the opportunity to initiate a dialogue with

\textsuperscript{66} GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. T. 4. St Petersburg to Rachkovskii, 11 April 1894. ll. 86 and 94–110. Burtsev’s original letter is at \textit{ibid.}, ll. 61–72.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{ibid.}, l. 60.

\textsuperscript{68} HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIId/1A. Director of the Department of Police (Petrov) to Rachkovskii. Doc. no. 2544 (alt. ref. no. 19). St Petersburg, 16/28 April 1894.
Shishakin, thanks to a recommendation from a mutual acquaintance whom he referred to throughout as 'A'. He professed himself to be all the happier to deal with the unknown student as the latter was a representative of 'young revolutionary Russia'. The letter again demonstrates Burtsev's abiding interest and belief in the need to involve the youth of Russia in the revolutionary movement. As mentioned previously, A.I. Nelidov, the Russian ambassador to Paris, had warned of Burtsev's 'amazing gift for rousing the evil instincts of young revolutionaries and rapidly turning them into fanatics capable of frightful crimes'. And he did, indeed, seem to have the ability to inspire youngsters, a fact which had not escaped the attention of the Department of Police. As A.K. Agafonov noted:

Burtsev's contacts were more or less known to the [Foreign] Agency. Particular attention was paid to his acquaintances among those youngsters arriving from Russia who, upon their return to their homeland, would be placed under surveillance.

Indeed, Burtsev's life in emigration is peppered with references to his meetings with, and letters to and from, young students both in Russia and in emigration. Thus, on his European tour with Bullier he had meetings first in Montpellier with a young medical student named 'Arenkoff', with whom he later frequently corresponded; then, in Zurich, as mentioned earlier, he spent time with the student Grankovskii and his friends. In her reminiscences of Burtsev, the academician S.N. Motovilova recalls visiting him in the summer of 1900 with a friend who, like so many other youngsters

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69 The identity of 'comrade A' has not yet been established, though it is possible that it was Petr Alisov.

70 Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 60.

71 Agafonov, Parizhskie tainy, p. 50.

72 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A contains an undated scrap of paper listing a handful of names written in a bold Russian hand, the second of which is 'Iakov Arenkov, Student Meditsin, Montpellier, 11 rue Petit St Jean.' The other names on the list are: Dr Shitlovskii, Munchen; Zurich – Hoffingen, Gemeind…. 49, Sonneneck; Munich Theresen Str. 118, Frl. Lewisch (for Novikova).

73 ibid., Bullier to Rachkovskii, Genoa, 12 April 1893.
at the time, was in awe of Burtsev's dedication to the cause and his purity, both moral and physical.  

His letter to Shishakin is certainly not short of exhortations, which might indeed have served to inspire had the intended recipient ever received it. But it is of a wider interest too, for it contains the clearest possible exposition of Burtsev's political views at that time, including his unqualified support for acts of political terror:

Let me say a few words about our political programme. Our motto is: To recreate the Party of the People's Will of 1879 – both in its theoretical programme and in its practices of 1879 and 1880. In other words, To demand a constitution and strive towards that goal by means of propaganda and agitation amongst all ranks of society, relying on systematic terror. A constitution – now; socialism – as our end goal; political terror – as one of the most important weapons currently at our disposal in our struggle. That, in short, is our programme.

He expanded further on the benefits of terror as a weapon of choice in the political struggle:

At a time of reaction, to use terror against reactionaries is a good thing and has an enlivening effect on youth, on society, and on the workers on the one hand, and on the government on the other, even if it is a matter of individual acts of terror and not a systematic programme.

On the question of organisation Burtsev recommended the introduction of small, local, independent groups which would be set up ad hoc and run by what he described as 'dictators', whose role as such would end the moment they had accomplished their allotted task. These organisations were to be serviced by a central 'revolutionary office of information' (spravochnoe revoliutsionnoe biuro), which would be set up

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74 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206. l. 1. Motovilova, obviously unaware of the Bullier affair, repeated the belief held in some émigré circles that Burtsev had remained a virgin all his life!

75 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVII/1A. 'Kopiia pis'ma Vladimira Burtseva k studentu Shishakinu i drugim litsam', f. 3. Undated attachment to: Director of the Department of Police to Rachkovskii. Doc. no. 2544 (alt. ref. no. 19). St Petersburg, 16/28 April 1894.

76 ibid., f. 4.
abroad and whose role would be that of technical support – from the provision of printing services to the supply of bomb-making materials. (He felt it important to stress that bombs would not be manufactured abroad – that, in his view, would be unnecessary.) Much of this brings to mind the structure and *modus operandi* of the Socialist Revolutionary Party’s Combat Organization, which would come into being only in 1901.77

Burtsev also had some useful advice to pass on to the young student concerning secret methods of communication that might be usefully employed. In so doing, he shed some light on the rather crude ‘trade craft’ practised by the revolutionaries of the day. He began by laying the foundations for a successful and secure means of correspondence and was, apparently, so confident that this, his introductory letter to the unknown student, would be delivered safely that he immediately launched into an explanation of how best to use chemical inks and how to conceal letters in books with uncut pages – ‘using this method you will be able to send me entire tracts’. He then proceeded to lay out, with breathtaking naivety, the cipher which he suggested Shishakin use, together with its key.78 One might wonder who needed the services of an informer such as Maliankewicz when the revolutionaries themselves acted with such lack of care! Finally, Burtsev passed on a ‘safe’ address in Zurich for correspondence.

As one studies this letter, in the knowledge that it has already been meticulously deciphered and copied out in the offices of the Department of Police on the Fontanka, and then reads Burtsev’s confident assertion that ‘the above conditions are quite enough to enable us to correspond securely and will allow us to exchange letters on any serious matter we chose’, one cannot help but feel that this ‘professional’ revolutionary conspirator had yet again seriously underestimated his opponent’s abilities and that failure awaited just around the corner. Indeed, at one point in the letter Burtsev appeared to foretell his own fate. Urging caution, he wrote:

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78 *ibid.*, ll. 1–2. The code was a simple one which used an issue of *Severnyi vestnik* (Northern Messenger) as its key and employed a system whereby every letter was represented by a fraction: the numerator referring to the line number and the denominator to the position of the letter on that line with each letter appearing separately on an ascending even-numbered page starting from page twenty.
‗Only, be careful – I say this not for my own sake. It is all one to me. They can even accuse me of plotting regicide if they like, it will not add anything to the accusations which are already levelled against me.‘

Burtsev devoted the last part of this letter to a discussion of his and his comrades’ current and projected literary undertakings, with the request that Shishak in support them in their endeavours. His first objective was the production of a history of the Russian revolutionary movement, which, in his view, was ‘as necessary to the revolutionaries as bread’. He had already been working on the project for some three years and had amassed a huge quantity of material. Estimating that the entire book would cost somewhere in the region of 500 roubles, he asked for contributions from Shishak in and his comrades in St Petersburg of five, ten or, if possible, fifty roubles. He would also seek financial assistance from other revolutionary groups in Moscow and elsewhere. Amongst the other projects outlined was the republication of the major articles from Vestnik Narodnoi voli and the proclamations of the party’s Executive Committee, all heavily annotated and costing somewhere in the region of 75 francs per printed sheet.

Whether Burtsev held out any serious hope of raising enough funds in this manner to reach his goal is unknown but, as it happened, such donations from Russia were not required. In his memoirs, the seasoned revolutionary Egor’ Lazarev recalled arriving in London in the spring of 1894 to take up the position of secretary of the RFPF. He described how he succeeded in obtaining funds from America to enable the publication of a new and enlarged version of the Kalendar’ Narodnoi voli (which had first appeared in Geneva in 1883) and how members of the Fund had then decided to approach Burtsev, in Switzerland, to ask him to come back to London to undertake the task. It would appear that Burtsev accepted the offer with relish and thereby brought his grand tour of Europe to an end.

As mentioned above, Burtsev returned to London in mid-June 1894 and, within two weeks, this bookish man was already back in the sanctuary of his beloved British Museum, working studiously on his history of the revolutionary movement.

79 ibid., l. 6.
80 ibid., l. 8.
the famous Reading Room he was in the company of many like-minded revolutionaries and, as it would transpire, an equal (or even greater) number of Russian and British spies, stooges and provocateurs. Rachkovskii's earlier alarmist reports had achieved the desired result in St Petersburg. He had asked for, and immediately received, a payment of 10,000 francs. This, he reported, was to enable him to employ another sixteen surveillance agents in Europe.\(^8^2\) How many of these he intended for service in London is unclear, although it is known that he considered the British capital to be the second most important centre of sedition after Paris\(^8^3\) and, at this time, considered his operations in London important enough to warrant the despatch one of his most trusted spies, V. Milevskii, across the Channel 'to collaborate with the London police'.\(^8^4\) Evidently, Chief Inspector Melville's unofficial assistance to his Russian colleague extended further than merely putting him in touch with his friends in the press. It would transpire that he was even prepared to offer up the services of his own staff at Scotland Yard.

**At the Museum**

I am a 'desk-man', a literary man and a journalist. My life has been devoted mainly to the production of journals and newspapers. I am essentially a journalist and always have been, even during those periods when I was involved in my fight against provocateurs.\(^8^5\)

In his reminiscences, L.D. Trotsky described the British Museum Reading Room as a 'sanctuary' (sviatilishche).\(^8^6\) It had long been thus for those political refugees who, like Burtsev, had arrived before Lev Davidovich, and it is one of the aims of this chapter to describe the nature of the attraction of this institution. At this point, therefore, it would be useful to make a brief detour into the halls and corridors of the

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\(^8^2\) GARF f. 102, d. 3. op. 88 (1890). del. 569. Po rozysku Burtseva. T. 4. Rachkovskii to Petrov. Report no. 37, 26 March 1894. l. 77.


\(^8^4\) Taratuta, Eiel' Lilian Voinich, p. 110.

\(^8^5\) Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 6.

British Museum to explore in detail the role that this venerable institution had played— for some fifty years already— in the intellectual development of the Russian revolutionary movement.

On 13 November 1852 a slim volume, published in Paris and entitled *Du Développement des idées révolutionnaires en Russie* was presented as a gift to the British Museum. The volume bears a manuscript dedication on the title page: ‘To the british [sic] Museum – the author’. This is almost certainly in the hand of the father of Russian socialism, Alexander Ivanovich Herzen (Gertsen), who had only recently arrived in England, and the donation is a fitting one indeed. For, over the next half century and more, the British Museum was to play a major role in the development of these ideas and in the growth of the Russian revolutionary movement as a whole.87

Herzen was probably one of the first Russian exiles during the so-called dvorianskii etap (the ‘nobility stage’) of the emigration to settle in London and to avail himself of the collections of the British Museum Library.88 The attraction of London to Herzen, Ogarev, Bakunin and many other European political exiles of the day was self-evident: simply, it was that country’s willingness to offer refuge to those suffering political persecution at home, especially, in the decades of antagonism between the world’s two largest empires over the second half of the nineteenth century, if that home happened to be Russia. (It should be remembered that, at the time of Herzen’s arrival in London in 1852, Anglo-Russian relations were particularly strained, resulting two years later in the formation of an anti-Russian military alliance between Britain, France and Turkey and shortly thereafter, the invasion of the Crimea.)

The British Museum authorities, in turn, were more than happy to spell out this same policy of support for refugees. As their rules of admission clearly stated:

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89 Herzen arrived in London on 25 August 1852 and although the BM Archives contain no record of his admission a member of staff recalls him as a regular visitor. See N. Viktorov (pseud. V.I. Burtsev), ‘Britanskii musei’, *Istoricheskii vestnik*, vol. 59 (January 1895), p. 285.
'The fact of a man’s being a political exile does not exclude him from the Reading-room of the British Museum'.

Antonio Panizzi, Keeper of Printed Books and later Chief Librarian, was himself a political fugitive, having been forced to flee his native Italy during the unification struggles of the early 1820s. As such, he was sympathetic to their plight and made no secret of his distaste for the regime of Nicholas I—on one occasion describing the Imperial Public Library of St Petersburg as 'a monument of the rapacity of the most odious government that can exist'.

As well as extending a compassionate welcome to the refugee, the Museum also offered him (or her, although it was mostly ‘hims’) access to one of the best collections of scholarly books and journals in the world. Included amongst the Library's riches was a most impressive collection of historical and contemporary foreign material (both by language and subject), including, without doubt, the best Russian collection outside Russia. Taking these factors into account, it is no surprise that the Museum's fame spread both within Russia and within other centres of the Russian emigration in mainland Europe. From then on it seemed that following every repressive act of a European government a new cohort of refugees would arrive to register and then take up their seats under Sydney Smirke's majestic dome.

When Burtsev entered the Reading Room for the first time in March 1891 he found himself in good company. Among the roll-call of the Russian revolutionary movement that is the admissions register of the British Museum one encounters the names of Kropotkin, Chaikovskii and Zasulich and also the eminent political figures of the day with whom the latter was acquainted, such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and a number of prominent English liberals, including the Avelings. Indeed, it was Edward Aveling, son-in-law of Marx, who acted as Zasulich’s referee when she was

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93 It is known that the Library was frequented during this period by a number of other émigrés, such as P.L. Lavrov, though as yet no reference to his admission has been uncovered.
first admitted to the Library under the pseudonym Vera Beldinsky, a name invented for her by Eleanor Marx.\textsuperscript{95}

Zasulich, however, was not the first female Russian revolutionary to be admitted as a reader. That honour probably belongs to Sophie Kropotkin who received her ticket to the Reading Room on 2 December 1881. A few months earlier, following the assassination of Alexander II, Prince Peter Kropotkin and his young wife had been expelled from Switzerland and had made their way to England. Kropotkin was to become one of the Library’s most prolific users, returning his reader’s ticket only in 1907 – some 26 years after his first admission. Not only was he an enthusiastic and voracious reader, but throughout his stay he expressed his admiration for and gratitude to the Library by donating vast amounts of material: entire runs of émigré journals, socialist and anarchist books and pamphlets and, of course, many of his own works. Indeed, there is scarcely a Donations Register for the period that does not record at least one of his gifts.

Over the next 20 years or so the round Reading Room came to resemble a veritable club of revolutionaries (with membership by no means restricted to those of East European origin). Stepniak had arrived in the Reading Room for the first time in 1884. It is recorded that he acted as referee for the revolutionaries Hesper Serebriakoff, Lev Deich and Vasilii Petrovich Sidoratskii (the revolutionary Paris-based publisher), for the Russian anthropologist Efim Chepurkovskii and for a mysterious ‘Mr. Adolf Roubleff of Stoke Newington’ whose true identity remains unknown. ‘Roubleff/Rublev’ was one of Stepniak’s own pseudonyms, but this transference of ‘\textit{noms de plume}’ and the adoption of specific names for specific purposes was not at all uncommon among the émigrés at the Museum, as we shall see.\textsuperscript{96}

There was, of course, a host of other radicals to be found in the Reading Room during the late 1880s and early 90s – too many to enumerate here. A few, though, can

\textsuperscript{95} Details of these and later admissions referred to can be found at BMA, Registers of Admissions to the Reading Room; Volumes of Readers’ Signatures; and Readers’ Admissions Correspondence (CE 80–83).

\textsuperscript{96} The practice may or may not have helped to throw the tsarist police off their track, but it certainly makes positive identification of individuals more difficult for the historian! As will be shown later Rublev assisted Burtsev in his compilation of \textit{Za sto let}. See Burtsev, \textit{Za sto let}, introduction, ii.
be mentioned: in the volumes of Readers’ Signatures one encounters the names of Feliks Volkovskii and Mikhail Voinich of the RFPF, the journalist Jaakoff Prelooker, Georgii Plekhanov, Solomon Rappoport, Ivan Kashintsev, Evgenii Stepanov, Theodore Rothstein and Doris Weiss (whose testimonial was provided by the anarchist William Rossetti). Later, of course, came Lenin and his comrades from the board of *Iskra*.

The émigré community in London was, of course, aware of the presence in their midst of informers and other Okhrana agents and at one point were even convinced that a member of the British Museum staff was supplying the Foreign Agency with their addresses. Olive Garnett, a close friend of the Stepniaks and their circle (and the daughter of Richard Garnett, the former Superintendent of the Reading Room and Keeper of Printed Books) kept a diary. The entry for Saturday 9 February 1895 reads as follows:

[I talked] to F. V. [olkhovskii] who told me a long story about a supposed spy in the B.M. reading room who supplied the Russian refugees’ names and addresses to people in Paris who sent circulars to them. This was discovered because two Russians had taken names for the B.M. only and they were addressed by these. I assured him that the B.M. existed only ‘to assist’ the public not to deliver them up to the police.¹⁷

Who these Russians were is unclear but the émigrés may not have been unduly concerned or surprised that some over-zealous (or perhaps underpaid) member of the Museum staff could be recruited into the service of the Okhrana. One can be sure, however, that they would not have expected the Museum authorities or the British police to be involved, even though suspicions of some kind of police interference had been aroused a few months earlier. Garnett described a *soirée* at the Stepniaks in late 1894 and how:

A Russian present described the emotions occasioned by a scrutiny of readers’ tickets at the B.M. and the arrest of a Russian, and his belief that it was occasioned by an order from Scotland Yard. I endeavoured to smooth away these erroneous impressions but he remained unconvinced. As I find from Papa, the stir was

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occasioned by an enforcement of an old regulation, the Russian had only a temporary permission and was released upon its production.98

The Museum archives contain no reference to this scrutiny of tickets, nor indeed to the alleged arrest. However, as the British Museum’s Confidential Papers show, such surveillance had been going on for almost a year in the full knowledge (and, it would appear, with the full support) of the institution’s Trustees. On 12 December 1893 the Principal Librarian had received the following letter from Scotland Yard:

Sir
I respectfully ask that I may be supplied with a ticket or card of admission to the Reading Room of the British Museum.
I do not require it for the ordinary purpose but as I understand that certain persons (who are certainly not above suspicion) frequent the rooms it would perhaps be of assistance to me. Under ordinary circumstances one cannot enter without disclosing his identity and worse still that of the suspect. If possible I will call at your office at the Museum on the 13th inst. when I can further explain. Thanking you in anticipation.
I remain, Your obedient servant, Francis Powell. PC. C.I. Dept.99

Police Constable Powell was duly admitted a week later. In his admission form he listed his referee as William Collins, Inspector of Police and gave his purpose for requiring admission as ‘reference’. If we leave aside for the moment issues of legality or morality the question arises: who exactly were these ‘certain persons not above suspicion’ and why was it felt necessary to send a detective in plain clothes into a public building to spy on them?

As already mentioned, the Library attracted political activists of all descriptions and nationalities. Rubbing shoulders with the Russians were radicals from every European country (including Ireland and the British mainland itself). But based on the sheer number of readers of East European origin one may be drawn to conclude that this was Scotland Yard’s target group. It is worth mentioning too that PC Powell appeared to be developing a special interest in the Russian emigration at

98 ibid, p.129. Entry for 10 November 1894.
99 BMA, Confidential papers. 12 December 1893.
this time: like his boss, Chief Inspector Melville, he too had apparently formed close
links with Rachkovskii. Indeed, some years later Powell, by this time Chief Inspector
Powell, was himself recruited into the Okhrana as head of its operations in England.\footnote{100}

Scanning the lists of admissions prior to the date of Powell’s letter, one discovers that
five days earlier Varlaam Nikolaevich Cherkezov, the Georgian nationalist and
anarchist (and friend of Burtsev, Kropotkin and Stepaniak), who was already well-
known to the Special Branch, received his Reader’s ticket, but whether Scotland Yard
were particularly interested in him or felt he deserved special treatment is impossible
to say. In short, the reason why at this particular time the CID felt it necessary to have
an undercover presence in the Reading Room remains obscure. If, however, it was to
monitor the movements of one particular individual admitted a few weeks before
Cherkezov, then later events were to show that the police had failed miserably in their
task.

The Greenwich outrage

The news of an explosion in Greenwich Park at 4.45 p.m. on Thursday 15 February
1894 spread quickly. It was reported that shortly after the explosion, the horribly
mutilated body of a young man had been discovered on the winding path leading up
to the Royal Observatory. It appeared that he had stumbled and accidentally detonated
an explosive device he had been carrying. The unfortunate individual was soon
identified as Martial Bourdin, an unemployed French tailor aged 26. It is unclear
whether the Observatory itself had been his target, or whether the bomb had been
intended for use on the continent and he had simply gone to a rendezvous in the park
to hand over the device in question. There has also been speculation that Bourdin may
have been working for the British police, who, by attempting to link the bombing to
foreign anarchists, hoped to help the passage into law of Lord Salisbury’s Aliens
Bill.\footnote{101} To David Nicoll it was quite clear that this was Walsall all over again, the
motive behind it being ‘to create a prejudice against Anarchism’.\footnote{102}

\footnote{100} HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 1: Report no. 552, 24 April/7 May 1912, A.A. Krasil’nikov,
Head of Foreign Agency to S.P. Beletskii, Director of Police, ff. 1–2.

\footnote{101} See web advert for exhibition by Rod Dickinson and Tom McCarthy, Greenwich Degree Zero at:
http://www.setproject.ca/dickinson/. The Greenwich incident also, of course, famously inspired Joseph
Conrad’s novel The Secret Agent (1907).
Whatever the reason for Bourdin’s presence in Greenwich that day, we can at least be certain of how the infernal device came to be constructed. Some two weeks after the incident it was disclosed at the Coroner’s Court that: ‘On his [Bourdin’s] person were… an Autonomie Club membership card, identity card, and recipes for the preparation of explosives that he had copied from a book in the British Museum.’

It is perhaps surprising that, on making this discovery, the police did not immediately contact the Museum authorities. Similarly, one might have expected the Museum Trustees to raise the matter at one of their monthly Board meetings. But it would appear from the records neither happened. However, it is clear that – at least in private – the Museum authorities were worried by these developments. An indication of this concern can be gleaned from another entry in Olive Garnett’s diary. On Monday 26 February 1894, she writes of her father having received:

...a letter from William Rossetti asking Papa to manage for Arthur to read in the B.M.... I suggested to Papa to look after Arthur a little. It would be unfortunate to say the least if he made use of his permit to study explosives on behalf of anarchist friends, or even on his own behalf as he has a talent for chemical research. There is already a suggestion to make the regulations stricter and it would be a thousand pities if, through the folly of one idiot, innocent and deserving students were to suffer.

Arthur Rossetti, a nephew of the celebrated artist Dante Gabriel, was joint editor of the Anarchist newspaper *The Torch* and a keen amateur chemist. He was also suspected by the police of being involved in the Greenwich affair. Leaving to one side the rather indelicate timing of Mr. Rossetti’s request, one can see from this entry

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103 *Kentish and Deptford Observer*, 23 February and 2 March 1894. See also *Morning Leader*, 17 February 1894; and the *Times*, 16–21 February 1894. Interestingly, the only record of admission for a Bourdin held in the Museum Archives is for Henri, Martial’s brother, who received his Reader’s Ticket on 14 August 1893. This raises the question, therefore, of which brother had visited the Museum to copy out the ‘recipes’.

104 Johnson, *Olive and Stepniak*, pp. 43–44.

that procedural adjustments were already under discussion at the Museum; and a few months later, at the request of the government, certain changes were indeed made.

At their meeting of 13 October 1894, the Trustees discussed a letter received from the Home Office concerning the imminent publication of a new edition of Lieutenant-Colonel John Ponsonby Cundill's *Dictionary of Explosives* and the desire of the Home Office that the work should not be issued to readers who were not well known to Reading Room Staff. There is a manuscript post-script:

> It may be mentioned that on the person of an anarchist arrested for crimes committed with explosives a British Museum book ticket was discovered, shewing that he had used the 'Dictionary of Explosives' in that Institution.

Who this particular anarchist was is unclear, but from another Home Office memorandum of the time it is evident that the same edition of Cundill's *Dictionary* had been used by Bourdin to source his noxious recipes. The Home Office went on to suggest that when the *bona fides* of a person desiring to consult the book was doubted, the matter could be referred to H.M. Chief Inspector of Explosives. In due course, when the second edition was received, Richard Garnett reported to the Trustees that the book would not be entered into the catalogue.107

Under the circumstances, this call for these dangerous works to be added to a proscribed list was perhaps understandable, as too was the Home Office's request for increased vigilance on the part of the Museum staff, though whether any 'individuals

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106 TNA, PRO HO 45/9886/B16975: a memorandum of 12 September 1894 on the background to the *Dictionary*, the need for new edition and the dangers of its publication. Part of the text reads: 'There is, however, at the present time, a danger in the publication of a work of this sort which may fall into the hands of Anarchists and evil-disposed persons and may furnish them with the means of preparing explosive compounds for unlawful purposes. That this is no imaginary danger is shown by the case of Bourdin... On his person was found a demand slip of the British Museum for the Dictionary, and also two extracts from the book, giving prescriptions for explosives, and it is probable that it was with one of these mixtures that the man was killed.'

107 Whether Garnett did, in fact, keep the book back is unclear, for currently both editions are to be found in the General Catalogue of the Library, and are apparently available to anyone possessing a reader's ticket, whether 'well-known to Reading Room staff' or not.
not above suspicion’, Russian or otherwise, were reported to the authorities as a result is, at present, unknown.

The Greenwich outrage appeared to shock the police into action. As far as the Museum was concerned, it was decided not only that an undercover presence in the Reading Room should be maintained but also that it should be increased. On 20 December 1894 Powell again wrote to Thomson:

Sir

I beg to thank you for the reader’s ticket granted to one of my comrades viz Michael Thorpe… I have now a new comrade for whom I would feel very grateful if you would grant a reader’s ticket. His name and address is Michael Flood 117 Hill Street Peckham.108

Then, on 29 April the following year, Thorpe wrote with the request that his ticket be renewed, for, as he pointed out, in his capacity of Detective Sergeant at New Scotland Yard, he found it ‘convenient at times to have a ticket for the reading room’.109 It is worth noting here that DS Thorpe actually preceded his associate, Powell, as the Okhrana’s contact in London and, on his retirement, was even awarded a pension by the Russian Department of Police!110 It is likely that he too, by the time he entered the Reading Room, had already developed an interest in the Russian emigre community and was in regular contact with agent Milevskii in London and/or Rachkovskii in Paris.

There is no archival evidence that the dubious practice of admitting undercover CID officers as readers was ever discussed by the Museum’s Board of Trustees, nor is there any mention of when (or indeed if!) the practice ceased. It was almost certainly a new departure for the police and it is unlikely that the Museum authorities had been approached with such a request before.111

108 BMA, Confidential Papers. 20 December 1894.
109 ibid., 29 April 1895.
110 HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 1: Report no. 552, 24 April/7 May 1912, A.A. Krasil’nikov, Head of Foreign Agency to S.P. Beletskii, Director of Police, ff. 1–2.
111 There is, though, at least one earlier instance of a Metropolitan Police detective being admitted to the Reading Room. On 5 June 1862 Mr Daniel Howie, Superintendent of Police ‘K’ (Stepney) Division
That is not so say, however, that there had been no previous high-level contact between Scotland Yard and the Museum. In late 1889, for example, in an incident which demonstrates the anxieties of the period, the Principal Librarian, Edward Maunde Thompson, had contacted the CID in a panic, to report the receipt in the Museum of a package that he suspected contained a bomb. Following investigations, he received a letter from New Scotland Yard assuring him that the parcel was inhabited by nothing but a small tin box containing some ‘plate polish’ and that it was doubtless no more than some kind of hoax. Then, a few years later, on 8 December 1892, Inspector Collins wrote to Maunde Thompson enclosing a clipping from the Echo newspaper of 5 December entitled ‘Outrages threatened in London’ and drawing his attention to the presence in the Reading Room of a certain Luigi Parmeggiani, whom he termed ‘The French Anarchist’. Although the Inspector did not spell out what he required of Maunde Thompson, one can be sure that he wished him to keep this dangerous individual under surveillance. It is also almost certain that the Principal Librarian would have contacted Scotland Yard two years earlier, when the British Museum had received an anonymous donation of six thin pamphlets entitled L’International. On the back page of each was a section entitled ‘L’Indicateur Anarchiste’ which, allegedly, was the work of Parmegianni and which contained instructions on how to make and preserve dynamite. The documents were, of course, immediately suppressed.

It was in such an atmosphere of heightened police and public awareness that another young Russian émigré arrived in London from the University of Zurich in September 1894 and, styling himself a ‘candidat du philosophie’, applied for admission to the British Museum. He apparently raised not the slightest suspicion was given a ticket by order of Panizzi. It is, however, impossible to say whether he sought admission for professional reasons or merely for purposes of self-improvement. See BMA, Volumes of Readers’ Signatures for 1862.


113 L’International. no. 1–6. May–August 1890. London, 1890.

amongst police or Museum staff and, thanks to a reference from none other than Richard Garnett, was admitted as a reader. This was Burtsev’s duplicitous young acquaintance from the previous year, Lev Dmitrievich Beitner, also known as Arkadii Shiriaev. He was quick to renew his relationship with Burtsev and also to strike up friendships with those émigrés associated with *Free Russia*, such as Volkhovskii and Stepniak. Indeed, Beitner wrote a short biography of Stepniak in 1896 and was happy to donate two signed copies to the Museum Library. The young man continued to attend the Museum and to be involved at the very heart of the emigration for a number of years before it was revealed, in June 1908, that he had been recruited into the Okhrana as an informer some sixteen years earlier. It is difficult to put a figure on the number of Russian political émigrés deceived by Beitner in the course of his career, but of these Burtsev was perhaps the most famous. The nature of that betrayal and its tragic consequences will be examined in the next chapter.

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Chapter Four  1895–1898: An ‘ephemeral terrorist’?

Scarcely had Burtsev arrived back in London from Switzerland when news was received of yet another anarchist assassination – this time the stabbing to death at Lyon of M.F. Sadi Carnot, the President of the Third Republic. The reaction of the French government to this outrage was to rush an anti-anarchist bill through parliament and to make a series of arrests. The pattern was repeated in several other European countries and in the USA, where numerous anarchists were also jailed or expelled. The effect was felt in Britain too, where public support for radicalism in general suffered a noticeable and immediate fall and where the police took advantage of the prevailing mood to take leading anarchists into custody. This developing anti-alien atmosphere in Britain was further encouraged by alarmist newspaper reports that for some time had proclaimed London the home of international anarchy and now claimed that the assassination of the French president had been planned on British soil. It was suggested by some that the time had come to review the country’s historic role as a sanctuary for political refugees.

In the present chapter the impact of this growing anti-alienism on the activities of Burtsev and others in the Russian political emigration will be examined, as will the other factors, both internal and external, that served to weaken the revolutionary opposition at this time. In addition, attention will be paid to a neglected aspect of Burtsev’s life during the period – namely, his remarkable literary productivity. He himself had identified the final years of the reign of Alexander III as the loneliest period of his life in emigration: a time of ‘small deeds’ when all signs of active revolutionary struggle had been crushed. The death of the autocrat on 20 October/1 November 1894 did, indeed, signal a re-awakening of the radical opposition and

1 The murder was perpetrated by the Italian anarchist Sante Geronimo Caserio on 24 June 1894, as the president travelled in his carriage from a banquet to the theatre.

2 In Italy anti-anarchist legislation was introduced as early as July 1894. In August an anti-anarchist bill was passed by the Senate in Washington, while in Vienna two editors of an anarchist newspaper were arrested. In Germany a number of anti-revolutionary bills were first laid before the Federal Council in November 1894 but, after much debate, were rejected in May 1895.

3 See, for example, The Western Mail, 15 February 1894, p. 5: ‘The International Centre of Anarchy’.
Burtsev too sprang to life in a burst of literary endeavour. Archival documents from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam throw new light on his life during this period and on his literary activities and political contacts. Burtsev’s journalistic activities, however, were to be brought to an abrupt end in December 1897, when he was taken into custody by the British police. Reference will be made to a number of previously unpublished Russian archival documents in describing the role played by the Russian authorities in this arrest and the circumstances surrounding Burtsev’s subsequent trial and imprisonment.

The Burtsev trial\(^4\) was examined in 1973 by the historian Alan Kimball, who also provided a detailed study of the political considerations leading up to the arrest. Additional valuable commentary on Scotland Yard’s involvement in the case was provided by Donald Senese in 1981,\(^5\) but Senese underestimated the importance of the part played by Chief Inspector William Melville. The significance of his role will be re-examined here.

The anarchist laboratory

By the summer of 1894 signs of a growing anti-anarchist mood in Britain were prevalent. A week after the assassination of the French president, the editor of the anarchist journal *The Commonweal*, Thomas Cantwell, and his associate, Charles Quinn, were arrested after distributing an anarchist pamphlet *Why Vaillant threw the Bomb* and delivering an inflammatory speech to a crowd at Tower Hill in London. It was claimed they had ‘incited persons to murder the Royal family and others’ and were duly found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison by Mr Justice Lawrance, a notorious Conservative place-man, who would return to play a decisive role at Burtsev’s trial.

The prison sentence effectively spelled the end of the *Commonweal* but that, apparently, was not enough to satisfy the British public. It was argued in the press that Cantwell and Quinn were proof enough that the anarchist infection had already spread to Britain and that the time had come to put a stop to it before it was too late. Opposition to East European immigration – primarily, but not wholly, on economic


grounds – had been on the increase for a number of years, encouraged, on the one hand, by such antisemitic exclusionists as Arnold White and, on the other, by the Trade Union Congress itself, where, it was argued, labour was being devalued by the large number of Russian and Polish Jews who were prepared to take work at any price. Now, it appeared, these aliens were not only taking ‘British jobs’ but were threatening British lives to boot.

In July 1894 the Marquess of Salisbury, that ‘cynical pessimist’, as one political historian has described him, was quick to jump on the exclusionist bandwagon and take over a Bill in preparation, whose primary aim had been to make provision for the expulsion of destitute aliens. Salisbury added a second, in his opinion, more important part, the intent of which was to empower the Secretary of State to prevent the immigration of dangerous aliens and to allow him to expel ‘any foreigner whose presence in this country is either dangerous to the public peace here, or is likely to promote the commission of crimes elsewhere.’ Introducing his Aliens Bill to the House of Lords on 6 July 1894, the Leader of the Opposition proclaimed:

We know there are large clubs of persons in this country in which murderous plots have been hatched and brought to completion: so that now England is to a great extent the headquarters, the base from which the anarchist operations are conducted, the laboratory in which all their contrivances are perfected.

Referring to the recent atrocities he finished his speech by declaring:

I wish it to be known that our country looks with as much horror as any other upon these detestable enormities and that it is willing to make some departure from its old habits and some sacrifice of its own convenience in order to make clear to its allies and its friends that it has no part or share in crimes which have cast a stain of blood and horror on the closing years of the nineteenth century.

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8 Parliamentary Debates, 4th Series, 1894, vol. 27, col. 137.

9 ibid.
The recently appointed Liberal First Minister, Lord Rosebury, challenged him on this call to bring an end to Britain’s long-cherished law on the Right of Asylum and on the outrageous insinuation that Britain was a haven for European political criminals. Having sought the advice of the Home Office and police he was able confidently to declare that ‘none of the conspiracies hatched against foreign states have been planned or plotted in these islands’.\footnote{The Times, 18 July 1894, p. 6: ‘Aliens Bill’.

10} Announcing his opposition to the Bill, Lord Herschell, the Lord Chancellor, argued that the expulsion of an individual would clearly be far less likely to result in the prevention of a crime in preparation than if the plotter was kept under police surveillance here, and the police were in communication with foreign police.\footnote{ibid. According to another report there was already in existence a ‘pretty constant interchange of notes respecting anarchists between the police of the various continental countries’. See Reynolds’s Newspaper, 1 July 1894, p. 5: ‘Assassination of President Carnot’.

11} Despite such reasonable objections, the Bill received its second reading some days later and was passed with a comfortable majority of fifty-two.\footnote{The Times, 18 July 1894, p. 6: ‘Aliens Bill’. The exact numbers were: Contents – 89. Not Contents – 37.

12} Salisbury, however, had been conscious of the fact that such a Bill had little chance of success in the House of Commons at this late stage of the parliamentary session – indeed, Sir William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House, emphatically stated that no time would be allocated for its consideration – and so, with a minimum of fuss, it was withdrawn. Salisbury was well aware of the prevailing mood of the British public on the subject and, to his mind, the fact that Rosebury had been obliged publicly to state his opposition to a measure which sought to deal with the growing problems of destitute and dangerous aliens was sufficient in itself. At the general election the following year the Conservatives returned to power with a landslide victory and, according to one commentator, the different stance adopted by the main parties on this crucial issue was one of the key contributory factors to the transfer of votes and to the ‘radical rout’ in the East End of London.\footnote{ibid., 20 July 1895, p. 16: ‘The Radical Rout in the East-End’.

13} That Salisbury had raised the issue at this stage primarily as a political ploy is evinced

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by the fact that he did not immediately attempt to revive the Bill upon his return to power, despite being in possession of a more than comfortable majority in both houses. That is not to say, however, that émigré issues were ever far from his mind during this, his third and last term in office.

A 'bookish' man

Burtsev, meanwhile, seemingly unaware of the public antipathy which was growing around him, had his head down in the British Museum. He had been commissioned by the RFPF to help in the compilation of a history of the Russian revolutionary movement that was to take the form of a new and enlarged version of the successful *Kalendarn Narodnoi voli* (Calendar of the People’s Will) published in Geneva in 1883. Before settling down to the task in hand, however, he occupied himself with a preliminary study of what would constitute a major source of information for that history – namely, the Museum’s unparalleled collection of Russian books, periodicals and newspapers. The result of his labours, an impressive, thirty-page article entitled ‘Britanskii Muzei’ (The British Museum), appeared early in 1895 in the St Petersburg *Istoricheskii vestnik* (Historical Messenger) under the *nom de plume* 'N. Viktorov'.

The article, the first detailed description of the Museum Library’s Russian collections by a Russian is a meticulous and comprehensive bibliographic and historical study, which, it is important to note, could not have been simply dashed off but must necessarily have involved weeks of dedicated and exhaustive research. It is, moreover, a scholarly work, in which it is almost impossible to detect the author’s radical political views. Indeed, the closest Burtsev came to an expression of a political opinion was when, singing the praises of the Library’s General Catalogue and bemoaning the lack of the same in the national library of Russia, he predicted that the situation would remain thus until such time as ‘the state lavishes as much attention on literature, national education, universities and libraries as it does currently on Krupp cannon’.


15 *ibid.*, p. 276.
some bravery on the part of the editor, S.N. Shubinskii, to allow even such a mild criticism of the government’s fiscal policy to appear in print.\(^\text{16}\)

In attempting to give an overall picture of the Museum’s Russian holdings, Burtsev the journalist, began with periodicals, ‘if for no other reason than that, in Russian literature, periodicals have always played and to this day continue to play a major role and, in importance, quite overshadow pamphlets and books’.\(^\text{17}\) While singing the praises of the collections he did point to some lacunae and strongly urged any Russian learned society to whose journal the Museum had been unable to subscribe, to donate that journal to the Library, where it ‘would be kept for eternity, at the service of all of those outside Russia who are interested in the subject’.\(^\text{18}\) Some years later, when asking for help in the compilation of a revised edition of *Za sto let*, Burtsev again called on his compatriots to make donations to the Museum.\(^\text{19}\) And, indeed, as the Library’s archival records show, he himself made numerous personal gifts in the course of his future life.\(^\text{20}\)

If the author’s high regard for the British Museum and his voracious appetite for reading are not adequately demonstrated by this eulogy to the institution, then further proof is available from another source: namely, a collection of his letters and a selection of British Museum book request slips, which I recently discovered amongst the papers of the German anarchist and historian Max Nettlau.\(^\text{21}\) The correspondence, which continued for almost twenty years, throws new light on Burtsev’s activities and the wide range of his contacts during the period. He had first contacted Nettlau in


\[^{17}\] Viktorov, ‘Britanskii Muzei’, p. 258.

\[^{18}\] *ibid.*, p. 260.

\[^{19}\] HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIId/1A. Director of Dept. of Police to Rachkovskii. no. 2395 (24 December 1899) ‘Zapiska V. Burtseva’ f. 4.

\[^{20}\] The Museum’s ‘Books of Presents’ contain numerous donations under his name, including a limited edition of Griboedov’s *Gore ot uma*, which he sent from Paris in November 1919.

London regarding the latter’s work on Bakunin, expressing his regrets that the author had completely overlooked Russian material on the subject and offering his assistance in this respect. Whether he expected to be paid for his services is unknown but, from his correspondence, it is clear that the impoverished émigré regularly received support from Nettlau in the form of loans of a few shillings. 22

Another source of income came from further journal contributions. A few months after his pseudonymous article on the British Museum appeared, *Istoricheskii vestnik* published a second contribution from the pen of N. Viktorov entitled ‘Kruzhok shestnadtsati’ (The Circle of Sixteen). 23 This was a study of a much more political nature and of much more relevance to his projected history, dealing, as it did, with Lermontov’s liberal opposition group of that name whose existence had first been referred to in a book published by one of its former members, Ksawery Branicki, in 1879 but whose significance to the life and works of the poet had been overlooked until the Viktorov article brought it to public attention. 24 Burtsev drew heavily on Branicki’s work and included translations from the *Lettre préliminaire* with which it began and which summarized the group’s history and membership. The final chapter, concerning Herzen, Bakunin, Lavrov and the history of Nihilism, would also have been of immediate relevance and interest to the radical historian. 25

Throughout the remainder of his period of emigration in London, Burtsev continued to derive a small and irregular income from his journal contributions, the

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22 See, for example, *ibid.*, Burtsev to Nettlau, 27 August 1892: ‘Comrade, La même chose, toujours la même chose. Si vous pouvez, je vous prie me donner pour 1 ou 2 semaines 3–5 shillings (combien vous pouvez et si vous pouvez). Ou par la poste ou dans la Bibliothèque, comme vous voulez.’ By July 1895 his debt amounted to eleven shillings and a request for a further loan was, on this occasion, refused. See *ibid.*, Burtsev to Nettlau, 5 July 1895, with the latter’s annotation dated 6 July 1895.


subject matter of which was by no means confined to nineteenth-century revolutionary movements. *Istoricheskii vestnik* published one more of his historico-bibliographical essays, this time on the works of the eighteenth-century historian and traveller William Coxe.\(^{26}\) The article, based on a thorough examination of the British Museum’s collection of Coxe’s books and manuscripts, highlighted the significance of his writings regarding the study of the Russia of Catherine II and drew attention to a rare sixth edition of his *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*, the existence of which, Burtsev claimed, was previously unknown within Russia.\(^{27}\) The Russian archives supply evidence of another of his essays that dealt with Catherine’s Russia,\(^{28}\) while, in a letter to Stepniak, Burtsev referred to yet more of his submissions during this period on topics as diverse as Flaubert, Dickens and Russian literature in 1892.\(^{29}\)

All of the above adds some weight to Burtsev’s own view of himself as a writer first and a revolutionary second. As he was later to declare:

> I am a ‘desk-man’, a literary man. I am essentially a journalist and always have been, even during those periods when I was involved in my fight against *agents provocateur*.\(^{30}\)

His journalism was unquestionably revolutionary, but Burtsev who claimed never to have joined any political grouping, who was neither Fundist nor Populist (nor, indeed, Social Democrat), was always keen to stress in his writings his lack of political affiliation, which he regarded as divisive and, whenever possible, to encourage unification of the political opposition.


\(^{27}\) Coxe, William, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark. Interspersed with Historical Relations and Political Inquiries*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1803.

\(^{28}\) RGASPI f. 328, op. 1. ed. khr. 7. F. Dillon Woon to Burtsev, 13 November 1896, concerning publication of the latter’s article on Samuel Bentham (1757–1831), brother of Jeremy and traveller in Russia.


\(^{30}\) Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, p. 6.
A diet of stones and dreams
This desire to unite the opposition under one flag was shared by many within Russia. V.G. Korolenko, for example, had drawn up plans to publish abroad a single, free journal of the opposition – a new Kolokol’ – and had begun to look for support among the various émigré communities.31 In 1893 he visited New York to advance his idea in discussions with the editors of the American edition of Free Russia, Egor’ Lazarev and Lazar’ Gol’denberg. His proposal was then communicated to the leading émigrés in Europe, including Stepniak in London and Plekhanov in Geneva, but, unfortunately, the latter’s lukewarm response meant that this, like so many previous attempts at unification, was doomed to failure.

Lazarev, however, had already begun canvassing for funds and had met with almost immediate success in the New York offices of the émigré bookseller and publisher Aleksandr Markovich Evalenko, who offered an initial contribution of 300 dollars towards the costs. The revolutionary seized the offer without for a moment doubting the donor’s credentials. Evalenko, after all, had arrived in America some years before and was an established and respected figure, well-known for his hospitality. Shortly after meeting him Gol’denberg described him as a ‘good egg’ (dobryi duren’) who never appeared to be without money, despite being a terrible wastrel.32 In fact, the source of his wealth would not be revealed until 1910, when he was unmasked as a police spy by none other than Burtsev himself.33 As would later be revealed, Evalenko, known to the tsarist police as agent Sergeev, had worked for them

31 For a detailed examination of the events surrounding this attempt to found a journal of the opposition see Shirokova, ‘Iz istorii sviazei russkikh revoltsionerov s emigrantami’. Kolokol’ (The Bell) was the name of the famous political émigré journal published by Herzen between 1857 and 1867.
33 The story was covered in detail in the press and was followed with great interest by the American public. See for example: The New York Times, 27 February 1910, p. 5: ‘Denies he’s a Spy for Czar Nicholas’.
as far back as 1885–1886 and, upon his arrival in New York, had re-entered their employ on a salary of 200 dollars per month.34

It was, therefore, with Russian government funding that Lazarev, on his arrival in London in the spring of 1894, proposed the publication of a new edition of Zasulich's successful Kalendar' as an alternative to Korolenko's failed journal. He suggested the title be published under the Fund's name and Evalenko, with the consent of his masters in St Petersburg, agreed to back this substitute. The search for an editor/compiler then began.

Lazarev had been one of a number of émigrés previously approached by Burtsev in his search for funding for his long-cherished plan for a history of the Russian revolutionary movement and was, therefore, already aware of the huge quantity of materials which Burtsev had amassed over the years. This, together with the latter's nepartiinost' ("non-partisanship") and scrupulous attention to detail, made him an ideal candidate for the job which, when offered, he accepted without hesitation. The plan was for Stepniak to assume over-all editorial control of the project, with Burtsev acting as 'compiler-in-chief', contributing the voluminous materials he had already collected and adding to them. To assist him in the task, he was assigned two co-workers: Adol'f Rublev and Vasilii Zhuk, who, thanks to Stepniak's intercession, were admitted to the British Museum in January 1895. Work then began in earnest.35

A few months after Burtsev's departure from Zurich, that other tsarist informer, Lev Beitner, scurried after his prey, arriving in London in August 1894. He immediately immersed himself in the life of the émigré community, ingratiated

34 GARF f. 102, del. 3. 1891, d. 688, T. 1 and 2. 'Po soobshcheniiam agenta Sergeeva v N'iu Iorke.' 1. 1 ob. 43, 47-a. Cited in Panteleeva, 'Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel'skaia deiatel'nost' V.L. Burtseva', p. 164.

35 Little is known of Rublev other than his entry in Za sto let, which states that he was tried at Odessa on 26 March 1880 and received a nineteen-year sentence. Burtsev, Za sto let, p. 104. Zhuk was the pseudonym of Vasilii Pavlovich Maslov-Stokoz (1876–1949), an adherent of Narodnaia volia, also known under the names Baturinskii and Baranov (this latter pseudonym was also used by Burtsev). Zhuk was admitted to the Museum on 16 January 1895, with Rublev following suit on 25 January. Stepniak also served as referee a few months later (on 17 April 1895) for Wilfrid Voynich, fellow member of the RFPF. See: BMA, Letters of Admission to the Reading Room, CE 83/A53263, CE 83/A53347 and CE 83/53962.
himself with a number of members of the Fund and, no doubt at Rachkovskii's suggestion, quickly gained admission to the Reading Room of the British Museum. With his agent in place the head of the Foreign Agency could now justifiably consider himself to be aware of all of the RFPF's and Burtsev's activities in London. Moreover, thanks to reports from the Fontanka headquarters, Rachkovskii was also in receipt of details of Burtsev's letters to many of his comrades both in Russia and elsewhere. A particularly rich source of information was his correspondence with his old friend Ivan Kashintsev in Sofia. It becomes apparent from a study of Department of Police files that almost every letter Burtsev sent either to Bulgaria or Romania throughout his emigration was intercepted by the diligent head of the Agency, Lieutenant-Colonel A.I. Budzilovich, who then sent transcripts to St Petersburg. The Department, in turn, forwarded anything it considered to be of relevance to Paris. At the same time, Burtsev's personal file was methodically updated with any new details obtained concerning contacts, pseudonyms, addresses, etc. Based on such information, particular individuals could then be targeted and, if necessary, their post intercepted.

A case in point is a copy of a letter held both in the Department of Police file at GARF and in the Hoover's Okhrana archive. Dated 12 November 1894, it is addressed to the Dean of the Medical Faculty at the University of Kiev and signed by 'Doctor V. Ermolov' (one of Burtsev's pseudonyms). In it Burtsev announced his move to London and his involvement in his old work at the library. Attached is another letter, signed simply 'Vlad', to an old friend from Kazan', Nikolai Nikolaevich Mikhailov, which began:

> It is a pity I cannot arrange for this letter to be delivered by hand, for then I would write something of interest. I know that our correspondence is being read by others and I have no wish to let them crawl into my personal life.

But then, inexplicably, Burtsev proceeded to list a whole range of his personal details, announcing how he could be contacted: either under the name 'Livshits', or 'Care of Mr Liber', at 27, Bouverie Rd, Stoke Newington. As for newspapers etc., he

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36 Numerous examples are contained in: GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569. Tom. 4.

37 ibid., l. 188.
suggested they be sent straight to his address: 29, Francis Street, under the name ‘Roustieff’.\(^{38}\) All of this new information was, as a matter of course, added to his personal police file. Such dispatches, while serving as proof of Burtsev’s apparent awareness of the okhrana’s surveillance operations demonstrate even more clearly, perhaps, the professionalism, determination (and omnipresence!) of that department and the utter futility of the revolutionary’s attempts to evade its attentions.

It would appear that surveillance over Burtsev had now reached saturation point. As mentioned previously, a handful of undercover detectives from Scotland Yard had already been admitted to the Reading Room and, moreover, the émigré community had good reason to believe that a member of the Museum staff was also spying on them.\(^{39}\) It was under such intense and, arguably, excessive scrutiny that Burtsev and his co-workers set about their historical researches.

His collaboration with the RFPF over the production of *Za sto let* has been examined in detail by T.L. Panteleeva of Moscow State University. From her study, based on exhaustive researches in a number of Russian archives and on the personal papers and reminiscences of the leading émigrés of the day, there emerges a vivid picture of the London Russian community and of Burtsev’s place within it.\(^{40}\) Gol’denberg and Chaikovskii remembered him as a modest, even shy, man who constantly said he wanted nothing more than that his testament – his chronicle of the revolution – be published.\(^{41}\) For the first six months, the Fund provided Burtsev and his assistants with an allowance for each day worked at the Museum which, as Lazarev admitted, was miserly indeed. Burtsev, however, far from complaining, paid each of his co-workers three shillings a day and himself a mere two shillings and

\(^{38}\) It would appear that Mikhailov did not receive the message in question, for in a follow-up letter to another contact Burtsev asks for Mikhailov’s address signing himself V. Rodstein and giving his address this time as 87, Byron Street, Leeds. See *ibid.* II. 206–207: Burtsev to Anastasiia Klepachevskaiia in Kiev, 2 December 1895.

\(^{39}\) See *supra* p. 155. The British Museum Archives contain proof that on at least one occasion the authorities reported to Scotland Yard on material read by a Russian ‘suspect’ in the Reading Room. See: BMA, Confidential Papers. Scotland Yard to British Museum, 28 February 1923: ‘Re. Material read by Professor Barthold’.


\(^{41}\) *ibid.*, p. 166.
sixpence, despite the fact that he worked twice as many hours as they did.\textsuperscript{42} Moreover, he petitioned the Fund to pay Rublev and Zhuk extra because their need was greater. He, on the other hand, insisted that he required nothing more.\textsuperscript{43}

After the first six months, support from the Fund stopped but Burtsev continued to work on alone for the next year and a half, apparently feeding himself, in Lazarev’s colourful expression, ‘more on stones and dreams than anything else’.\textsuperscript{44} This disregard for money would remain with him in his later years. The Socialist Revolutionary V.M. Zenzinov, later recalled how, following the exposure of Azef, Burtsev had been courted by the world’s press and offered huge sums of money for interviews and articles:

> Millions passed through his hands — in the literal sense of the word. Money simply slipped through — nothing remained — he simply was not interested in money and failed completely to understand anything about its importance.\textsuperscript{45}

Such straitened circumstances evidently had an adverse effect on the author’s productivity. In October 1895, Rachkovskii reported to Director of Police Petrov that Burtsev was still having trouble finishing his chapter of the \textit{Kalender}.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, Stepniak, his editor, was finding it so impossible to collate, or even understand, the chaotic pile of notes he had received from his compiler that he eventually invited him to spend the day with him dictating from the notes he had made.\textsuperscript{47} In such a way, a final structure for the book was eventually devised and some slow progress made.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{ibid.}, pp. 165–166.

\textsuperscript{43} During this period he did, however, complain of his poverty in a letter to Kashintsev in Sofia. See: GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569. Tom. 4. Report of Budzilovich, head of Romanian Agency, 6 March 1895, l. 200.

\textsuperscript{44} ‘Pitaias’ bol’she kamniami i snovideniami’: GARF f. 5824, op. 2, d. 114, l. 32. Cited in Panteleeva, ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{45} Zenzinov, ‘V.L. Burtsev’, p. 362.

\textsuperscript{46} GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569. Tom. 4: Report no. 86, 18/30 October 1895, Rachkovskii to Director of Dept. of Police. l. 205.

\textsuperscript{47} Quoted in Panteleeva, ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, p. 168.
However, a huge setback was encountered on Christmas Eve 1895, when Stepniak inexplicably fell to his death under a train at a level crossing in north-west London. The loss to the revolutionary movement was enormous and the tragedy also had a devastating and weakening effect on both the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom and on the Russian Free Press Fund. Burtsev’s work on the *Kalender* continued, nevertheless, but at a much slower pace, and it was hampered too by his disagreements with some of his colleagues. Volkhovskii had attempted to fill Stepniak’s shoes but the lack of the latter’s steadying and unifying influence were soon felt, with differences of opinion starting to appear amongst members of the editorial board. In his letters to Kashintsev, Burtsev constantly complained about the attitude of his co-workers: ‘There are arguments about the introduction. I am not giving way to the fundists. Neither to Gol’denberg nor Chaikovskii.’48 Gol’denberg later claimed the dispute over the introduction had arisen over Burtsev’s desire to include a statement of his terrorist principles.49 Of that period Burtsev later wrote:

As before, I fought with those who placed party higher than country and could not see the chasm that we were being driven towards by the reaction on the one hand and those who preached social revolution on the other. As a result of this struggle I developed some difficult relations with certain well-known émigrés and down-right hostile relations with others. But I also had many overt and covert friends and supporters.50

Teplov, too, was finding Burtsev impossible to work with, while his old colleague and co-editor, Debagorii-Mokreevich, broke off relations a few years later, when, having offered some autobiographical notes for publication, he discovered that Burtsev wished to read them first: ‘So, our Burtsev would act as censor! That ephemeral

48 GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569. Tom. 4: Burtsev to Kashintsev, 12 July 1897, ll. 265–268.
50 Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, pp. 112–113.
terrorist would cross out all my attacks on his imaginary terrorism with his red crayon!  

Burtsev’s relationship with Gol’denberg appears to have been particularly hostile, as evinced by the fact that the latter received not a single mention by name in Burtsev’s autobiography. However, in the end, some form of compromise appears to have been reached, for the long-awaited Kalender’ finally made its appearance in 1897 under the title Za sto let (1800–1896), with the participation of the late Stepniak duly acknowledged on the title page.  

In its final version, the collection consisted of two parts. The first, divided into thirty-six sections, contained various revolutionary documents, programmes, speeches and proclamations and, in its day at least, this selection certainly had its uses. As the Soviet historian Sh.M. Levin has pointed out, no less a figure than V.I. Lenin made heavy use of it in one of his articles. That first part has long since lost its relevance but the second – the Khronika i bibliografiia (‘Chronology and Bibliography’) – despite being incomplete and containing not a few factual inaccuracies, still retains value and, as Levin has remarked, constituted a unique work of reference in the prerevolutionary period. It contained, in chronological order, a mass of information on arrests, trials, exiles, escapes, peasant and worker uprisings, all manner of events of a social and political character, government directives, and so on. Also included for each year was a selection of both legally and illegally published sources of information – books, periodical and newspaper articles. This ‘essential work of

51 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2.) 15 April 1900, Debagorii-Mokrievich to Kashintsev. My thanks to David Saunders for drawing this quote to my attention.


54 ibid. Burtsev himself admitted to the numerous omissions and errors which he blamed on the fact that it was the work of only a very few London-based émigrés. See: HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Part 2): Director of Dept. of Police to Rachkovskii. no. 2395, 24 December 1899. ‘Zapiska V. Burtseva’ f. 2.
reference for every Russian radical achieved considerable popularity and not only amongst revolutionaries: no less a figure than S.E. Zvolianskii, the new Director of the Department of Police, showed he was a believer in the old maxim ‘know your enemy’ when he asked for ten copies to be sent to him and two months later placed an order for ten more!56

The tsar's visit

As Burtsev was finishing his revolutionary chronicle an historic event took place, when, as part of his tour of Europe, Tsar Nicholas II paid a state visit to Britain. He stayed at Balmoral Castle from 23 September to 4 October 1896, with a large entourage including Count Pahlen (First Secretary of the Russian Embassy) and de Staal, the Russian ambassador. The tsar received numerous visits from royals and functionaries, including First Minister Salisbury, who arrived on 26 September and stayed for a week. Press reports initially stressed the informal nature of this visit, implying that no official discussions were expected to take place. However, on the day of the royal party’s departure The Times reported in its leader: ‘It is no secret that the Emperor took the opportunity afforded him by Lord Salisbury’s presence at Balmoral to have several conversations with the Premier.’57

In his official report Salisbury recorded only the first two of these ‘several conversations’, both of which centred around Turkey and, in particular, the Straits question. Nicholas expressed the opinion that ‘the Straits were the door to the room in which he lived and insisted he must have the key of that door. Russia did not want Constantinople or any of the Turkish territory on either side. She only wanted the door and the power of fortifying it.’58 Salisbury replied that the idea that control of the Straits should be given to Russia while the Sultan was still at Constantinople would

55 Review in Letuchie listki, no. 41 (1898): ‘My uvereny chto Za sto let sdelaetsia nastol'noi knigi vsiakogo russkago radikala.’

56 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIa/1A (Part 2): Director of Department of Police to Rachkovskii, 20 January and 10 March 1898. Sergei Erastovich Zvolianskii (1855–1912) served as Director of Police from August 1897 to May 1902.

57 The Times, 5 October 1896, p. 9.

be exceedingly unacceptable to the other powers and would be strongly resisted. Despite this disagreement, the two apparently remained on amicable terms.\(^{59}\)

It is known that, at this time, Salisbury was hoping to take advantage of the recent cooling in Russo-German relations to reach an understanding with the tsar’s government.\(^{60}\) However, whether he made use of the state visit to raise any other topics of mutual interest is unknown. As yet, no evidence has been found, for example, of any discussion between the tsar and the premier on the topic of terrorism, though that such conversations would have taken place is almost beyond doubt. A mere two weeks prior to the tsar’s arrival the press had reported the discovery of a plot to assassinate him as he passed through Britain.\(^{61}\) The sensational story of the plot and the arrest of two desperate Fenians, Tynan and Bell, was still newsworthy even after the tsar’s departure. With the security of his royal personage being treated as a top priority, it is unthinkable that Salisbury would not have raised the issue as a matter of courtesy at least.

There is no doubt, however, that the same topic would have been eagerly discussed by others present at Balmoral. From newspaper reports and reminiscences it is known that among the large Russian police presence in the tsar’s retinue was none other than his Okhrana representative in Europe, Petr Ivanovich Rachkovskii. Also attending from Scotland Yard were Detective Inspectors Allen, Sweeney and Melville, the last of whom was reported to have made use of the opportunity ‘to develop his contacts with the Russian secret police’.\(^{62}\) It is also recorded that: ‘Before leaving the castle the Emperor of Russia made some presents to Inspector Melville, who had previously received a gift from him.’\(^{63}\) Melville did not leave the tsar’s side

\(^{59}\) Some months later the tsar dropped the idea, possibly being persuaded that the Russian fleet could be locked in the Black Sea if the British Navy succeeded in taking control of the Dardanelles. See: ‘Proekt zakhvata Bosfora v 1896 g.’, Krasnyi arkhiv, vol. 47–48 (1931), pp. 50–70.

\(^{60}\) See for example, Palmer, ‘Salisbury’s Approach’.

\(^{61}\) The story received world-wide coverage. See, for example, The New York Times, 15 September 1896, pp. 1–2: ‘The Czar In Danger; A Scheme to Assassinate the Ruler of Russia. Discovered By The Police’.

\(^{62}\) Sweeney, J. At Scotland Yard: Being The Experiences During Twenty-Seven Years’ Service of J. Sweeney. London: Grant Richards, 1904, pp. 80–84.

\(^{63}\) The Times, 5 October 1896, p. 10: ‘The Emperor of Russia’.
throughout his stay and on the day of his departure for Paris accompanied him together ‘with colleagues English and Foreign’ on the royal train.  

Both countries seem to have regarded the visit as a great success, though as yet no record has been found of Burtsev’s reaction to this historic event. One can be fairly certain, however, of what his attitude would have been. Throughout his life the revolutionary made no secret of his loathing of the autocracy in general and of the tsar in particular. Certain commentators, such as S.N. Motovilova, considered this hatred excessive, while others felt it showed a blinkered attitude, which paid no heed to Russia’s other social and political problems. As a colleague recalled, ‘For a long time, Burtsev’s political programme could be summarized in a very short formula – kill the tsar and everything else will fall into place.’ Whether it was the tsar’s visit which sparked the revolutionary into action is unknown but, within two weeks of Nicholas’s departure, Burtsev had drawn up a new radical political programme in which the desired fate of the autocrat was clearly spelled out.

The Narodovolets affair

In mid-October 1896 Burtsev wrote to Kashintsev and Stepanov telling them of his plans to visit Switzerland and Paris to drum up support for a new revolutionary group, which, he proposed, would collectively edit and publish a new radical journal. He included a draft of his programme, claiming he already had the moral and monetary support of Lazarev and Chaikovskii and was hoping too for the active participation of Teplov, Rappoport, Zhitlovskii and Rusanov. In December of that year, Rachkovskii transmitted further details of Burtsev’s plans to St Petersburg, reporting first on a split which had arisen in the emigre community. Certain individuals believed the RFPF had been relying too heavily on liberals and had formed a separate Populist group, the members of which, according to Rachkovskii, included Zhuk, Cherkezov and Burtsev. The head of the Foreign Agency had detected a mood amongst the remnants of the

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64 ibid.

65 Posse, V.A., Vospominaniia. 1905–1917 gg. Petrograd: Mysl’, 1923, p. 120.

66 GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569. Tom. 4: Burtsev to Kashintsev, 14 October 1896, l. 223. Khaim Osipovich Zhitlovskii (1865–1943) and Nikolai Sergeevich Rusanov (1859–1939) were leading Socialists-Revolutionaries.
Young People’s Will for a rebirth of the party and it was his opinion that Burtsev stood a real chance of success in his latest venture.

Rachkovskii then reported on Burtsev’s intention to release a new monthly Populist publication by the name of *Narodovolets* (Member of the People’s Will) – the first issue of which was due to appear on 1/13 January 1897. The journal would call for the resumption of revolutionary activities, including terrorist acts, within Russia and would roundly censure the Social Democrats for their lack of support, which, it was claimed, was responsible for the current lull in such activities. Burtsev was optimistic that Lavrov and other members of the Old People’s Will would join the group after they had seen the first few issues of the journal. 67

In December Burtsev duly set off for Switzerland, where he met up with someone he described as a ‘well-known Russian publisher’ and secured further funding for his proposed journal. The identity of this individual has not yet been established. There is evidence that, while in Switzerland, Burtsev, for reasons unknown, contacted V.A. Gringmut of the *Moskovskie vedomosti* (Moscow Gazette) but there is not even the remotest chance that this extreme conservative monarchist would have contributed a kopeck to such an undertaking. It is more likely (as the Department of Police suspected) that the publisher in question was the revolutionary V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, who was living in Switzerland at that time. 68 Burtsev also wrote of having received money and a guarantee of future contributions towards the project from a certain ‘B’. 69 In the anonymous reminiscences of an ‘Old Populist’ (possibly Teplov) the claim is made that part of the funding for the journal was, in fact, supplied by none other than Lev Beitner, although confirmation of this is yet to be found in the archives of the Department of Police. 70 However that may be, with funding and support apparently secured, Burtsev returned to London and set about his

67 GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569: Tom. 4. Rachkovskii to Petrov 4/12 December 1896, ll. 212–213.

68 ibid., Burtsev to Gringmut, 21 Dec 1896. l. 218.

69 ibid., ll. 226–227.

70 Panteleeva, ‘Obshestvenno-politicheskaiia i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, pp. 121–122. Further information on the funding of the journal may be contained in Beitner’s own police file at GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 91 (1893), d. 85: ‘O syne nadvomogo sovetnika L’ve Dmitrieve [sic] Beitmere.’ Unfortunately, this file was unavailable for consultation during my visit to Moscow in 2007.
task. Having borrowed type from the RFPF and employed the services of an old Polish typesetter, Klement Wierzbicki, he worked for the next two months on his journal, assisted in the main by a small but loyal band of followers — namely, Zhuk, Teplov, Kashintsev and Alisov.

Not all in the émigré community were as supportive or enthusiastic, however. In the atmosphere of tension and anxiety which still gripped Europe following the anarchist outrages of recent years, it was highly unlikely that any of the leading émigrés would be persuaded openly to declare support for terrorist acts, whether they be confined to Russian soil or not. Having received some sample pages from the first issue of the journal, both Volkhovskii and Chaikovskii implored Burtsev to moderate his revolutionary language, quoting the precedent of Johann Most, the London-based German anarchist, who, during the 'Freiheit Trial' in 1881, had been sentenced to sixteen months hard labour for publishing an article (in German) applauding the assassination of Alexander II and wishing the same fate on the Kaiser and the other crowned heads of Europe. This was the first time that Section 4 of the Offences Against the Persons Act had been successfully used in a prosecution of this kind. A decade later it was wheeled out again to silence Nicoll, editor of the Commonweal. In Chaikovskii's prescient opinion, the same fate awaited Burtsev. The warning, however, fell on deaf ears.

Narodovolets No. 1 appeared in April 1897 and created, perhaps, more of a stir than the editor had expected. The journal certainly pulled no punches. Its radical

71 The exact date of Burtsev's return is unknown. On 24 January 1897 he left Lausanne for Paris and so, probably, arrived back in England later that month. See: GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569: Tom. 4. Burtsev to Kashintsev, 24 January 1897, l. 220.

72 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 123.

73 In its original form, Section 4 of the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, provided as follows: 'All persons who shall conspire, confederate, and agree to murder any person, whether he be a subject of Her Majesty or not, and whether he be within the Queen's dominions or not, and whosoever shall solicit, encourage, persuade, or endeavour to persuade, or shall propose to any person, to murder any other person, whether he be a subject of Her Majesty or not, and whether he be within the Queen's dominions or not, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to be kept in penal servitude for any term not more than ten and not less than three years, or to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.' Offences against the Person Act 1861 (24 and 25 Vict. c 100), s. 4.
programme was clearly laid out in a twelve-page leader, which Burtsev had edited together from two pieces written by Kashintsev, and in a second article under Burtsev’s own name entitled ‘K voprosu chto delat?’ (On the question – What is to be done?). Calling for the revival of the Party of the People’s Will, the editors reminded their readers that, at the height of its influence, the old party had held terror as its central idea – its very soul. The editors then laid out the credo of their proposed new party:

The fight for political freedom must be openly recognized as the first obligation of the party and brought forward as the basis of its theoretical and practical programme.

Our first task is the destruction of the autocracy, the transfer of all state business out of the hands of the present bureaucracy into the hands of legally elected people’s representatives, the creation of a federal state, with regional and local self-government, with guaranteed rights for all freedoms: of speech, of the press, of the individual, of nationality, etc. In the field of economics we shall defend and uphold everything that will help us attain the final socialist ideal.

To attain these ends we shall recognize all means which are realistic and effective in the struggle with the current Russian government – from the most moderate to the most extreme and revolutionary, depending on time and place. We may say, in the words of the late Stepniak: ‘We are revolutionists, not only to the extent of a direct rising of the people, but to the extent of military conspiracies, to the extent of nocturnal invasions of the Palace, to the extent of bombs and dynamite.’

The editors made it clear, however, that the call to enter the fray was directed only at revolutionaries within Russia, whom they exhorted ‘boldly to follow in the footsteps of the Zheliabovs, the Perovskiis, the Khalturins and their friends and to pay heed to the testament which they have bequeathed us. In their testament lies our programme’. Burtsev, in his article, was even more incendiary, summarizing the programme of the journal as ‘in one word – regicide and, if necessary, then a whole

74 Narodovolets, no. 1 (April 1897), p. 11.
75 ibid., p. 12. A.I. Zheliabov (1851–1881), S.L. Perovskaia (1853–1881). Founder members of the Executive Committee of the People’s Will. Sentenced to death for their role in the assassination of Alexander II. S.N. Khalturin (1856–1882). Responsible for the earlier attempt on the tsar’s life in the Winter Palace. He too received a death sentence the following year for the murder of procurator V.S. Strel’nikov.
series of regicides and a programme of systematic terror'. Some twelve years later, in an interview for *The New York Times*, the author recalled how,

Russian revolutionists were very taken up at that time with the working men's movement, strikes, labour unions and street mass meetings. Most of them considered terrorism a worn-out weapon. I, on the contrary, decided to bring it again to the front and in the very first issue of the *Narodovolets*, I mentioned the subject frankly and openly discussed questions that the terrorists were accustomed to bring up only in their most secret meetings. I boldly asserted that regicide was a necessity in Russia.

The outcry was immediate and not only from his enemies but from many former allies and from his 'collective editorial board' itself. Burtsev was particularly upset by what he termed the 'Teplov incident'. In a letter to Kashintsev he told of his co-editor's decision no longer to participate in his kruzhok. Teplov and some of the Parisian émigrés had felt that the first issue had suffered as a result of Burtsev having assumed the role of sole editor. Concerned that too much power lay in his hands they asked that, in future, copies of all articles be sent to all members of the editorial board for comment before publication. In this way, they believed, collective responsibility would be ensured. Burtsev had tried to explain to Teplov that with such a scattered editorial board (members were based in Bulgaria, Switzerland, France and England) such a system was simply unworkable and asked Kashintsev and Stepanov for their backing.

He no longer believed, as he had done five years previously, that his safety in England was assured and was fully aware of the risk he was taking by using such intemperate language in his 'fighting organ' (*boevoi organ*). As he warned Kashintsev, 'here they are already threatening me with sixteen months in an English prison for *Narodovolets*'. But, rather than moderating his line, he responded with the

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78 GARF f. 102, del. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569: Tom. 4. Burtsev to Kashintsev, 22 May 1897, ll. 232, 263–264.
warning that 'the second issue will be no less hot than the first!' It was just such an
intemperate and foolhardy attitude which his contemporaries feared would be adopted
by this firebrand who, when threatened with imprisonment at a later date,
romantically declared: 'From prison I shall cry out. I shall speak about what I said
earlier and what I say now. It is my right to do so and no one and no prison can ever
take that right away from me!' 80

Meanwhile, Volkovskii and Gol'denberg had voiced their displeasure at the
tone of the journal and Burtsev, in turn, had announced his intention to sever relations
with them. 81 Lavrov was next to join the fray. On behalf of the Gruppa starykh
narodovol'tsev (Group of Members of the Old People's Will), he publicly declared
that no émigré he knew, who had played any kind of active role in Narodnaia volia
during its most influential period (1879–1883), had anything to do with Narodovolets,
despite the editor's assertion to that effect. 82 The attack was taken up by Chaikovskii,
who claimed Stepniak had been misquoted. The much revered revolutionary had
actually written of his belief that terror had outlived its time, wrote Chaikovskii, and
could never be brought back to life. Moreover, Chaikovskii added, Stepniak had been
even more outspoken about any attempts to hatch terrorist plots abroad which, he
said, were not welcomed by revolutionaries within Russia and were simply not to be
tolerated. 83

Again, the criticism fell on deaf ears: when the second issue appeared in July
189784 it was, indeed, just as 'hot' as the first. In an article entitled Pravda li, chto

79 ibid. 1. 264.

80 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 35: Letters from Burtsev to Teplov ll. 56–59. Copy dated Stockholm
23 October 1914 of a typewritten letter to 'The Editor' which he asks to be published in the event of his
arrest on his return to Russia.

81 ibid. The poor state of the journal's finances at this point is evinced by Burtsev's request to
Kashintsev for ten or twelve pounds to buy new type in the eventuality that the Fundists asked for
theirs back.

82 'Zaiavlenie', Letuchie listki no. 39, (20 May 1897), p. 6. In fact, Lavrov was mistaken: he was
unaware that the leader had been written by Kashintsev who had indeed been an active member of the
Party.

83 'Terror bez terroristy', Letuchie listki no. 40 (28 June 1897), p. 1. (Signed. 'N.Ch.')

84 No. 2 actually bears an incorrect date of publication: May 1897.
terror delaiut no o terrore ne govoriat? (Is it the case that it is alright to practise terror but not to talk about it?), Burtsev repeated the infamous Stepniak quote while trying to defend his stance and advance his argument: 'We espouse terror now not because we enjoy it but because in our opinion there are currently no other means which would oblige the government to make concessions.' This, of course, was by no means the view he held when he first arrived in emigration. At that time, as he recalled in his autobiography:

In my plans for a free journal published abroad the ideas of political and factory terror were completely subsumed as were any plans for peasant or worker uprisings. The journal would make further opposition on the part of the reaction impossible – under such circumstances we would no longer require popular uprisings, nor political terror, nor regicide!

In issues 1, 2 and 3 of Narodovolets, by contrast, regicide and terror in general were placed very much to the fore.

By the time the second issue appeared, Burtsev's relations with Teplov, at least, had improved and the harassed editor expressed the glimmer of hope that another trip to the continent would be all that it would take to rally support again. Unfortunately, by this time, Gol'denberg and his colleagues at the RFPF had, as expected, demanded the return of their typeface and so Burtsev was obliged to rush to complete work on the third number of his journal. It eventually came out in October 1897 and contained another particularly inflammatory article entitled 'Za terror' (For Terror) in which the author openly condemned the Social Democrats, and Plekhanov in particular, for their repudiation of extreme forms of revolutionary activity. Also included was a letter from P.F. Alisov which stated:

The fearful mistake which the terrorist party made was that after their victory of 1 March they for a moment stopped systematic terrorism, for a moment put their sword

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85 Narodovolets, no. 2 (May 1897), p. 51.
86 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p. 62.
87 GARF f. 102, del.. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569: Tom. 4 (Burtsev to Kashintsev, 12 July 1897), ll. 265–268. He would eventually set off for his second trip to Switzerland after the publication of issue no. 3.
in its sheath. If they had prepared everything beforehand and had stricken down Alexander III on the day of the funeral of Alexander II one of two things would have happened in Russia — either a revolution would have broken out or a liberal constitution would have been declared. 88

From a twenty-first-century European perspective it may be difficult to conceive of such acts of extreme violence being discussed and put forward as a valid means of political action but it should be borne in mind that, at this stage in the development of the Russian revolutionary movement, Burtsev and Alisov were by no means alone in their support for terror. According to Burtsev, for example, 'generally speaking all the Parisian émigrés are thirsting for terror'. 89 It was the end of 1897 too that saw the birth of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries whose programme was, firstly, to carry out mass propaganda and then, having won over the people, to embark on a mass campaign of terror. Here, then, was apparent common cause, but, although Burtsev would associate with the SRs in later years, never would he consider becoming a member, preferring to retain his unaffiliated stance. David Saunders has suggested the reason for Burtsev’s refusal to join the SRs was his disagreement with the order of that party’s priorities and the belief that they were not terroristic enough. 90 The extreme sentiments expressed by the young editor on the pages of his journal would tend to back this view up.

A plot is devised

If the uproar against the journal from his colleagues was unexpected, the same, at least, could not be said of the hostile reaction of his sworn enemies. As Burtsev later said in an interview:

88 Narodovolets, no. 3 (October 1897), p. 117.

89 GARF f. 102, del.. 3, op. 88 (1890), d. 569: Tom. 4 (Burtsev to Kashintsev, 15 April 1897), l. 238.

90 Saunders, 'Vladimir Burtsev', p. 53.
Proof exists that much perturbation was felt on my account in high places: I have a collection of the daily reports of the Minister of the Interior to the Czar at this period, showing the close attention with which the publication of my review was followed.91

The new Minister of the Interior, I.L. Goremykin, had succeeded Durnovo in 1895.92 An extremely conservative lawyer and politician, he saw the revolutionaries in emigration as a prime target and kept the tsar closely informed on all their activities, and those of Burtsev in particular. Shortly after the publication of Narodovolet, S.E. Zvolianskii, the newly-appointed Director of the Department of Police, was instructed to draw up a detailed plan that would ensure the troublesome editor could be brought to justice once and for all.93 Zvolianskii assigned his representative in Paris to the case and the latter set to work immediately by calling for the assistance of his old acquaintance at Scotland Yard.

Even before the publication of the second issue of the journal, Rachkovskii had filed a report to St Petersburg telling of how he had approached Melville to ask whether, in his opinion, the editor could be brought to justice for his expression of such terroristic ideas.94 Melville explained that it would be necessary to name actual persons and cited the cases of Most and Nicoll, where both editors had been successfully prosecuted under the Offences Against the Persons Act. But the Chief Inspector was not content merely to cite precedents and went further, suggesting precisely the course of action that Rachkovskii and the Russian government should take:

You can only initiate a successful legal action against Burtsev by acting according to the following plan: send to the Russian ambassador in London the journal referred to,


92 Ivan Logginovitch Goremykin (1839–1917), served as Minister of the Interior October 1895–1899.

93 Burtsev, Bor’ba, p. 133.

94 It is evident from the contents of a letter from Melville, which Rachkovskii translated in his report of 10 July 1897, that the Inspector had written in response to an earlier communication from the head of the Foreign Agency. See HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 2. Cited in Senese, ‘Le Vil Melville’, p. 151.
marking in it the most extraordinary places, along with a letter in which you insist on the need to prosecute the editor. Ask your ambassador to bring this letter to the attention of our Foreign Secretary, who in his turn will forward it to the Home Secretary. The latter will not fail to send it along to me. As you can see, it is necessary to act via the diplomatic route. 95

He was concerned too to warn Rachkovskii that he would be on leave in the first three weeks in August and that the latter should be careful to time his actions so that the report would be received personally by Melville and not fall into the hands of some other deputy. On a personal note, he stated that, 'As for myself, I will be glad to do you a service and grab these scoundrels' and assured the head of the Foreign Agency that he 'preserved the warmest memories of our times together'. Rachkovskii and his masters would follow the Chief Inspector's counsel to the letter.

The plan was put into action on 6 September 1897 when P.M. Lessar, 96 the Russian chargé d'affaires in London, sent a memorandum to the Foreign Office enclosing two translated extracts from Narodovolets, in the second of which a direct call for the assassination of the tsar was made. Lessar wished to enquire confidentially, he said, on behalf of the Russian government, whether the editor could be prosecuted under English law for this incitement to regicide. 97 Just as Melville had predicted, the case landed on his desk a few days later and, on 13 September, he duly submitted a five-page report on Burtsev's history, occupation and associates, also mentioning that he had already obtained copies of issues Nos. 1 and 2 of the journal in question. An idea of the level of the Chief Inspector's analytical abilities can be gained from the following illogical assertion concerning the émigré's arrival in England in 1891: 'That Bourtzeff had committed some crime previous to leaving Bulgaria was apparent by the fact that his arrival in London gave immense pleasure to the Nihilists here.' 98 Claiming that Burtsev associated with 'notorious anarchists', he also made the curious allegation that the revolutionary's prime reason for frequenting the British Museum was 'to act as an agent for the Nihilist party in picking up any

95 ibid.
96 Lessar, Pavel Mikhailovich (1851–1905).
97 TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222/1 'V. Bourtzeff: Editor of "Narodovoletz"'.
98 ibid., HO 144/272/A59222/1a f. 3. 'Nihilist Literature'.

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new Nihilist arrivals and obtaining lodgings etc. for them’.\footnote{ibid., f. 4.} Having filed this somewhat unbalanced and misleading report Melville considered his first task completed and sat back to await developments.

The further progress of the case has been examined in detail by Alan Kimball, who, however, failed to accord sufficient importance to the role played by Melville.\footnote{Kimball, ‘Harassment’.

\footnote{ibid., f. 4.}} Some eight years after Kimball’s study, Donald Senese reported on his discovery of a document overlooked by Kimball that threw new light on the Chief Inspector’s covert collaboration with the Russian secret police.\footnote{Senese, ‘Le Vil Melville’.

\footnote{ibid., f. 4.}} However, he too missed the full extent of Melville’s involvement in the case and his key role in bringing Burtsev to court.

Events actually unfolded as follows.

Upon receipt of Melville’s report, the Home Office suggested, firstly, that the Law Officers should be asked for an opinion as to whether proceedings against Burtsev could be justified and, if so, what the likelihood of prosecution was. The Director of Public Prosecutions himself, the Honourable Hamilton Cuffe, approached Melville to see whether publication of the journal in Britain could be proved and discovered that the specimens in the latter’s possession had been obtained by agents of the police and from a binder not a publisher. Cuffe felt, therefore, that, on both these counts, it would be unsafe to use them in any prosecution. On 2 October the Law officers, accordingly, replied to the Home Office that there was insufficient proof to justify proceedings since ‘it would be improper to rely upon any publication which was obtained through the police, or by arrangement with the parties’.\footnote{TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222/4: ‘re. Bourtzeff: Opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown’ (2 October 1897).} This was, indeed, a blow to Melville but the Chief Inspector had by no means given up the chase. Following his meeting with Cuffe he immediately decided to try his hand at entrapment.

He ‘caused a letter to be written in Russian’ from a fictional ‘Lubinsky’ of 91, Edwin Street, Gravesend, to Burtsev in London asking the editor to send all three issues of the journal and enclosing payment. When the journals arrived Melville informed Cuffe of his ‘trial run’ – his \textit{ballon d’essai} as he termed it – and reassured

\footnote{TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222/4: ‘re. Bourtzeff: Opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown’ (2 October 1897).}
the Public Prosecutor that 'should you decide on a prosecution I have no doubt we can get ample evidence of authorship and publication'.\textsuperscript{103} Melville's intervention at this stage proved to be crucial: without it, the case against Burtsev could not have progressed. Instead, the ball was set in motion once more. Cuffe requested a further opinion from the Law Officers and, on 29 October, they duly provided one in which, although expressing some reservations, they reversed their previous decision.\textsuperscript{104}

Having been informed of the Law Officers' opinion, Salisbury, who had shown a keen interest in the case from the beginning, summoned Russian ambassador de Staal to inform him that,

\begin{quote}

a prosecution might properly be instituted if the Russian government desired it but he warned his Excellency that publication in England might be difficult to prove and that the prosecution would fail if there were among the jury one man who refused to recognize the prisoner's guilt.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

The British ambassador in St Petersburg Edward Goschen had, in turn, been summoned by Count M.N. Murav'ev, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and had been told, in no uncertain terms, that:

\begin{quote}

There was one very serious matter which led, on the Russian side, to a feeling of dislike and distrust towards England. This was that we harboured and gave hospitality to a group of men whose open and declared aim was the destruction of Law and Order in Russia.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

Goschen, on receiving news of Salisbury's meeting with de Staal, was now relieved to be able to extricate himself from his uncomfortable position and offer Murav'ev proof of Britain's goodwill. The Foreign Minister immediately expressed his gratitude and

\textsuperscript{103} ibid., HO 144/272/A59222/5 Melville to Cuffe (16 October 1897).

\textsuperscript{104} ibid., HO 144/272/A59222/6 'Opinion' (29 October 1897), signed R.B. Finley, Law Officers Department.

\textsuperscript{105} ibid., HO 144/272/A59222/7 Foreign Office to Under Secretary of State, Home Office. (8 December 1897), f. 3.

\textsuperscript{106} Goschen to Salisbury (10 November 1897): Salisbury Papers. A/129/30 (cited in Porter, Origins, pp. 111 and 222, footnote 77.)
informed the ambassador that the Russian government was anxious for the prosecution to be commenced with as little delay as possible:

His Excellency added that even if a conviction were not secured the mere fact of a prosecution having been undertaken would have an excellent effect on public opinion in Russia and would at the same time show the revolutionary refugees themselves that they could not incite to murder and rebellion with impunity and that a sharp eye would be kept on their doings in future.  

On 8 December 1897 the Director of Public Prosecutions was duly instructed to proceed in the matter and on 16 December a warrant for Burtsev’s arrest was placed in the hands of Detective Chief Inspector William Melville.  

He lost no time in carrying out his orders.

**Arrest and trial**

A good deal of curiosity is felt as to the origin of the present charge, and little doubt is felt that it has been lodged at the request of the Russian police.

Burtsev later described the events which unfolded on the afternoon of 16 December 1897:

On coming out of the Reading Room of the British Museum I ran against a stranger in a frock coat and a high hat, in the hall, who said to me:

‘I believe this is Mr. Burtsev, is it not?’

‘It is.’

‘In that case I must beg for an interview: I have a very urgent matter to communicate to you.’

I acceded to his demand, supposing him to be a frequenter of the British Museum in search of enlightenment on some obscure point or other in the history of the Russian

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107 TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222/7 Goschen to Salisbury (2 December 1897), ff. 7–8.


people. But my deception did not last long, as he introduced himself at once as Melville, the Chief Inspector of the London police. Four other equally well-dressed gentlemen in high hats appeared from nobody knows where. We all got into cabs and drove to Bow Street. After a wait of an hour they took me before a magistrate's court. Here I sat down on a prisoner's bench and Melville told the judge that I was the editor of a journal in which I incited others to murder the Tsar and asked to have the case adjourned for a week in order that he might complete his investigations.110

The arrest of the 'nihilist editor' Burtsev was widely reported in both the British press and abroad.111 Volkhovskii and others on the ground in London had been expecting it but Burtsev's comrades on the Continent were appalled. Teplov, from his base at the Russian Free Library in Whitechapel, appears to have served as the main news contact in London. From his home in Florence Alisov wrote to him expressing his horror and wondering if there was any truth in Italian newspaper reports that Burtsev's papers had been seized and that, as a result, colleagues in Russia had been arrested.112

In fact, following the arrest, Melville had immediately taken Burtsev's keys from him and, without his permission or the presence of his landlady, had illegally entered his flat, tied up a large quantity of his personal papers and belongings and carted them off to the police station. As soon as Burtsev's colleagues heard this worrying news, Robert Spence Watson, President of the SFRF, telegraphed the Home Secretary Sir Matthew White Ridley and received the assurance that no foreign government or their agents would be allowed sight of the papers.111 The Society then quickly proceeded to set up a Defence Fund for the prisoner, employing Mr Corrie

110 The New York Times, 5 September, 1909, p. SM3: 'The Man Who Unmasked The Spies Of The Czar'. On arrival at Bow Street Melville had conducted a search of the prisoner and had found some copies of Narodovolets and Za sto let in his briefcase, packed and ready to be posted. One package was addressed to 'M. Baitner 6, Rue Condolle, Gèneve'. It would appear, therefore, that, just as Landezen had vanished from Paris in 1898, so this latest police informer had made himself scarce before the arrest was made. See TNA, PRO DPP 4/32 f. 30.

111 The arrest was reported throughout the British and European press and also in America. See, for example, The New York Times, 23 December 1897, p. 9: 'Nihilist Editors in London. They are Remanded for Inciting the Assassination of the Czar'.

112 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 38: Letter to Teplov (18 January 1898), l. 18.

113 'Delo Burtseva', Letuchie Listki, no. 42 (23 March 1898), pp. 4–7.
Grant and Lord Coleridge to act as his solicitor and barrister respectively. A letter of appeal for contributions sent to the press warned that this was ‘the first time that the English police have publicly undertaken to do the dirty work of the Russian government’. In an editorial comment the anarchist journal Freedom drew to its readers’ attention the fact that the prosecution was to be lead by the Attorney General himself, which pointed to the fact that this was ‘a positively political case’, and warned that ‘though at the moment only Russians are involved, tomorrow it may be another nationality. The danger at present’ it ended ominously ‘is the indifference of the British people.’

Burtsev was first held at Holloway prison and then transferred to Newgate, by which time Wierzbicki, the unfortunate printer of the journal, had also been taken into custody. The Times carried a report of proceedings at the following hearing which took place at Bow Street on 22 December ‘in the Extradition Court’ and at which the Honourable Hamilton Cuffe, the Public Prosecutor himself, occupied a seat on the bench. The case was part-heard and on adjournment,

Mr Grant applied for bail for Bourtzeff, saying he was prepared with substantial bail, adding, amid some laughter, that there was not the least likelihood of his running away, as England was the only country in which he was safe from arrest. Bail was refused for Bourtzeff but granted for Wierzbicki.

Unfortunately, Wierbicki would only enjoy his liberty for a few more days. When the hearing resumed on 31 December both he and Burtsev were refused bail and committed for trial. The prisoners could, however, consider themselves lucky in that

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115 Freedom, February 1898, p. 7.

116 Burtsev, Doloi tsaria, pp. 44–45.

117 The Times, 23 December, 1897, p. 9: ‘Police’.
the trial judge decided, for whatever reason, to transfer the case from the Extradition Court to the Central Criminal Court.¹¹⁸

At the 10 January Sessions at the Old Bailey there was a further intriguing development when Police Constable Thomas Clancy gave evidence to the effect that, two days prior to the arrest, on the instructions of Chief Inspector Melville, he had gone to Burtsev’s flat in plain clothes and asked to purchase two copies each of Nos. 1, 2 and 3 of Narodovolets. Burtsev asked him to write his name and address on a piece of paper which he duly gave as, ‘G. Johnson, care of Lubinsky, 91 Edwin St, Gravesend’. Cross-examined for Burtsev, Clancy admitted that his name was never G. Johnston, that he knew of no one named Lubinsky, and that he did not know if such a place as 91 Edwin St, Gravesend existed. Crucially, he then continued: ‘I did not expect to be asked for my name and address and I invented this name and address on the spur of the moment.’¹¹⁹ As Burtsev’s case file shows, this was a falsehood: the fictitious ‘Lubinsky’ had not been conjured up on the spur of the moment by Clancy but had been invented by his superior some ten weeks earlier. Thus, PC Thomas Clancy of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard became the first witness to commit perjury in the trial of Regina v. Burtsev. He would not be the last police officer so to do.

In the meantime, support for the prisoner grew. Even those who had fallen out with Burtsev over the direction of Narodovolets now rallied to his aid. Shortly after the arrest, Chaikovskii wrote to Lavrov:

I have as much sympathy for him as you do but the question of his defence is vital – it creates a dangerous precedent because firstly; they are treating terrorists like simple murderers; secondly they are seizing our papers on behalf of the Russian government; and thirdly they are creating conditions which will enable the Russian political censorship to operate abroad.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Why the case was transferred is not recorded in Burtsev’s file at the PRO, though the decision is referred to in a letter to the press from the SFRF. See Daily News, 31 December 1897, p. 3: ‘Letters to the Editor’.

¹¹⁹ TNA, PRO DPP 1/32 ‘Central Criminal Court 10 January Sessions 1898. Bourtzeff and Wierzbicki. Brief for the Prosecution.’ f. 34.

¹²⁰ GARF f. 1762, op. 4, d. 168, l. 84. Cited in Panteleeva, ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel’eskai deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, p. 132.
The case, then, was viewed as immensely important by all in the emigration. The Russian Free Press Fund were in no doubt that the prosecution had been commenced at the insistence of the Russian government and that, 'it was clearly a political issue and was of great and general significance as the first attempt to officially prosecute, on English soil, a Russian émigré in his struggle with tsarist despotism'.

It was not only the émigrés who awaited the trial with some trepidation. Once Burtsev's arrest had been effected, Rachkovskii's anxiety with regard to his nemesis resurfaced. On 3 January 1898 he wrote to Melville asking nervously, 'Don't you think we might suffer a defeat as a result of the transfer of the case to the Court of Assizes?' In his next letter, dated 5 February, just a few days before the trial, his caution and apprehension showed itself again. Having thanked the Chief Inspector for the assistance he had given to a Russian official who had arrived for the trial, he wrote:

I myself was tempted to make the trip to London but I preferred to abstain, not wishing to give a pretext for inopportune comments, which my presence in England would be bound to give rise to in various quarters. However, a game postponed is not a game lost and as soon as the case is resolved I shall take great pleasure in coming to thank you personally for the active devotion which you are always ready to demonstrate with such eagerness. I would be most obliged if, as soon as the affair is terminated, you could let me know the result by which ever means you consider most opportune.

It would appear, therefore, that Burtsev's later claim that Rachkovskii had arrived in London with a team of assistants to prepare for the trial was incorrect. Burtsev also claimed that the main intermediary between the Russian embassy and the British

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122 HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 3: Rachkovskii to Melville (3 January, 1897[i.e. 1898]). He also added a postscript concerning a token of his appreciation for the Inspector's assistance: 'Could you also let me know if you received my little crate and my letter from the Ministry of the Interior which I sent to you through our embassy in London?'

123 ibid., Rachkovskii to Melville (5 February, 1898).

124 Burtsev, Bor'ba, p.143.
police in the preparation of his trial was Mme. Ol’ga Novikova, agent of the Russian government and London correspondent of the *Moskovskie vedomosti*, who, in August 1897, had arrived back from a trip to Russia with specific instructions from Zvolianskii to the effect that the Russian agents were to deal not with the British police and Home Office, but with the Foreign Office. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to corroborate these allegations. However, Burtsev was certainly right to claim that for many months before his arrest, Beitner, Rachkovskii’s man on the ground, had worked closely with Melville, and had kept his superior and the Department of Police in St Petersburg well informed of the progress towards publication of Burtsev’s journal.

Following yet another adjournment at the request of the prosecution, the trial of Burtsev and Wierzbicki eventually got under way on Friday 11 February 1898 in front of an all-male jury and before Alderman John Pound and the Honourable Mr Justice Lawrance. It would be apposite here to provide a few background details on the trial judge.

Mr John Compton Lawrance QC had served as Conservative Member of Parliament for South Lincolnshire for ten years until February 1890, when the then Conservative Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, appointed him to the Queen’s Bench Division. Widely viewed as a purely partisan political appointment, many considered Lawrance quite unfit for the job. The *Daily News* considered him ‘unfit for the lowest judicial appointment’ while the *Law Times* protested that it ‘was a bad appointment, for, although a popular man and a thorough Englishman, Mr Lawrance has no reputation as a lawyer’. Lord Justice MacKinnon would later go so far as to describe

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126 Burtsev, *Doloi tsaria*, pp. 44–56: ‘Delo Burtseva po povodu izdaniia “Narodovoltsa”’. As we have seen, this is, of course, the advice proffered earlier by Melville.

127 Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, p. 143.

128 TNA, PRO CRIM 6/19: Court Books, Old Court, July 1894 – May 1898. Entry for 11 February 1898. Sir John Pound, a wealthy London businessman, would later go on to serve as Lord Mayor of London (1904–05). It was not until the passing of the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act that women were allowed to sit on juries.
him as, 'a stupid man, a very ill-equipped lawyer, and a bad judge'. Indeed, Lawrance had barely taken up his new appointment when he showed his ineptitude in a most spectacular fashion, bringing down so much criticism on the judiciary from the London commercial community, as a result of a complete mishandling of a case in the High Court, that it had been felt necessary to establish a new Commercial Court. Lawrance escaped unscathed from this debacle and continued to sit in the High Court, although thereafter he preferred to preside over criminal rather than commercial cases. By the time the Burtsev trial came to court, Salisbury was, of course, back in power and had again appointed Halsbury as his Lord Chancellor. The choice of 'Long John' Lawrance as trial judge, therefore, came as no surprise.

The prisoners were brought before Lawrance and the charge was duly read out. They were indicted for:

unlawfully encouraging on 30 April 1897, certain persons whose names were unknown, to murder his Imperial Majesty Nicholas II, Emperor of the Russias; second count: endeavouring to persuade certain persons to commit that offence: other counts charging similar offences on other days.

Both entered pleas of Not Guilty and the prosecution began its case, concentrating, in particular, on the content and language of *Narodovolets* and reciting long extracts from the most incendiary articles from all three issues – including, of course, the by now infamous Stepniak quote. Translations of the journal had been supplied by the Russian government but were not used as the Foreign Office had prepared its own.

The chief witnesses for the prosecution were Scotland Yard detectives who had come armed with copies of *Narodovolets* which they had successfully bought, both from Burtsev at his flat, as we have seen, and from a news-vendor in London’s

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130 *ibid.*, p. 294. He was, apparently, the tallest man on the bench. The nickname was used to differentiate him from a shorter namesake.


132 Translation taken from *ibid.*, FO 881/6985 Russia: Memo. Russian Publication in M. Lessar's Note verbale of 6 September, 1897. (Mr. V. Bourtzeff's "Narodovoletz." no. 1, April 1897.)
East End. Thus, Melville hoped, authorship and publication of the incriminating passages would be proved beyond doubt. And indeed, by this point in the trial, they were.

The Chief Inspector, having given his evidence proving that Burtsev had admitted to being the editor and author of the journal, was then cross-examined by Lord Coleridge. The prominent barrister proceeded in a most original way and, in a series of questions, succeeded in conveying to the jury the whole story of Burtsev’s unfortunate life: his imprisonment, exile, pursuit through Europe and so on. In the process he also obliged Melville to follow PC Clancy’s example and perjure himself on at least two occasions: firstly, in response to the question of whether he knew that, since his escape from Siberia, Burtsev had been pursued by agents of the Russian government he replied, ‘I do not know that’; and secondly, when, asked, ‘Have you heard that he has been the object of Russian spies in this country? Informers?’ the Chief Inspector again answered in the negative.133

Lord Coleridge went on to make a powerful speech in Burtsev’s defence, making much of the fact that the most incendiary language was someone else’s – and had been taken from a book by Stepniak that was freely ‘available in Mudie’s and every other large library in the kingdom. If this is such a dangerous statement why has nothing hitherto been said about this book and its author?’134 Burtsev, he argued, as any other free man in a civilized country, had the right to express an opinion. He also ridiculed the notion that the defendant was some kind of crazed dynamitard:

Where are the bombs or the dynamite that are talked about so freely? He is nothing but a literary man, and the place of his apprehension bespeaks the literary man, because he is found in the greatest library in the world – the library of the British Museum. Here is this conspirator against the life of his Majesty the Tsar, doing what? He is in the British Museum engaged in writing a history of his country – an innocent history – a history that involves great labour and application: that is no doubt a labour of love.135

133 ibid., DPP 4/32 ff. 175, 176.
134 ibid., ff. 191–192
135 ibid., f. 192.
In his summing up, Mr Justice Lawrance did little more than repeat much of the prosecution’s case. Referring to Lord Coleridge’s support of Burstein’s right as an individual to an expression of personal opinion, the judge ‘quite agreed that expression was free in this country, though it might be dangerous sometimes to express it’. At 3.46 p.m. the jury retired to consider this last little nugget and all the other arguments that had been put before them in the course of the day. They returned at 4.00 p.m., after precisely fourteen minutes of debate, to pronounce both defendants guilty, though recommending Wierzbicki to mercy. In passing sentence on Burstein, Mr Justice Lawrance commented that he had been found guilty ‘on what I should think is the very clearest evidence’ and that he had ‘no doubt what the natural tendency of the language used in the publication really was’. His sentence was, that he should be imprisoned and left to hard labour for eighteen calendar months. Having taken into account the jury’s recommendation, he sentenced Wierzbicki to two months.

Thus it was that Burstein became the first Russian revolutionary to be imprisoned in Britain. Clearly, much had changed in the country in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Whereas the fugitive Burstein had been feted as a persecuted hero upon his arrival in London in 1891, there was no major public outcry at his trial a mere seven years later. On the contrary, The Times, making no mention of the lawfulness or otherwise of the proceedings, thundered out its own verdict on the outcome:

The justification of the jury in finding him guilty and of the judge in sentencing him to eighteen months imprisonment is that no one is to be excused for publishing as to a foreign sovereign that which would be highly criminal in regard to a private person. The prisoner pleads for one law for all in his own country: this equality of treatment is meted out to him here.

136 The Times, 12 February 1898, p. 14: ‘Central Criminal Court’.
137 TNA, PRO DPP 4/32 f. 218.
139 The Times, 14 February 1898, p. 7.
That is not to say, however, that Burtsev found himself completely without support. *Freedom* devoted its editorial to the case, commenting acidly that the trial and sentence was ‘to our mind one of the worst judicial scandals that has happened in many a year’.140 The Fundists were likewise convinced that it had been a purely political trial, directed by a biased and unreliable judge.141 It was Volkhovskii’s judgment that: ‘The whole affair from beginning to end was not one of justice, nor was it even one of a necessity to enforce law, but merely a matter of political convenience of the moment. It was thought imperatively necessary to pay a visible compliment to one of ‘our neighbours’ at the lowest possible cost.’142 Alan Kimball, on the other hand, concluded that: ‘If ‘considerations of policy’ played any determining role in the Burtsev case, they did so when the Conservative government of Salisbury – especially the Foreign Office – allowed the matter to come to trial.'143

Whereas all of the above opinions may have some truth in them, it is now clear that the case came to trial primarily due to the efforts of Chief Inspector Melville of Scotland Yard. But for his subversion of justice, Burtsev would have remained a free man. Such law-breaking by law-enforcers was, however, by no means uncommon, nor, according to some, was it necessarily ‘wrong’ or ‘immoral’ when it was a question of dealing with the new international terrorist threat of the late nineteenth century. As the head of the CID, Robert Anderson, himself acknowledged later that year: ‘I would say emphatically that in recent years the police have succeeded only by straining the law, or in plain English, by doing utterly unlawful things, at intervals, to check this conspiracy.’144

In Lord Salisbury’s opinion, the case had concluded successfully and he himself rushed to telegraph the news to his ambassador in St Petersburg.145 A few days later, he received a telegram in return from Goschen: ‘I am requested to express


142 Quoted in *The Anglo-Russian*, vol. 1, no. 10 (April 1898), p. 112: ‘Bourtzeff’s Case Again’.

143 Kimball, ‘Harassment’, p. 65.

144 TNA, PRO HO 45/10254/X36450: Anderson memorandum of 13 December 1898.

to H.M. government the Emperor of Russia’s satisfaction at the result of the Bourtzeff trial. Melville, too, received his thanks in a letter from Rachkovskii dated (perhaps aptly, given their increasingly warm relations) 14 February 1898. It is worth quoting here in full:

Dear Mister Melville
I rush to express all my best wishes and my great satisfaction at the brilliant outcome of the affair. I am pleased in particular to note the most praiseworthy attitude of the jury who were able to make their judgment inspired solely by the principles of equity and without any political considerations. I am fully persuaded that this British method of considering questions by jury will be appreciated for its great and proper value amongst the most elevated circles in Russia and will help a great deal to silence those who regard with malevolence any manifestation of good relations between our two countries.

I have no need to add that I am very happy that the success of this business has spared you any personal unpleasantness: I would have been distraught to see your goodwill so poorly rewarded.

I am looking forward to the pleasure of shaking you by the hand at the beginning of March and would like again to pass on to you, M. Melville, my warmest thanks.

Of interest here is the inference that Melville may have come in for some official criticism for the role he had played in the case. It is possible, indeed, that he had again acted without the knowledge or blessing of his superiors in his desire to be of service to the Russian tsar.

Some two years later, following his release from prison, Burtsev gave notice of his intention to resume publication of *Narodovolets* and warned his supporters of the obstacles which would be put in their path by the *nikolaevskie merzavtsy* (Nicholas’s scoundrels) as he colourfully described the Russian police and their allies:

Of course, if they feel they have the slightest chance of success they will again employ all their efforts to prevent its publication and, with Mme. Novikova at their

\[146\] ibid., HO 144/272/A59222/8: By cipher Sir N. O’Conor, 15 February 1898.

\[147\] HIA Okhrana archive 35/Vc/folder 3: Rachkovskii to Melville, 14 February 1898.
head, will once more ask permission to prostrate themselves at the feet of someone like, let’s say, Melville, begging for his defence, and asking him (in return for a very nice reward of course) to reprise his role of ‘Komisarov’.\footnote{Dva slova ob izdanii “Narodovoltsa”, Byloe, no. 1 (1900), pp. 62–63. No doubt the reference here is to M.S. Komissarov, the gendarme officer subordinate to Rachkovskii who in 1905–06 was responsible for producing anti-Jewish pamphlets on a secret printing press located within the St Petersburg Police Department.}

Rachkovskii, having intercepted some draft pages from the new publication, claimed that the author, this time, had ‘excelled himself as a violent terrorist fanatic’ and had again provided enough material to bring him to book ‘if, of course, the British government is again willing to offer us a friendly service’.\footnote{Quoted in Men’shchikov, Russkii politicheskii sysk, p. 61.} On this occasion, however, the Foreign Agency would have no need to ask for the assistance of their co-conspirator at Scotland Yard. Instead, they would turn to the Swiss government, which would show itself to be just as willing to offer up ‘a friendly service’ to the Russian tsar. The fate of Burtsev’s journals and the continuing, relentless pursuit of this beleaguered refugee, will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

148 'Dva slova ob izdanii “Narodovoltsa”', Byloe, no. 1 (1900), pp. 62–63. No doubt the reference here is to M.S. Komissarov, the gendarme officer subordinate to Rachkovskii who in 1905–06 was responsible for producing anti-Jewish pamphlets on a secret printing press located within the St Petersburg Police Department.

149 Quoted in Men’shchikov, Russkii politicheskii sysk, p. 61.
Chapter Five  1898–1905: A man with few enemies

Having at last secured Burtsev’s prosecution, the tsarist police, far from resting on their laurels, increased their surveillance of him upon his release from prison. At this time, according to the former Department of Police official Leonid Men’šchikov, Burtsev was:

‘under crossfire’ from the agency: on the one hand there was Beitner in whom he had complete trust – and on the other, Pankrat’ev, his long-time friend. Moreover, one cannot say with any certainty that there was not a third informer. It was not for nothing that Rachkovskii boastfully reported that, concerning the populists in Paris and London, measures had been taken to ‘ensure against any surprises’ and that he knew all of the activities of the populists ‘in minutest detail’.¹

Of particular interest here is the reference to the involvement of Petr Emanuilovich Pankrat’ev, for this friend of Burtsev was an agent of the St Petersburg okhrana – a fact of which Rachkovskii himself was quite unaware.² This ‘belt and braces’ approach to Burtsev’s surveillance serves as another indication of the level of respect accorded to the revolutionary by the Director of Police, Zvolianskii.³

Moreover, thanks to the new-found infamy that his arrest and trial had brought him, Burtsev had now become the focus of attention of other national police agencies who, for the next six years, would relentlessly hound him throughout Europe. For the historian, at least, this increased interest in, and recording of, his movements is of great value, for Burtsev’s own account of this period of his life is, at best, sketchy.⁴

¹ Men’šchikov, Russkii politicheskii sysk, p. 203.
² Ibid., p. 207. Burtsev had entrusted Pankrat’ev with the smuggling of his Narodovolets into Russia. Later, in 1901, he would be unmasked as a police informer.
³ The police had also deemed it necessary to place Burtsev’s mother under constant secret surveillance in her remote Siberian village with post in and out being subject to perliustratsiia. This surveillance continued up to her death in 1902. See: Akhmerova, Burtsev, pp. 16, 58 (note 26).
⁴ He devotes no more than twenty pages of his autobiography to these years (Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 144–163) and makes only a brief reference to them in his interview with The New York Times, 5 September, 1909, p. SM3: ‘The Man Who Unmasked The Spies Of The Czar’.
This chapter will focus on the blanket international police surveillance placed on the revolutionary during these final years of his first, period of emigration. But first, the prison conditions pertaining in England at the time will be described, as will the new-found fame which awaited him on his release and the new friendships which he succeeded in forming as a result. Burtsev's trial and sentence had been widely reported as a travesty of justice and consequently, as he wrote to Kashintsev, he suddenly found himself with far fewer political enemies both in Russia and abroad. Many who had previously disagreed with his open and unashamed espousal of violent political action nevertheless expressed their admiration and respect for the way he had suffered for the common cause. Burtsev, in turn, while still vehemently proclaiming his belief in the need for terror, now showed even more determination to unite the opposition and, to this end, made use of his new-found popularity to develop some new, unexpected (and hitherto unexamined) relationships.

The chapter will also examine Burtsev's return to historico-political journalism and to a series of renewed and even more vicious attacks on the autocracy, all set against a background of increasing international tension and escalating political violence. Finally, the chapter will chart the various mood-swings of the British public with regard to the political refugees in their midst and to 'aliens' in general.

Prisoner no. A442

Shake him firmly by the hand and thank him for that fact that he is suffering now for our common revolutionary cause.

From the courthouse Burtsev was conveyed first to Pentonville Prison and then, a few months later, transferred to Wormwood Scrubs. His autobiography contains a powerful reminiscence of his time in detention and the appalling conditions he endured. It was the opinion of this man, already familiar with the rigours of prison

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5 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2.) Report no. 3120. 22 December 1900. Dept. of Police to Rachkovskii. ‘Copy of a letter from the émigré Vladimir Burtsev to Ivan Kashintsev in Sofia’ (Undated), ff. 5–6.
6 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 40, l. 4. ‘Lev’ in Geneva (i.e. Beitner) to Teplov, 22 February 1898.
7 Burtsev, Bor'ba, pp. 134–143.
life in Russia, that the British regime was by far the harsher of the two. He told, for example, of his transfer from Pentonville and how he and his fellow prisoners were handcuffed and chained together in groups of ten. This was, he said, the first time he had ever been shackled and 'it happened in Free England! Neither at St Petersburg nor in Siberia had such an indignity been put upon me.'

And there were worse, more enduring humiliations to be faced. Leaving aside the solitary confinement, the hard-labour, the indignities of the slopping-out bucket, the bed of bare boards and the constant threat of further punishment, Burtsev recalled that it was the small black arrows which covered every piece of the convict's clothing and his meagre possessions which caused him the greatest distress and which haunted him long after he left prison. To him, they were 'a very nightmare symbol of the humiliations without number that men are capable of inflicting upon their kind'.

Further information regarding his incarceration is contained in a Home Office response to a letter from Sir Charles Dilke concerning Burtsev's well-being. It was reported that the prisoner had been furnished with a number of books and had been, permitted to write a letter on 14 February and again on 21 May and was entitled early in this month to receive a further letter, also that he received a visit on 10 May and will again be entitled to one early in August. The prisoner has never been put to the treadmill but has been employed in repairing socks and sorting wool.

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8 And also far more severe than the French regime, as described by Evgenii Stepanov, one of those incarcerated in the Maison de la Santé in Paris following the Bomb Plot of 1890. There, prisoners could smoke, take walks together several times a day and were even allowed spirit stoves in their cells on which they could cook and make tea! See Stepanov, E.D., 'Iz zagranichnykh vospominanii starogo narodovol'tsa', Katorga i ssylka, no. 24 (1926) pp. 123–144.


10 ibid.

11 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 84: Under Secretary of State, K.E. Digby to C.W. Dilke, 16 June 1898, ll. 8–9.
Dilke duly informed Fanny Stepniak, who thanked him for the interest he had shown in Burtsev's case and hoped only that his health would not be impaired by the prison regime. As will be shown, this, unfortunately, would not prove to be the case.

Burtsev later recalled the visit of 10 May when he had received his good friend the émigré Semen Kagan and his wife, accompanied by none other than Lev Beitner, who appeared particularly shocked and upset to see him. The reasons for his distress would become clear only at a later date but:

that day, when he visited me in prison, Beitner would have been perfectly well aware that he was, to a large extent, the cause of my imprisonment and that he would have to compile a report on the visit for his superiors that very day. The circumstances of such a meeting could not fail to shock even such a traitor.

The prisoner was allowed one twenty-minute visit every ten weeks or so and, during his term, received further visits from Volkhovskii, Stepanov and Teplov, who, by this time, had established his Russkaia besplatnaia biblioteka (Russian Free Library) in the heart of London's East End and who, with some difficulty, managed to persuade the authorities to accept some Russian books for the prisoner. Teplov also did his best to keep everyone informed regarding his friend's health and the conditions of his confinement and to rally support for his release. Prior to the trial, not all in the Russian émigré community had been sympathetic to Burtsev's plight. Indeed, there were those who behaved in an openly antagonistic manner towards him. One such was Jaakoff Moiseevich Prelooker, editor of the successful London émigré monthly, The Anglo-Russian.

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12 ibid., Fanny Stepniak to C.W. Dilke, 29 June 1898, l. 24.
13 Burtsev, Bor'ba, pp. 142–143.
15 The Teplov archive in GARF contains some correspondence concerning Burtsev's arrest. See, GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 38: Letters from various to Teplov re. Burtsev's sentence etc. 1896–1899. (70 listy), also ed. khr. 40 (18 listy) and ed. khr. 84 (300 listy).
An unlikely convert

Like Burtsev, Prelooker had arrived in emigration in London in 1891 and his journal, like Narodovolets, had first appeared in 1897. He too felt it was his mission to attempt to effect a rapprochement between two opposing ‘factions’ within the émigré community, but there the similarities ended. A Russian-Jewish convert to Protestantism, Prelooker, by his own admission, had been:

a humble schoolmaster, never inciting anyone to revolutionary actions against the government, even opposing, when opportunity presented itself, terrorist enterprises as useless, and harmful to the cause itself, preaching only a religious reformation to my people, disseminating ideas of reconciliation between creed and creed, class and class, man and man.16

He stood, in other words, at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Burtsev and yet, the Russian authorities had made life ‘too hot’ even for him and he had chosen, therefore, to enter into self-imposed exile in London. There, through his journalism and a series of public lectures, he continued to preach his gospel and to ‘point out the dangers of all ill-calculated attempts at violent revolution’.17 It is not surprising, therefore, that in January 1898, as Burtsev awaited trial, far from coming out in support of him, Prelooker published a vicious attack:

We have to oppose strongly the policy by which the party of Russians, represented by Mr Bourtzeff, believes to be able to attain the ends it has in view... Leaving ethics and speculative theories aside, we ask Mr Bourtzeff’s sympathisers and supporters, what practical ends do they hope to attain by preaching a reign of terror in Russia and inciting to regicide? In our conviction the propaganda of terror does certainly only harm and no good whatever and is defeating its own ends.18

That said, the following month, Prelooker, at least, had the decency to publish an SFRF circular announcing the establishment of the Burtsev Defence Fund and to

18 ibid., pp. 79–80: ‘Foolish Schemes of Russian Revolutionists’.
agree, grudgingly, that the accused deserved a fair trial. Then, suddenly, in the March issue of his journal, he changed tack completely. In a lengthy article, highly critical of the sentence passed on the accused, he thundered:

Bourtzeff is no enemy of society but wants to see society controlled by equal laws of justice and humanity. He is himself guided by no murderous instincts, but on the contrary by the highest motives of humanity, by that spirit of self-abnegation which was bequeathed to the world on Golgotha. He is exposing himself to greatest personal danger that others may be raised from the terrible slavery and suffering.

Prelooker felt Burtsev's defence should have raised the case of Zasulich and wondered whether a British jury would now be asked to prosecute her on behalf of the tsar. He continued:

As the British government cannot or will not plead on behalf of the oppressed people of Russia, it ought not to interfere on behalf of the oppressors. We cannot help feeling that, under a Liberal government in England, Russian autocracy would not have ventured the experiment.

This further conversion of the proselyte Prelooker to Burtsev's cause serves as proof of the strength of support that the hapless refugee's imprisonment had engendered amongst the émigré community. What, Prelooker wondered, would be the practical consequences of Burtsev's eighteen months hard labour?

If Siberia has not shaken his faith in the righteousness of his cause, an English prison will not do it, and on leaving it he will be only a still more determined and more skilful conspirator. Having been known to a few only before, he will now be admired by millions with hearts beating for oppressed and downtrodden humanity. The prosecution and punishment have not weakened, but decidedly strengthened, the cause both in Russia and even in England.

19 ibid., vol. 1, no. 8 February 1898, p. 86: 'For Justice and Liberty'.
21 ibid.
Prelooker was correct in every respect, including his prediction of an increase in support from the British public. He returned to the case in the April issue but, this time, confined himself to publishing extracts from the March number of *Free Russia*, including the opinion of a Mr Henry Simon of Manchester who believed that, ‘it would be a sad day for liberty generally should England descend to the level of France and become a servant of the secret police of the tsar’. And Mr Simon was by no means the only Englishman to come out in support of Burtsev and to berate the British Conservative government for its act of betrayal.

A month after sentence had been passed, permission was granted for a demonstration to be held in Trafalgar Square at which the Social Democrat Harry Quelch and the anarchist David Nicoll were among those who made speeches calling for a complete amnesty for Burtsev, the Walsall anarchists and all ‘political prisoners’. A week later, at Clerkenwell Green, a follow-up meeting was held at which an extract from Stepniak’s “Nihilism as it is” was read. The speaker reminded the audience that, whereas Burtsev had been sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for simply quoting from this work, neither the author nor publisher of the book had ever been prosecuted. ‘If it is a crime for a poor man to quote from a certain book’ he continued, ‘it is difficult to understand why the authors and publishers were not proceeded against.’ While all present were certainly in agreement with this sentiment, the newspaper reporter felt obliged to point out that public interest in the case was, however, ‘not of an overwhelming character’, as evidenced by the fact that a collection on the day could raise no more than a paltry fifteen shillings and tenpence ha’penny.

Few in number his supporters may have been, but they were, nonetheless, tenacious. As Burtsev recalled, his friends redoubled their efforts to get him out of prison and,

at their initiative, numerous interpellations were addressed to Lord Salisbury, the head of the Conservative government. Sir Charles Dilke and Mr John Morley

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22 *ibid.*, vol. 1. no. 10 April 1898, p. 112: ‘Bourtzeff’s Case Again’.


24 *ibid.*, also 3, 10 April 1898, p. 1: ‘Socialism’.
interceded personally with the ministers on my behalf both individually and in parliament but to no avail.  

Undaunted, they persevered. A year into his sentence a number of his supporters, including Robert Spence Watson, other members of the SFRF and such notables as C.P. Scott of The Manchester Guardian petitioned Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, pleading once more for the remainder of the prisoner’s sentence to be remitted. But again the Secretary of State rejected the plea out of hand. Tsar Nicholas, it would appear, had stipulated that Burtsev should serve his sentence to the last day.

Return to the Museum

On 18 June 1899, even before the convict’s release, Rachkovskii had learned that Burtsev’s health had indeed deteriorated, as Fanny Stepniak had feared it would. The head of the Foreign Agency had been informed that, on his discharge, Burtsev intended to visit Kashintsev in Sofia to recuperate. This plan, however, did not materialize. As Burtsev later recalled:

I was set free at last in July 1899. A number of my friends were waiting for me on my release from prison and, an hour later we were all seated together in the apartment of one of them. In the course of our conversation I made a very unpleasant discovery: I noticed that I had to ask to have things repeated several times. To my great distress I found that my hearing was decidedly affected and that I did not always understand what was said to me. By evening I was in a state of great nervous irritation and excitement, which increased still further the next day.

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27 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2.): Report no. 34, Director of the Department of Police to Rachkovskii, 18 June 1899.

The invalid was taken off to an address on the outskirts of London but it soon became
clear that a much better climate would be required for his recuperation. 29

I could not endure the multitude of new impressions that my brain was called upon to
receive and was obliged to leave London for some quiet place where I could be alone
and out of the sound of the human voice which had grown to be a veritable torture to
me. Little by little the habit of living came back to me at the seashore and the
sensations of daily existence became slowly and gradually less painful. 30

The seashore in question was that at Ramsgate, in north Kent, where Burtsev spent a
few weeks before returning to London in October 1899. 31 He soon discovered,
however, that his recovery was far from complete:

I began to realise how seriously prison life had told upon me and, while I could truly
say that I had borne the hard labour comparatively well, the bitter knowledge was
forced upon me that my constitution was completely undermined by the lack of food,
air and exercise. I, who had never suffered from the slightest illness before, was now
so weak that I felt the least cold. 32

Nevertheless, he was glad to be back in London and was looking forward to
recommencing his studies at the British Museum. 33 He was unaware, however, of the
decision that had been taken by the Museum Trustees, shortly after his trial, to ban
him from the Reading Room 'and not to re-admit him should he at any future time

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29 On release from Wormwood Scrubs he lived at 7 Colville Road, Leytonstone, Essex. See TNA, PRO
HO/144/272/A59222B33: Burtsev to Home Office, 17 August 1899.

Czar'.

31 IISH Nettlau Collection, 275: Burtsev to Nettlau, 5 October 1899.

Czar'.

33 IISH Nettlau Collection, 275: Burtsev to Nettlau, 21 Aug 1899.
apply for renewal of his ticket. Learning of his exclusion the ex-convict wrote despondently to Nettlau:

My seat at the Library remains unoccupied because I have been denied entrance to the Museum. Just like the Russian government the British tell me ‘If you had edited *The Social Democrat* instead of *Narodovolets* you would still be at the British Museum and would never have ended up in prison!’ I, however, would rather edit *Narodovolets* (not *The Social Democrat*) so they can do as they please!

Nettlau was furious at the Museum’s insensitivity. Having come into possession of Bakunin’s personal archive, it had been his intention to present it (and his own extensive collection) to the Museum Library. Now, in protest at the exclusion, Nettlau changed his mind. Whether he informed the Museum authorities of his decision and the reasons behind it are not documented, but the matter did not end there, for Burtsev had other means of bringing pressure to bear. At the next meeting of the Trustees his case was again raised, the minutes recording that:

In the hope that the Right Hon. John Morley would be present at the next meeting of the Standing Committee, the Trustees postponed consideration of an application by Mr. Vladimir Bourtzeff for renewed admission supported by a letter in his favour from the Right Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke.

34 BMA, Minutes of the Trustees Meetings CE1, March 1898.

35 IISH Nettlau Collection, 275: Burtsev to Nettlau, 23 October 1899. Burtsev went on to describe how he had been obliged to make alternative study arrangements at the Free Public Library on Holborn near the British Museum, and at the Guildhall Library in Cheapside.

36 *ibid.*, Nettlau Collection, 1005: Correspondence with Elisée Reclus, 28 November, 1 December 1899. It should be added that Nettlau made his decision, also, in protest at the Boer War - ‘that infamous war in Africa’ as he described it. See: Kloosterman, Jap, ‘Les papiers de Michel Bakounine à Amsterdam’, p. 12. Available at: http://www.iisg.nl/archives/docs/bakarch.pdf. Both the Bakunin and Nettlau archives eventually found a home at the IISH in 1935.

37 BMA, Minutes of the Trustees Meetings CE1, 14 October 1899.
Yet again, Dilke and Morley had come to the revolutionary’s service but the Trustees repeatedly postponed making a decision until, finally, at their meeting of 14 January 1900, they ruled as follows:

Mr. Morley having submitted a letter of 27 December addressed to Sir Charles Dilke by Mr. Vladimir Bourtzeff, the Trustees directed that Mr. Bourtzeff be readmitted to the Reading Room.38

From Morley’s letters to Dilke it is clear that these two worthy MPs had conspired to overturn the Board’s decision and effect Burtsev’s readmission. In one of his letters, for example, Morley explained to Dilke, in some detail, how Burtsev should word his application for readmission, to enable him (Morley) to ‘carry’ it at the next Trustees’ meeting.39 And so, with the Museum having been obliged to perform this public volte-face, the revolutionary quickly resumed his seat under the Dome.

Since his release from prison, Burtsev had kept up a steady correspondence with Max Nettlau. In the main, the exchange concerned Bakunin but it also contained much of interest on other aspects of this little-known period of Burtsev’s life. We learn, for example, of a week he spent in Paris in November 1899.40 We discover too that he acted as translator and intermediary between Nettlau and the Russian Scholar S.A. Vengerov in St Petersburg concerning the latter’s biography of, and Bakunin’s influence on, V.G. Belinskii.41 Further, we learn that, soon after his readmission to the Museum, he re-embarked on his literary endeavours, sending off articles to Vengerov– on Belinskii, Herzen and Saltykov-Shchedrin. The last piece was returned

38 ibid., 14 January 1900.
39 British Library (BL) Add. Ms. 43895, (Dilke Papers, vol. 22), ff. 212–229. Unfortunately, Dilke’s letters to Morley on the subject have not yet been traced.
40 IISH Nettlau Collection, 275: Burtsev to Nettlau, 23 October, and 13, 23 November 1899. Some further details on his Paris trip can be gleaned from the A.L. Teplov archive at GARF which contains a postcard from Burtsev dated November 1899 giving his address as ‘Chez VI. Baranoff, Schenzis, 42 rue Echiquier, Paris. See: GARF f. 1721. op. 1. ed. khr. 35. I. 5. This, according to a Foreign Agency report, was the home of Sofia Sheintsis (Scheinziss), one of the thirteen Russian ‘bombers’ expelled from Switzerland in 1889 as a result of the Peterstobel affair. See AN F/7/12521/1: Suisse (1882–1909) Order of Expulsion, 7 May 1889. Also Men’shchikov, Russkii politicheskii sysk, p. 62.
41 IISH Nettlau Collection, 275: Burtsev to Nettlau, 23 November 1899, f. 2.
immediately with the comment that it was ‘quite unthinkable that it would be published in our press’. Vengerov did, however, submit at least one of the other articles to the *Historical Messenger*, though whether it was published is unrecorded.\(^42\)

Fortunately, Burtsev had more success with his writings for the émigré press. During this period, he had acquired another unlikely friend in the person of V.G. Chertkov, Tolstoy’s literary agent and disciple in Britain and head of the *Svobodnoe slovo* (Free Word) publishing house, whom Burtsev occasionally visited (first at his house in Purleigh, Essex, and later at Tuckton House, the Tolstoyan retreat at Christchurch near Bournemouth). Chertkov had written to Burtsev on 24 May 1900 asking permission to write his biography but by the end of the year nothing had come of the proposal. Indeed, relations between the two had taken a decided turn for the worse.\(^43\) The cause was the publication of the reminiscences of Liudmila Aleksandrovna Vol’kenshtein, a follower of the Party of the People’s Will who had received a lengthy prison sentence in the Shlissel’burg Fortress for her incidental involvement in the 1879 assassination of the Governor of Khar’kov, Prince D.N. Kropotkin.\(^44\)

Chertkov had approached Burtsev telling him of his intention to publish the memoir and asking him to provide footnotes. This he willingly did and, in addition, supplied an appendix giving a chronological and biographical listing of all those ever incarcerated in the fortress. Chertkov, in his preface to the volume, praised Burtsev’s contribution and his exhaustive study of the revolutionary movement but also felt it necessary to append a note stating his unequivocal opposition to revolutionary terrorism, believing it to be both ‘morally illegal’ and harmful to the national interests it was supposed to support. Burtsev became aware of this ‘parting shot’ from the editor only after printing of the book had commenced. He was astonished and felt sure the author of the book would share his amazement. In Burtsev’s view, it was not the editor’s opinions that were at issue here: his reactionary views on the revolutionary movement (like those of all Tolstoyans) were common knowledge. The issue was,

\(^{42}\) *ibid.* Burtsev to Nettlau, 21 May 1900, enclosing letter from S.A. Vengerov to ‘Baranov’, 14 April 1900, f. 1.

\(^{43}\) RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 19: Chertkov to Burtsev, 24 May 1900, ll. 1–5.

rather, the lack of political tact shown by Chertkov in polemicking with those unfortunate revolutionaries,

thereby weakening the impact of the exposure of these heinous crimes of the Russian government. The jailers and gendarmes who have suffocated and continue to suffocate our comrades will note with satisfaction and gratitude how the story of their crimes is accompanied by such comments.45

With this broadside the Burtsev of old would, doubtless, have terminated relations forthwith, but it was a different, quieter and more fragile man who had emerged from prison a year earlier. Chertkov wrote to him a few months later concerning their disagreement and, as a result, the two decided to let bygones be bygones. The ailing revolutionary soon renewed his visits to his new moderate associates at Christchurch.46

On one such visit he struck up another unlikely friendship, this time with the Social Democrat (and later Bolshevik) S.V. Andropov.47 S.N. Motovilova, a companion of the latter, left a lengthy reminiscence in which she described how the two had nothing in common other than their commitment to the overthrow of tsarism but, also, that Andropov was completely in awe of Burtsev.48 She, on the other hand, did not hold Burtsev in such high regard, blaming him for, among other things, Andropov’s subsequent arrest and imprisonment. According to her, Burtsev had persuaded Andropov to take some of his publications with him when he returned to Russia, where he was arrested almost immediately and sentenced to two years in prison followed by twenty years exile. Motovilova suspected it was Burtsev’s

45 Byloe, no. 1, London: 1900. p. 61. Burtsev mentioned in his note that he would return to review Vol’kenshtein’s reminiscence properly in a forthcoming issue of his journal when he would also comment on the editor’s note. This he did not, in fact, do.

46 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 19: Chertkov to Burtsev, 29 October 1900, ll. 6–9.

47 Andropov, Sergei Vasil’evich (1873–1955) Social-Democrat, editor of Rabochaia znamia and Iskra agent. According to a Foreign Agency report, Burtsev lived with Andropov and another of his Social Democrat colleagues, V.P. Novoselov, at Christchurch from 21 April to 10 May 1901. See Men’shchikov, Russkii politicheskii sysk, p. 148.

48 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 1.
terroristic' books that were to blame for the harshness of the sentence, though other sources cast doubt on this interpretation. 49

While describing herself as an anarchist, Motovilova stated that she never sympathized with terror: the fact that in Narodovolets Burtsev extolled the murder of Alexander II and termed it an ‘execution’ disgusted her. 50 The ‘post-prison’ Burtsev may well have entered into the company of those of a decidedly more moderate persuasion, such as Chertkov, Prelooker and Andropov, but he had in no way modified his own political views. On the contrary, as his next literary endeavour would show, he was more fervent than ever in his calls for the autocracy to be overthrown ‘at any cost’.

‘What has been’ 51

Burtsev’s main reason for seeking readmission to the British Museum had been to enable him to begin where, in December 1897, he had been obliged to leave off. During the last few months of his imprisonment he had drawn up plans for a new historical review, Byloe (The Past), 52 the programme of which he outlined in a pre-publication note to Kashintsev. In this same note he stated his earnest belief that the study of history ‘constitutes the most essential task of our current political movement’ and went on:

To our mind history is not the collecting of ‘stories’ about famous events but has an incomparably more important, immediate and practical meaning. To our mind history directs us in our current idealistic struggle. It exposes the reasons for our and our

49 See: Sinel’nikov, A.V. Shifty i revoliutsionery Rossi. Web version available at: http://www.hrono.info/libris/lib_s/shifr19.html. The author makes no mention of Burtsev or his publications but, rather, states that Andropov was smuggling illegal literature into Russia on behalf of Lenin’s Iskra group when he was arrested in Kazan’ in August 1901.

50 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 1.

51 Such was the English banner heading on the title page of the first issue of Byloe. Burtsev’s next journal.

ancestors’ successes and failures and, at the same time, for the successes and failures of our enemies. It teaches how we can best struggle against the reaction which currently reigns in Russia and how we can rid our motherland of it as quickly as possible. Therefore we must study the history of Russian revolutionary and social trends, primarily, in the interests of the coming battle.

We shall adhere to this point of view concerning the study of history in our new historical journal *Byloe*, the programme of which will be similar to historical publications which appear within Russia but on its pages will be written all that it is impossible to say within Russia due to reasons of censorship. 53

He saw the role of the journal as serving as an aid to this vital study, providing a repository for reprints of rare, early, populist documents, proclamations and reminiscences dating from the 1860s to the 1880s. While the main subject of the first six ‘London’ issues54 was the history of the Party of the People’s Will, the editor also included numerous commentaries on the documents and articles eulogizing the most famous ‘sons of the revolution’ such as Ignatii Grinevitskii, the assassin of Alexander II. Meanwhile, having obtained a proof copy of the journal, the head of the Foreign Agency gave his superiors the accurate assessment that it was even more seditious than *Narodovolets*. 55 Indeed, with the author openly and repeatedly advocating the use of political terror against the tsar and members of his circle, the journal was every bit as inflammatory as any of his earlier works, if not more so. The main difference now, however, was that such opinions were gaining currency both at home and abroad.

Burtsev later described how the political atmosphere had changed from 1897 when *Narodovolets* had first appeared and when the revolutionary movement had been dominated by Marxist Social Democrats. ‘It is quite a different story,’ he wrote, ‘now that the Socialists-Revolutionaries – the party most sympathetic to our cause –

53 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2.): no. 2395, Director of Department of Police to Rachkovskii, ‘Zapiska V. Burtseva’, 24 December 1899. ff. 5–6.

54 *Byloe. Istoriko-revolutsionnyi sbornik*. nos. 1–6. London, 1900–1904. Although all the editions indicated that they were published in London, some were, in fact, published in Geneva. For a full history of the journal, see Lur’e, F.M., *Khramiteli proshlogo*. Zhurnal ‘Byloe’: istorita, redaktory, izdateli. Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990 (hereafter *Khramiteli proshlogo*).

has come to its senses.” Indeed, the radical views on terror promulgated by the SRs in their monthly journal *Revolutsionnaia Rossiia* (Revolutionary Russia) and their theoretical organ *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii* (Herald of the Russian Revolution) were not so dissimilar to those advanced in *Narodovolets*.

But perhaps the crucial difference from 1897 was that these views were now being acted upon in Russia. A case in point was alluded to in the second issue of *Byloe*, which carried a letter from the student P.V. Karpovich who had recently achieved international fame with his fatal attack on N.P. Bogolepov, the hated Minister of National Enlightenment. Although he had carried out the assassination on his own initiative, his act, like that of Vera Zasulich back in 1878, sparked further, organized, acts of terror. The Socialists-Revolutionaries’ Combat Organization came into being shortly afterwards and began its campaign of violent direct action, the first victim of which was D.S. Sipiagin, the Minister of the Interior. Other high-profile assaults followed, including an attempt on the life of I.M. Obolenskii, the Governor of Kharkov and, in 1903, the assassination of N.M. Bogdanovich, Governor of Ufa. Such impressive and daring attacks reminded many of the 1879–1881 exploits of the Party of the People’s Will itself, but Burtsev did not see it that way.

While praising the arrival on the scene of the PSR (and its Combat Organization in particular) he nevertheless criticized the latter for directing its blows more widely then the Party of the People’s Will had done. Listing the victims of the People’s Will – Trepov, Kotliarevskii, Geiking, Mezentsev, Kropotkin, Drentel’n – he argued that all (with the exception of Aleksandr II himself) had been powerful senior figures who had a direct affect on the revolutionaries themselves. The attacks of the

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56 *Narodovolets*, no. 4 1903, Geneva, pp. 1–2.
57 *Revolutsionnaia Rossiia*, nos. 1–77, 1900–1 November 1905, St Petersburg.
59 Bogolepov, N.P. (1846–1901), shot in the neck by Petr Vladimirovich Karpovich (1874–1917) on 27 February 1901 and died shortly afterwards.
61 These last three acts had been organized by Grigorii Andreevich Gershuni (1870–1908), one of the founders of the PSR and director of its Combat Organization. Following Gershuni’s arrest in 1903, direction of the Organization was taken over by Evno Azef and Boris Savinkov.
Combat Organization, on the other hand, were not so concentrated at the heart of power and, therefore, had to be regarded more as acts of propaganda rather than of terror. Burtsev did, however, sympathize with the difficult position the SRs found themselves in: on the one hand they faced the terror of police pursuit and, on the other, had to suffer the 'systematic and malignant teeth-gnashing of the Iskraites!'\(^62\)

Though Burtsev might befriend the odd individual Social Democrat, the party itself would remain an abomination to him.

**Sick and dangerous: the clandestine movements of an invalid**

As Burtsev informed his friend Kashintsev in December 1900, he was happy with the reception of the first issue of *Byloe* and believed that No. 2 would be even better. In the same letter he talked of his immediate travel plans and asked for a number of books to be sent to him care of Beitner in Paris, mentioning in passing that he felt in good health. On his return from his travels, he was obliged to write again following his discovery that 'our incorrigible Lev' (i.e. Beitner) had neglected to post his earlier letter. Obviously, still quite unaware of his friend's betrayal, he reported that the second issue of *Byloe* was already with the printers in Switzerland and that he had now received sufficient funding from Russia to enable him to continue with his journalistic activities. He intended, over the coming weeks, to make further extended trips to Geneva, Berne, Zurich and Paris before returning to settle down to work in London.\(^63\)

Based on this itinerary, it is unlikely he would have arrived back in London until late January or early February 1901 and would, therefore, have missed the beginnings of the national lamentations which accompanied the passing of Queen Victoria on 22 January. In any event, this avowed republican would have shed few tears, being more concerned to return to his main task of bringing about the speedy downfall of the Russian husband of Victoria's grand-daughter! He took up lodgings,

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\(^{62}\) *Narodovolets*, no. 4 (1903), p. 22.

\(^{63}\) HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVId/1A (Pt. 2.): no. 3120, Director of the Department of Police to Rachkovskii, 22 December 1900, ff. 2–5. *Byloe* no. 2 was printed in Geneva and issued in March 1901.
convenient for the British Museum, at 52 Kenton St, St Pancras but, unfortunately, never made it back to his seat under the Dome. His extensive European travels had proved too much for his delicate post-prison constitution and he fell seriously ill with what appeared to be a form of tuberculosis. Within the month, he was dispatched by his friends to Jersey, where he stayed for a time with the old revolutionary K.M. Turski before moving on again to Switzerland.

Burtsev’s departure from London in early April 1901 had also been noted by agents of the French Sûreté, who informed Paris that he had left with a large sum of money received from the Russian Free Press Fund and had arrived in Lausanne, where he attended a conference of Russian socialists. French archival documents show that the Sûreté had, in fact, been shadowing Burtsev for some time. What concerned them, in particular, was a report of his correspondence with the political émigré Varvara Nikolaevna Dobreva in which he had asked for the address of a certain Safonov, a Russian student of chemistry, whom he wished to invite to London. According to the agent’s report, Dobreva had discussed the request with Plekhanov and the decision had been taken not to reply. It was on receipt of this information that the French police reached the conclusion that Burtsev’s request signalled his intention to construct a bomb and organize an attempt on the life of the tsar. The Sûreté was aware that plans were being made for a Russian state visit to France later that year, though whether this knowledge was commonplace at the time is unknown. They would, however, have been on full alert following the attempted assassination of the Shah of Persia in Paris the previous August.

64 TNA, PRO RG 13/139 f. 130, p. 92: Census for England and Wales (taken on 31 March 1901) in which ‘Vladimir Bourtzeff’, journalist and author, aged 36, is listed as lodger in the household of a Richard C. Peden, brick merchant’s book-keeper.

65 Kaspar-Mikhail Turski – formerly a close associate of Tkachev and proponent of terrorism.

66 French police reports on Burtsev are contained in the Archive de la Direction de la Sûreté Publique which was formerly held at the Russkii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive), Moscow and then, in 1997, ‘repatriated’ to the Archives nationales at Fontainebleau near Paris. A detailed description of these and other archival materials pertaining to Burtsev is available in an archival note compiled in 1989 and later published as: Popova, S.S., “‘La levyi iz levykh... demokrat, sotsialist”: Arkhivnaia spravka na V.L. Burtseva’, Istoricheskii arkhiv, no. 1 (2002), pp. 116–144; no. 2 (2002), pp. 42–80 (hereafter ‘Arkhivnaia spravka’).

67 ibid., no. 1, p. 120.
The tsar’s visit to France was eventually arranged for late September and, as that time drew near, Paris received reports of suspicious meetings of Russian revolutionaries, including Burtsev and Safonov, in London in August. Then, on 6 September, news was received from America of an anarchist’s assassination of President McKinley. In this atmosphere of heightened political tension, the French police decided to increase their surveillance over Burtsev and prepared 150 copies of his photograph for circulation.

That same day, Paul Cambon, the French ambassador to London, communicated a secret and urgent memorandum to the Foreign Office. The ambassador reported, with some anxiety, that the Sûreté had lost all trace of ‘the dangerous Russian Nihilist, de Bourteff’ and wondered whether he had, perhaps, returned to Britain. The query was immediately transmitted to Acting Superintendent Quinn at Scotland Yard, who reported, initially, that the refugee had indeed returned from France to London, on 7 August, and was now staying with Volkhovskii at Christchurch. A few days later it was pointed out that Quinn’s report should have read ‘to France from London’ – not the reverse – and, also, that Burtsev had actually only arrived at Tuckton House in the first week of September, where his host was not Volkhovskii but Chertkov. Then, a week later, ‘following careful inquiries’, the Hampshire Constabulary reported that they had been unable to ascertain that Burtsev was, in fact, in the district and that, although a man answering to his description had been staying at Tuckton House recently, he had not been seen in the vicinity for some days. Quinn was not sure how this desperado could have travelled from France to England without being observed by his men, but guessed he may have returned by way of Jersey and Weymouth where, for some years past, there had been no port officers. The French police, meanwhile, were taking no chances and,

68 The President was shot and fatally wounded on the afternoon of 6 September 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz.

69 Popova, ‘Arkhivnaia spravka’, no. 1, pp. 120–121.

in a registration book of anarchists under arrest or surveillance, noted the necessity to apprehend Burtsev immediately, should he set foot in France.\textsuperscript{71}

The impression gained from Scotland Yard’s ‘investigation’ is one of alarming incompetence, which is in no way alleviated by their final submission of 22 October 1901.\textsuperscript{72} In his report, Sergeant Thomas Earnshaw of the Metropolitan Police stated that he had made exhaustive enquiries but had failed to find out the whereabouts of ‘the suspect’, though rumour had it he was either in Christchurch, Hampshire or Geneva, Switzerland! His letters were sent to ‘the suspect’ Teplov who alone knew his whereabouts but, since,

\begin{quote}

it is against their principles to speak about each other’s movements, I find it difficult to get any information respecting him. Should he ever get over his illness, Phthisis, which is very doubtful, and move about again, I shall know it at once and a report submitted [sic].\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Quinn was no more helpful, simply confirming that the secrecy of Burtsev’s comrades with regard to his whereabouts was observed on account of the state of his health ‘and that if known to police he might be annoyed and his recovery retarded’.\textsuperscript{74} In any event, by this time, the tsar’s visit to France was over and the French government could relax. Their London embassy had again been in touch with the Foreign Office with regard to Burtsev, but this time merely to pass on the information that, following up on a rumour he had gone to Rome, they had received the opinion of the Italian Police that he was now to be found in London.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71} Popova, ‘Arkhivnaia spravka’, no. 1, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{72} TNA, PRO HO 144/272/A59222B/35a: CID New Scotland Yard to Home Office ‘re. the suspect Bourtzeff’, 22 October 1901, f. 1. This report, incidentally, contains the last reference to Burtsev I have been able to find in British government and police archives of the period.

\textsuperscript{73} ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} ibid., f. 2.

\textsuperscript{75} ibid., HO 144/272/A59222B/35: Geoffray, French embassy to Marquis of Lansdowne, Foreign Office, 4 October 1901. Geoffray, Léon (1852–1927), First Secretary at the London embassy, 1898–1920.
At the time of the tsar’s visit to France the Russian Department of Police had also renewed their interest in Burtsev’s movements. St Petersburg had contacted Rachkovskii, passing on information from their embassy in Berne that there was to have been a meeting of Russian anarchists in Lausanne on 9 August, and that Burtsev was probably coming from London to attend. The police wished to know if he had, in fact, turned up. Whether Rachkovskii was aware of the revolutionary’s whereabouts is unknown. As mentioned above, Scotland Yard knew only that Burtsev had left London and arrived in France on 7 August and it is likely they would have informed Rachkovskii of his arch-enemy’s arrival, but he makes no mention of this in his reports of the period. It would appear that, despite the overbearing surveillance by British, French and Russian police officers, Burtsev had somehow managed to disappear from view. What is even more remarkable, as will be shown, is that he succeeded in remaining out of police sight for some considerable time to come.

The revolutionary vanishes: the ‘black hole’ of 1902

Sergeant Earnshaw had been right with regard to Teplov’s knowledge of his friend’s whereabouts, for Burtsev was in the habit of notifying him of his every change of address. Indeed, from the Teplov archive at GARF the initial mystery of his disappearance can be cleared up, for it contains a postcard from Burtsev dated 10 August 1901, in which he gives his address as ‘VI. Baranoff chez Zhitlovsky, 35/1 Ziegler Str. Berne, Suisse.’ Moreover, the archive contains a further postcard dated 11 August 1901 from St Beatenberg in the Swiss Alps. But then, nothing more until November 1902 when Teplov received another missive, this time from Bougy-sur-Clarens.

The most pursued refugee in the world had become invisible and would remain thus for a year. There is little in the British, French or Russian police archives to indicate that any of these professional detectives were aware of his movements

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76 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2) Department of Police to Rachkovskii, 25 September/8 October 1901.

77 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 35/1. 11.

78 ibid., l. 12.

79 ibid., l. 14.
during this period. The Sûreté mentions him briefly in a report dating from early 1902 concerning the main groups of Russian political refugees in London but the information contained therein is hardly current.  

What is even more remarkable is that, judging from the Teplov archive, Burtsev had also apparently severed communications with his closest associate.

So, where was he? Sergeant Earnshaw had been right, also, in his estimation of the seriousness of Burtsev’s illness. In September 1903, the revolutionary wrote to a friend in exile in Iakutsk describing how in the spring of 1901 he had fallen ill with inflammation of the lungs, with ‘blood gushing from my throat’ and had been sent to Switzerland where he spent the year recuperating and, as a result, made a full recovery.  

Later, he would specify Montreux as his place of convalescence, though certain archival documents indicate the possibility that he was based in the Clarens region.

Despite his confinement he managed, at least in the early months, to continue his publishing activities. The second issue of Byloe, which had already been prepared, was published in late 1901, as was the pamphlet Doloi tsaria (Down with the Tsar, a compilation of all the articles for which he had been imprisoned) which came out in Geneva in a print run of 2,000 copies. Then, on 14 December a printed leaflet, ‘K chitateliam “Za sto let” i “Byloe”’ (To the Readers of Za sto let and Byloe) was circulated, stating that a second, revised edition of Burtsev’s chronicle was ready, together with a study of the revolutionary movement in the nineteenth century, but

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80 AN F/7/12521/2. Angleterre. Reports for 21 January, 28 February and 15 March 1902. The groups were identified as the Whitechapel group, the Hammersmith group (of which Burtsev was, allegedly, a principal member) and Chertkov’s colony in Christchurch (which, it was said, Burtsev visited frequently for health reasons).

81 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A (Pt. 2.): Burtsev to A.I. Khavkskaia, 25 September 1903. By the end of the year he was able to boast that he could climb up a mountain to the height of 2500 metres without a rest. See GARF f. 102, OO, 1906, d.702, t.1, l. 248. Cited in Panteleeva, ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, p. 185.

82 Burtsev’s personal archive in RGASPI contains several letters and postcards dated around 1903 addressed to him at ‘Pension Colline, Chailly-sur-Clarens’ See, for example, RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 17: Volkhovskii to Burtsev, 15 November 1903, l. 2.
that, unfortunately, shortage of funds prevented their publication.\textsuperscript{83} For the same reason, it would be some time before the third issue of his historico-revolutionary journal would see the light of day.

That the Russian police lost sight of Burtsev at this time was doubtless due, in part, to the disruption caused by a number of significant personnel changes within their ranks. In May 1902 a new Chief of Police, A.A. Lopukhin, was appointed and, a few months later, on instructions from Plehve, he had sacked Rachkovskii, the ‘fountainhead of police corruption’, as he termed him.\textsuperscript{84} Plehve had long wished to dispose of the services of his foreign chief, even addressing a complaint to the tsar in which he criticized him for various shortcomings, including the poor quality of his reports, his personal involvement in a number of underhand dealings and his overly close relations with French politicians and police.\textsuperscript{85} Leonid Aleksandrovich Rataev was appointed as Rachkovskii’s successor and, within the year, would prove himself the equal of his illustrious predecessor, at least, in the passion he invested in the pursuit of Burtsev.

\textbf{Worse than an anarchist}

According to a French police report, Burtsev emerged back into the world ‘at the beginning of 1903’ when he arrived in Switzerland and there, having gathered his true friends around him and secured funding, continued his publishing activities.\textsuperscript{86} Having regained contact with the elusive refugee, the agents of the Sûreté made sure they would not lose sight of him again and filed regular reports to Paris on his activities. From these reports, and from other Russian archival materials, one learns that, over the course of 1903, Burtsev held a number of meetings with fellow revolutionaries,

\textsuperscript{83} GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 35: Burtsev to Teplov, Lausanne 19 April 1903, l. 9; and Popova, ‘Arkhiivnaia spravka’, no. 1 p. 121.

\textsuperscript{84} Quoted in Lauchlan, \textit{Russian Hide and Seek}, p. 101. Lopukhin, Aleksei Aleksandrovich (1864–1928), took over from Zvolianskii on 9 May 1902 and headed the Department till 4 March 1905. He later collaborated with Burtsev and, indirectly, helped him expose Azef. Rachkovskiii’s employment was terminated on 15 October 1902.


\textsuperscript{86} Popova, ‘Arkhiivnaia spravka’, no. 1 p. 121.
travelling regularly between London and various towns in Switzerland such as, Lausanne in April, Clarens in July and August and Geneva in October. 87

During an earlier visit to Clarens he had had the good fortune to meet up with Egor Lazarev, who again offered to fund his literary exploits. Lazarev, already aware of Burtsev's great bibliographic experience and his invaluable collection of documents on the history of the revolutionary movement, recommended him to the PSR and arranged funding for the next three issues of Byloe. 88 All three duly came out under the slogan, Izdanie Partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (Publication of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries) and were jointly edited by Burtsev and Leonid Shishko. Unfortunately, editorial disagreements between the two began almost immediately: firstly, over Shishko's desire to tone down Burtsev's polemical outbursts and turn the journal into a more academic, purely historical publication; and, secondly, due to Burtsev's fears of losing his authorial rights. 89 Bickering continued until it was decided in November that, following issue No. 5, the two, whilst maintaining personal contacts, would go their separate ways. 90 Thus, having lost his funding but regained control of his journal, Burtsev immediately replaced the banner heading of the next issue (No. 6, February 1904) with the inspiring, 'Izdanie gruppy narodvol'tsev. Doloi tsaria! Da zdravstvuet narodnaia volia!' (Publication of the Group of Members of the People's Will. Down with the Tsar! Long Live the People's Will!) Impressive though this might have sounded, no such group, in fact, existed and no further funding for his Byloe would, therefore, be forthcoming.

In the meantime, quite independently from his dealings with the Socialists-Revolutionaries, Burtsev had found enough funds to enable him to produce a fourth

87 GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 35, l. 13.

88 Issues three to five appeared, respectively, in February and May 1903 and January 1904.

89 There is archival evidence to suggest that relations between the two had been poor even before they began their joint undertaking. See RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 18: Chaikovskii to Burtsev, 11 May 1900.

issue of *Narodovolets*. Burtsev’s tone was every bit as strident as in the earlier London issues and just as critical of Nicholas II. In his editorial he cautioned against underestimating the role of the tsar, as some revolutionaries did, and warned that he should not be dismissed as a weak-minded individual, powerless in the company of his more astute ministers. The tsar had much to lose and would protect his wealth at all costs. The journal also contained further praise for the revolutionary martyrs, Karpovich and Balmashnev and articles offering cautionary praise both for the Socialists-Revolutionaries and for Petr Struve’s journal *Osvobozhdenie* (Liberation), suggesting the editor call on his liberal readers to support all revolutionaries and not just the Social Democrats.

*Narodovolets* had been available on the streets of Geneva for a matter of weeks only when the Swiss authorities were informed of the nature of Burtsev’s publishing activities. This came about as a result of the arrest of tsarist agent Henri Bint and his accomplice, the informer Georgii Rabinovich, who had been caught embezzling post addressed to Burtsev and other Russian revolutionaries. Rataev, the new head of the Foreign Agency, hurried to Geneva from Paris to resolve the situation and, during meetings with the local police, described Burtsev’s sedition and a supposed plan to send his close friend and co-conspirator, the SR Pavel Aleksandrovich Krakov, to St Petersburg where he intended to make an assassination attempt on the Minister of Justice, N. V. Murav’ev. Rataev asked for the assistance

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91 How he obtained the monies for this undertaking is unclear, though, in a much earlier report to St Petersburg, Rachkovskii mentioned that an unidentified émigré friend of Turski had come into a large inheritance in Russia and intended to give Burtsev, Teplov and Kashintsev 25,000 roubles to allow them to renew publication of their journal. See report of 20 July/2 August 1901 Cited in Men’shchikov, *Russkii politicheskii sysk*, p. 128.

92 *Narodovolets*, no. 4, pp. 2–9: ‘Nikolai II i poslednii, Obmanov’ (Nicholas II and last, Deceiver).

93 Struve, P. B. (1870–1944), former member of the Emancipation of Labour Group, editor/publisher of the liberal *Osvobozhdenie*, Stuttgart, Paris, 1902–.

94 Bint was expelled but not pursued, so as not to upset the good relations which existed between the Swiss and Russian police. See: *Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse*. Available online at: http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/index.php?lg=f.

95 This information was doubtless obtained from Beitner who visited Burtsev and Krakov regularly at this time. See, Rataev’s Report no. 96, of 18/31 August 1903. Cited in Menshchikov, *Russkii politicheskii sysk*, pp. 163–164. Krakov would later be arrested on his return to Russia in July 1904 as a
of his Swiss colleagues in bringing the two to justice and they were happy to oblige. Burtsev later described the events which followed:

As I was coming out of my hotel at Geneva one morning in October 1903, I was roughly seized by two police agents, who handcuffed me first and then told me I was wanted by the Commissary of Police. I was taken to the police station where I declared that I was the publisher of the *Narodovolets*, that I was responsible for its management and that, furthermore, all the leading articles were signed by me.⁹⁶

According to the Swiss authorities, he had been arrested for the incitements to murder contained in his journal and in his pamphlet *Doloi tsaria*. They had also accused him, initially, of publishing another pamphlet entitled *K oruzhiiu* (To Arms), which called for the assassination of the tsar and contained an appendix with instructions on how to prepare explosives. Burtsev claimed that this was, in fact, the work of the SR Viktor Veinshtok and that he had nothing whatsoever to do with it.⁹⁷ The accusation was later dropped from the charge sheet.

From his cell in St Antoine Prison in Geneva Burtsev wrote immediately to his old friend Aleksei Teplov at the Russian Free Library in London, asking him to make his arrest known, to put up placards, to write to *The Times*, and to inform his friends in America and in Paris. Judging from the tone of these letters, Burtsev, despite his predicament, seemed in a positive mood, saying that he expected he would soon be released and in no time would be back at work in the British Museum.⁹⁸

That their detention had come about thanks to the intrigues of the Russian government was quite clear to all in the émigré community who were quick to show

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⁹⁷ Burtsev, *Bor'ba*, p. 152.

⁹⁸ GARF f. 1721, op. 1, ed. khr. 35: Burtsev to Teplov, 1 December 1903, ll. 15–16.
their solidarity. On 1 December, N.I. Kuliabko-Koretskii, the president of the local émigré association published an appeal to the Swiss people, protesting about the arrest and stating unequivocally where the blame lay:

It is impossible not to see the hand of the Russian government in the arrest of Burtsev and Krakov. It is not Switzerland that was menaced by Burtsev’s journal *which was published in London for Russians and in the Russian language*. Nor was it for the security of Switzerland that the spy Rabinovich attempted to corrupt postal workers and stole correspondence from letter boxes... This is why we are firmly convinced that Switzerland will know how to react in a dignified manner to the furtive scheming of the Russian government. 99

Burtsev later recalled an amusing incident during his interrogation when the examining magistrate wrote the word ‘anarchist’ against his name. The revolutionary protested, pointing out that he was in favour of political freedom, a constitution and a republic, in other words, that he was for everything that anarchists were against. To which the magistrate replied,

‘Yes, you are right, you are not an anarchist – we are aware of that. But,’ he sneered, after a short pause, ‘you are worse than an anarchist!’ 100

In the next issue of *Byloe* Burtsev described how he and Krakov were held in custody for twenty days before being sentenced by the Swiss Federal Council in the person of Adolf Deucher, President of the Council and Head of its Political Department. The latter would dearly have liked to satisfy fully the request of the Russian government and to have imprisoned both Burtsev and his companion but, already facing such public opprobrium, he decided, instead, to take the easy way out and opted for administrative expulsion to France. 101

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99 *ibid.: ‘Les expulsions Bourtzeff et Crakoff’, ll. 125, 126. Kuliabko-Koretskii, N.I. (1855-1924) criminal lawyer, politically close to the Populists, later, correspondent of *Russkie vedomosti*. The association in question was the Assemblée plénière des colonies russe, polonaise, arménienne et géorgienne, which numbered around 300.

100 Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, pp. 152–153.

101 *Byloe*, no. 6 (February 1904) pp. 63–64. Statement dated Berne, 5 December 1903.
Return to Paris

Shortly before he was expelled Burtsev had renewed contact with Prelooker, but what the exact subject of their correspondence was is unclear. Based on the contents of the February edition of The Anglo-Russian, however, one can assume that Burtsev had forwarded Prelooker some of his publications. They received the following brief review:

"Down with the Tsar", "From the Past", and "The Will of the People" are three collections of various articles by extreme Russian revolutionists, chiefly by Mr Vladimir Bourtzeff. What is the strength at present of this Russian Party numerically we do not know, but it is clear that Russian terrorists are quite active and form no very small section of the Russian opposition. Of this we can judge by the number of publications they are able to issue, and by the financial contributions to their funds published in these periodicals.

The 'party of terrorists' was certainly gaining in popularity, helped in no small measure by the continuing successes of the Combat Organization. Burtsev was, as ever, critical of some SR policies but, nevertheless, continued to call on the opposition to unite. Prelooker, too, had published an appeal for unity and asked for comments from his fellow émigrés, which he duly received. In the March issue, amongst other responses published, was a letter from Burtsev, whose attitude was generally supportive, though critical of the author for putting the idea forward as if it had never been advocated before. The criticism was humbly accepted.

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102 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 58: Prelooker to Burtsev c/o P. Akselrod, 13 January 1904.

103 The Anglo-Russian, vol. 7, no. 8 (February 1904), p. 796.

104 ibid., pp. 793–795. ‘Trebuetsia antipravitel’stvennoe pravitel’stvo i vnepartiinaia partiia: Russkie, poliaki, evreii, finliandtsy, armiane, latyshi, litovtsy i drugie, soediniates’! (There is a need for an anti-governmental government and a non-party party: Russians, Poles, Jews, Finns, Armenians, Latvians, Lithuanians and others, unite!)

But, as well as having opened up a public debate, the two had also been in private communication. Burtsev's personal file at RGASPI contains a letter from Prelooker dated 14 February 1904, which is of interest in a number of respects.  

With regard to an English publication of episodes from your life – escape from Siberia, attempted arrest in Constantinople, experiences in an English prison – I doubt you will find an English publisher thanks to your reputation as a dangerous man, and I am almost sure they would not give you an advance but I, personally, would very much like to give you the possibility of continuing your literary works in peace and here is what I propose: that you write a plain narrative of the above episodes without getting argumentative and defending terrorist methods; I will then translate them into English and try to get them published; if I do not succeed then I will publish them in my own paper. I will pay you £25 for an article and advance you £4 per month which will allow you to work quietly for six months in the country.

Having made this most generous offer, he then continued with the following intriguing observation:

I agree that all possible strong means should be used to deal with a strong enemy but I recommend you be practical and wise as a snake. I think Volkhovskii was right to try to defend you in the way he did: *keeping quiet about certain undertakings. There will be time enough to talk about these when you are no longer amongst the living.*

What did Prelooker mean by these ‘certain undertakings’? It is tempting to conclude that he knew some dark secret of Burtsev’s. Was he, perhaps, a practising rather than a merely theoretical terrorist, as the Russian police had always claimed? It was certainly Rataev’s belief that Burtsev was not only mixed up in terrorist plotting but was one of the key organizers of these conspiracies. This, of course, stands in stark contrast to the view of Rita Kronenbitter that, while:

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106 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 59.
107 *ibid.*, emphasis added.
venerated by the younger generation of insurgents for his past achievements and his present propaganda services, Burtsev was considered too meek and gentle to mix into current terrorist plotting. He was never a member of any of the revolutionary committees nor admitted to the inner councils. He was above all not privy to the dead secrecy of assassination conspiracies.\textsuperscript{109}

Based on available archival documents it is impossible to say with certainty which of these two statements is correct, although one can, of course, speculate. From the moment of Burtsev's arrival in Paris, Foreign Agency chief Rataev and ambassador Nelidov had been keen to impress on the French government that this was not just any revolutionary they were dealing with, but a terrorist of the most dangerous sort. Their main contact in Paris at that time, Maurice Paléologue, then Deputy Director of Political Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, recalled Rataev claiming that, in December 1901, Burtsev had actually been one of the founders of the Combat Organization, an allegation he would repeat at a later date. Bearing in mind that one of the other co-founders named was Evno Azef and that Rataev had inherited the services of the latter as an informer, one may, indeed, conclude that his assertion concerning Burtsev's involvement might carry some weight.\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the revolutionary's movements in the winter of 1901-02 are far from clear. On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of Burtsev as some kind of secret member of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries, and, consequently, almost impossible to imagine him as a member of such a clandestine sub-group. Further, no reference is made to Burtsev's membership of the Combat Organization in the writings of those who were most intimately associated with it such as Gershuni, Chernov and Nikolaevskii.

Ambassador Nelidov, meanwhile, had reminded the French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé that an order for the revolutionary's expulsion was already in existence, having been prepared in December 1891, but never served due to his premature departure from Paris. Could that order now be served, he wondered? Towards the end of April, the Prefecture of Police obliged, informing Burtsev of the order for his deportation and warning him that he had three days to leave the

\textsuperscript{109} Kronenbitter, 'Sherlock Holmes', p. 83.

\textsuperscript{110} Paléologue, \textit{The Turning Point}, pp. 60-61.
country. Over a month later, however, Paléologue noted that the revolutionary was still in Paris ‘thanks to the all-powerful protection of Jaurès’. On being served the order Burtsev had, with the help of the Paris-based SR, Il’ia Rubanovich, succeeded in enlisting the support of the prominent socialist who had warned President Émile Combes that the issue would be raised in the Council of Ministers if Burtsev was expelled. Nelidov was so incensed at Delcassé’s failure that the latter, apparently, felt obliged to raise the matter with the Cabinet and, after a heated discussion, a further order was placed for the revolutionary’s immediate expulsion.

It was at this point that news was received from St Petersburg of the assassination of Minister of the Interior V.K. Plehve. Paléologue noted the murder in his diary and his subsequent meeting with Rataev at which the latter complained: ‘My life is one long worry. Under the direction of Burtsev the Combat Organization has become very formidable. The man’s audacity is astounding. I can assure you he has made good use of his time in Paris...’ Now, according to the Foreign Agency head, Burtsev was not only a co-founder of this terrorist group, but its director!

Still this supposed ‘master-criminal’ held out: two days later, Paléologue, having accepted Rataev’s allegations as truth, noted that ‘the terrorist Burtsev is still in Paris, quietly directing the operations of the Combat Organization and the sanguinary exploits of his comrades in Russia’. Finally, however, at the end of July, Burtsev was persuaded to leave Paris and move for a short time to the town of Annemasse, on the Swiss border. There, at that time, there was much discussion

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111 ibid, pp. 65–66. Diary entry for 26 April 1904.
113 Il’ia Adol’fovich Rubanovich (1859–1922), senior SR, representative to the Second International. In 1904 set up La Tribune Russe to Counter Plehve’s La Revue Russe.
114 Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 153–154.
115 Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 86. Diary entry for 1 June 1904.
116 Plehve, Viacheslav Konstantinovich (1846–1904) Assassinated by the SR E. Sozonov who threw a bomb into his carriage on 15/28 July 1904.
118 ibid., p. 102. Diary entry for 30 July 1904. It is of interest to note that, however negative Paléologue’s opinion of Burtsev may have been at that time, it did not prevent him petitioning for the revolutionary’s release from prison following his return to Russia in 1914.
amongst the émigré community concerning Plehve’s murder and the appointment, in his place, of P.D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii, a choice applauded by many liberals. S.N. Motovilova, visiting her relatives in the region, was shocked to discover that Burtsev was one of those who welcomed the appointment:

All my friends were socialists – perhaps belonging to different parties but socialists nonetheless. This so-called terrifying terrorist revolutionary on the other hand was not a socialist in the slightest but the purest, most modest liberal imaginable who placed great hopes on... Sviatopolk-Mirskii!

But there was no time for further discussion, for it was at this point that the French government decided to take advantage of the parliamentary recess to arrest and expel the troublesome revolutionary. The elusive ‘Russian Pimpernel’, however, managed to avoid the clutches of the Sûreté once more and soon arrived back in the safe refuge of London.

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119 Sviatopolk-Mirskii, Petr Dmitrievich (1857–1914) Initially welcomed by the Liberals he was later held responsible for the events of 9/22 January 1905 (Bloody Sunday) and replaced by A.G. Bulygin.

120 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 4.

‘England for the English’

The dirty, destitute, diseased, verminous and criminal foreigner who dumps himself on our soil and rates simultaneously, shall be firmly forbidden to land.\textsuperscript{122}

The Britain Burtsev found that summer may, initially, have appeared more welcoming than it had for some time past. Prelooker, for one, thought he detected a decrease in Russophobia from when he had first started publication of his journal in 1897, writing that,

newspapers notorious hitherto for their strong anti-Russian sentiments now begin to explain that for the Russian people they cherish but the kindliest feelings and best wishes and their Russophobia is directed exclusively against the iniquitous system of Russian autocratic and bureaucratic government for which the people are not responsible in the least.\textsuperscript{123}

In the recent past, there had been no shortage of examples of the Russian government’s excesses for the British press to report on, such as, for instance, the appalling massacres of Jews at Kishinev in April 1903.\textsuperscript{124} An interesting illustration of how far the tsarist regime had fallen out of favour with the British public was to be found in how the press chose to report the departure from public life of one of Nicholas’s most loyal British servants.

News of the retirement of Chief Inspector William Melville, the ‘most celebrated detective of the day’, first appeared in The Times in November 1903.\textsuperscript{125} While mentioning Melville’s duties as bodyguard to visiting dignitaries such as the German emperor and the French president, the newspaper correspondent carefully avoided any reference to his past services to the tsars of Russia. Then, some six

\textsuperscript{122} The Manchester Evening Chronicle, 19 April 1905, Editorial p. 2: ‘The Unwanted, the Unfed, and the Unemployed’. The Aliens Bill had been introduced in parliament the previous day.

\textsuperscript{123} The Anglo-Russian, vol. 7, no. 12 (June–July 1904), pp. 844–845: ‘Our Seventh Anniversary’.


\textsuperscript{125} The Times, 10 November 1903, p. 9: ‘Retirement of Superintendent Melville’. For a description of Melville’s later role as the founding father of MI5, see Cook, MI5’s First Spymaster.
months later, in May 1904, Melville received a most impressive testimonial at City Hall Westminster.\textsuperscript{126} If press reports are to be believed, almost every foreign embassy in the land was either present at the ceremony or was a signatory to the address presented to him, again, with the notable exception of that of Russia.\textsuperscript{127}

Whether, in fact, there was a Russian presence and the press simply chose not to report it in order to avoid any awkwardness for Melville is not recorded but two years later \textit{The Daily Express} was not a bit concerned at the possibility of causing embarrassment when it reported ‘on Russian authority’ that the ex-Superintendent had joined the tsar’s police, following an approach from his old friend Mr ‘Ratshkovsky’.\textsuperscript{128} This ‘scoop’ was retracted a few days later when they received Melville’s rebuttal in which he stated that he was still in London enjoying his retirement and was:

\begin{quote}
content to follow revolutionary movements through the medium of his daily paper. He found the assertion that he had entered the service of another government, which service might at any moment bring him into conflict with his own country, both unfair and offensive.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

At this time \textit{The Express} appeared to like nothing better than a good scandal involving underhand clandestine liaisons between international police forces. In early 1905, it had carried a detailed report of the strength of the Russian secret police in Paris and London based on an interview with Burtsev’s colleague I.A. Rubanovich who claimed that some 60 to 70 Russian agents were operating in London and, what was perhaps more surprising, many of them were British. The report continued:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{126} An Executive Committee set up to organize his testimonial included among its members Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. See \textit{The Times}, 1 January 1904, p. 5: ‘Testimonial To Superintendent Melville’. (Whether the creator of Sherlock Holmes was acquainted with the Inspector or whether, indeed, the latter might have served as a role model for his Chief of Police Lestrade is unknown!)

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{The Times}, 18 May 1904, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{The Daily Express}, 28 February 1906 p. 2: ‘To Spy on Russia’s Enemies – Ex-Superintendent Melville Joins the Czar’s Police Force’.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{The Daily Express}, 2 March 1906 p. 5: ‘Superintendent Melville’.
\end{quote}
The British Police does not offer the same level of assistance to the Russian police as the French, seeing as the British government does not recognize the existence of any Russian police organization in London – England is, really and truly, a free country. Still, Scotland Yard has a special detective department to look after prominent socialists, Anarchists and foreign revolutionists. It has a sort of inborn prejudice against all kinds of revolutionists and there is no doubt that the Russian police in London frequently obtain discreet ‘indications’ from the Scotland Yard authorities.\textsuperscript{130}

While one might query the number of spies alleged to be on the streets of London, the claim that these agents were receiving assistance from their British counterparts was certainly accurate. As mentioned earlier, Scotland Yard was aware of the activities of the French citizen Edgar Jean Farce, the ‘principal Russian agent in London’, who, assisted by a retired Special Branch officer, conducted surveillance operations from an address within a stone’s throw of the headquarters of the RFPF in Hammersmith.\textsuperscript{131} Farce himself in a later report outlined his relationship with Special Branch, explaining that, thanks to his ability to read and understand Yiddish, he was able to pass on important information from the local newspapers to Scotland Yard officers who in turn passed on information that would otherwise have been impossible for him to obtain. In the same report he also mentioned the ‘almost untenable position of Russian agents in London due to adverse public opinion’.\textsuperscript{132}

Hostile though the British press may have been to the Russian tsar and his secret police, and sympathetic to those of his subjects who were forced into exile, this could not disguise the fact that xenophobia in general was on the increase in the country and that calls for immigration controls were now attracting more popular support than at any time. As early as 1900, the ‘rapidly recurring murders of kings and presidents’ on the continent had given rise to calls not only for further legislation to deal with the anarchist problem but for increased international police co-operation

\textsuperscript{130} The Daily Express, 16 February 1905, p. 4: ‘Russian Spies in Europe – How the Czar’s Police is organised in Paris and London’.

\textsuperscript{131} TNA, PRO KV 6/47, 8 December 1904 (274/B)

and surveillance.133 At the same time, interest had been renewed in proposals for an Aliens Bill. Following the return of Salisbury's government to power in November 1900, Conservative MP for Stepney, Major W.E. Evans-Gordon set up a Parliamentary Committee on Alien Immigration that, within the year, had reported on its fears of a rise in antisemitic feeling in the country and had contacted the prime minister with the recommendation that the reintroduction of his 1894 Bill would go a long way to checking the rise of such a movement.134

Evans-Gordon and his followers in the proto-fascist 'British Brothers' League' (slogan – 'England for the English') playing on fears of unemployment, housing shortages and an increase in crime, attracted much support in London's East End with their demands for the restriction of immigration of destitute foreigners and, in particular, East European Jews.135 Salisbury himself gave the proposal his backing but did not live to see the legislation come into force. In poor health, he resigned as prime minister in July 1902 and was succeeded by his nephew, Arthur James Balfour, who set about guiding his uncle's Bill through parliament.136 The Bill, however, would not have a smooth passage.

Among its opponents were, of course, the SFRF and Jaakoff Prelooker, editor of The Anglo-Russian. The May 1904 issue of that journal carried a letter calling for a protest to be drawn up, 'signed by such men and women of England who love their country' and suggesting that this would greatly strengthen the hand of Sir Charles Dilke and other members of the opposition. Prelooker gladly restated his journal's opposition to the proposed Bill and his willingness to support such a protest.137 On this occasion, the Liberal opposition in parliament proved strong enough and the Bill was

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133 See, for example, The Birmingham Daily Post, 7 August 1900, p. 5. Attempts had already been made on the lives of, among others, the Prince of Wales in Belgium in April and on the Shah of Persia in Paris in August, while in July, Italian anarchists had succeeded in murdering King Umberto I.

134 The Times, 28 August 1901, p. 5: 'Alien Immigration'.

135 On at least one occasion (14 June 1902) the League held a rally at the People's Palace, Mile End, now home to Queen Mary, University of London!

136 Salisbury died a year after his resignation, on 22 August 1903.

eventually talked out at Committee stage. The SFRF would later express the view that the success of such a Bill would constitute 'a reversal of the old traditions of offering asylum to the victims of political or religious persecution which has been one of the chief glories of our country in times past'. In the summer of 1904, Burtsev, having again had cause to give thanks to Britain in its role as the sole European refuge for the politically oppressed, would, doubtless, have concurred.

In August, Rubanovich contacted Burtsev from Paris advising him that, following the reopening of the French parliament, it was now safe for him to return. He duly said his farewells to his London comrades and set off back across the Channel. Shortly after his departure, Prelooker considered it appropriate to publish an appreciation of his good friend – a valedictory of sorts – for the benefit of his British readers. The November issue of The Anglo-Russian duly appeared carrying a photographic half-portrait of the revolutionary on its front page over the caption: 'M. Vladimir Bourtzeff. The Nestor of the Russian Revolutionary Movement.' A positively glowing biographical sketch of the man was contained within. Having described Burtsev's great political and literary achievements, Prelooker ended with the following effusive tribute:

Nothing can break his determination and devotion to the cause. Extremely gentle, humane, unassuming, and industrious in his private life, conscientious to a scrupulous degree, and sacrificing his whole life to the work for the amelioration of the condition of the Russian people, he is at the same time the most irreconcilable foe of Russian autocracy, for the destruction of which he believes all means are permissible. In the eyes of the Russian government he is one of the most dangerous Nihilists, in those of the revolutionists he is a saint and martyr for the national cause.

Prelooker, however, had over-estimated the degree of danger to the autocracy which his friend now posed.

138 The Times, 12 July 1904, p. 6: 'House Of Commons. Monday, July 11'. So many amendments were being tabled that the Bill was estimated to be making progress at the rate of half a line a day.

139 The Anglo-Russian, vol. 9, no. 5 (June 1905), p. 946.

140 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 66: I. Rubanovich to Burtsev c/o Teplov, 12 August 1904, l. 2.

141 The Anglo-Russian, vol. 8, no. 11 (November 1904), pp. 859 and 863.
Russia 1905: the return

Ura! Ura! Ura! Edu v Rossiiu! 142

According to Rataev, the arrest of Krakov in St Petersburg in July 1904 had come as a terrible blow to Burtsev and his followers, many of whom had abandoned him.143 His journalistic activities had ceased owing to lack of funds and, by the end of the year, the Russian Department of Police had all but lost interest in him as a serious terrorist threat. Indeed, from then until his return to Russia in October 1905, there is little of interest on Burtsev to be found in police files.144 The Sûreté, also, had ceased to file anything of importance concerning him but, for some time, their border police continued to produce half-hearted reports about some of his associates and their intentions to return to Russia.145 As for Scotland Yard, from available files, it would appear they had lost interest in this ‘dangerous Nihilist’ long before his departure from London in August 1904.

The Okhrana had long since refocused its attentions on what it had identified as the real threat to the person of his majesty and his empire: namely, the emergence of a unified political opposition coupled with the growth in strength and popularity of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries and its Combat Organization. Following the assassination of Plehve, A.L. von Aehrenthal, the Austrian ambassador to St Petersburg, summarized the prevailing mood in the country thus:

The most striking aspect of the present situation is the total indifference of society to an event which constituted a heavy blow to the principles of the government. I have found only totally indifferent people or people so cynical that they say no other

142 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 4. (Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! I’m going to Russia!)
143 GARF f. 102, op. 316, 1905, d. 1, t. 3. l. 235. Cited in Panteleeva, ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia i izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ V.L. Burtseva’, pp. 149–150.
144 ibid.
145 See, for example, Report of 11 March 1905 from Annemasse stating that three SRs: Viktor Veinshtok, Aleksandr Zaslavskii and Stepan Romanov, who are ‘en relation’ with Burtsev, are set to leave Switzerland for France and then Russia. AN F7/12521/1. Suisse. Cited in Lesure, ‘Les mouvements révolutionnaires russes’, p. 300.
outcome was to be expected. People are prepared to say that further catastrophes similar to Plehve’s murder will be necessary in order to bring about a change of mind on part of the highest authority. 146

And further catastrophes there were. A major contributory factor to the growing cynicism in the country was the series of disastrous and embarrassing defeats inflicted on the Russian army and navy in the course of the war with Japan in 1904–1905. Popular discontent grew further following the events of Bloody Sunday in January 1905, 147 while yet more pressure was brought to bear on the tsar the following month with the assassination of his uncle, Grand Duke Sergei. 148 It is interesting to note that, when recording this murder in his diary, Paléologue, while condemning the Combat Organization, at the same time admitted the brutality of the Russian regime. 149 Many who had previously been firmly opposed to violent political action, went further when re-evaluating their position. One such was Prelooker, who later wrote:

Who can wonder that as the Russian persecutors make a law unto themselves and slay their victims in their thousands, so also amongst the millions of persecuted Russians there will always be found groups or even individuals who, too, will take the law into their own hands and avenge their slaughtered brothers and sisters? 150

Internationally, too, support for these ‘avengers’ was on the increase and there was even some evidence that, in liberal circles in Britain, their violent actions were attracting more than merely vocal backing.

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147 9/22 January 1905, when troops fired into a peaceful demonstration killing hundreds (and by some accounts, thousands) of civilians.

148 Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich (1857–1905), killed on 4/17 February by the SR Ivan Kaliaev who threw a bomb at him while he attended a service in the Kremlin.

149 Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 191. Diary entry for 19 February 1905. He expanded on this theme in his entry for 30 March 1905, in which he also repeated his belief that Burtsev was one of the leaders of the Combat Organization. Ibid., pp. 213–214.

When a bomb exploded in a St Petersburg hotel room in early 1905, killing the occupant, a passport was discovered on the body under the name of Arthur Henry MacCulloch, a well-known actor of Newcastle on Tyne.\textsuperscript{151} Following a British police investigation it was discovered that Mr McCullough was, in fact, still very much alive, and that he, together with Henry Noel Brailsford, a journalist and Executive Committee member of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, had fraudulently procured three false English passports for a ‘Russian refugee’. The two were charged with conspiracy and found guilty but fined only £100 each.\textsuperscript{152} It was not suggested, of course, that the SFRF was itself involved in the conspiracy, although, following judgment, the Society did provide McCullough with £150 towards his expenses and issued an appeal to members for contributions towards the cost.\textsuperscript{153} It could be inferred from this that the situation in Russia had reached the point where even the peace-loving SFRF has come to accept the need for radical action, long since advocated by Burtsev and his colleagues.

But for Burtsev, such radical action had always served only as a means to the end and had, therefore, to be abandoned the moment that end seemed within reach. Despite the lack of interest shown in him by the international security services he still believed he had a vital, mediating role to play. As late as September 1905 he had written to Sergei Witte, the Russian prime minister, declaring that, if the latter felt his government might be prepared to give up its policy of ‘white terror’ and begin negotiations with the opposition, then he, Burtsev, would be prepared to go into print to announce that he himself was against political terror and call on revolutionaries to declare a cease-fire. He received no reply.\textsuperscript{154}

Meanwhile, following the death of his enemy Plehve and the appointment of his patron D.F. Trepov to the Ministry of the Interior, P.I. Rachkovskii had re-entered

\textsuperscript{151} The Times first reported the explosion as occurring on 11 March but later trial reports gave it as 25 February. The Times, 13 March 1906, p. 6: ‘Bomb Explosion in St Petersburg’ and, ibid., 24 May 1904, p. 13: ‘Alleged Conspiracy to Obtain a Passport’.

\textsuperscript{152} The leniency of the fines might point to a degree of sympathy for the defendants’ cause on the part of the judge.


\textsuperscript{154} Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 158–159.
the Department of Police as head of its Political Section. Under his direction, surveillance of the revolutionaries was increased and, as a result, a number of assassination attempts were foiled. The year progressed, however, with no let-up in strikes and popular disturbances and, eventually, the tsar was left with no choice but to sign Witte’s October Manifesto, which promised an increase in civil liberties and the election of a popular assembly. Then, four days later, on 21 October came the announcement of a political amnesty.155 Burtsev greeted the news with joy and decided on an immediate return to St Petersburg. S.N. Motovilova recalled the postcard he sent her mother shortly before his departure from Switzerland on which he had written simply: ‘Hurrah! Hurrah! I’m going to Russia!’156

He was by no means the only exile eager to return and all those who chose to do so were received with warmth and enthusiasm on their arrival. The Anglo-Russian reported how, on 13 November in St Petersburg, Zasulich and Deutsch appeared, to a rapturous reception, on the platform at a meeting of the St Petersburg Soviet. Two pages later, however, an additional news item announced the arrest of a number of the returning exiles, Zasulich among them.157 The amnesty, it was reported, was not a general one – exception had been made in the case of those involved in acts of terrorism, who would have to make individual applications to the Minister of Interior. He would then personally decide who would be allowed to return.158

In August, Rachkovskii had reorganized the Foreign Agency, sacking his rival Rataev and replacing him with his faithful agent Garting from the Berlin Agency. On 6 November, the latter sent an urgent report to his superiors stating that Burtsev had departed for St Petersburg the previous evening.159 Rachkovskii followed up a few days later issuing a secret circular to police departments throughout Russia alerting

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156 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 4.


158 The Anglo-Russian, vol. 9, no. 6 (December 1905), p. 974, 976.

159 HIA Okhrana archive 198/XVIIa/3B. My thanks to David Saunders for bringing this information to my attention.
them to the return of political immigrants and taking pains, in particular, to warn them of the imminent return of his old adversary, Vladimir L'vovich. On this occasion, however, Garting's intelligence was incorrect - already, in late October, Burtsev, not waiting to make an application for permission to return, had obtained a false passport and, by the time the border police received Rachkovskii's circular, had already crossed back into Russia.

Thus ended Burtsev's first period of emigration. The promises contained in the October Manifesto would, of course, be broken all too soon and the reaction would set in again, forcing him to flee abroad once more. But still, at last, following almost twenty stormy years of near constant surveillance and pursuit, he was home and, at least for the moment, could rest.

The return of Burtsev and many other European émigrés had a direct effect too on those who had been gainfully employed in their surveillance. It is clear, from the contents of a plaintive letter to Garting, his controller in Paris, that the Foreign Agency's chief operative in London, Edgar Jean Farce, and his associate, Michael Thorpe, had been offered the blunt alternative of a reduction in salary or termination of their employment. It would appear that Garting was a less considerate employer than his predecessors Rataev and Rachkovskii. In his defence Farce attempted to explain the peculiar difficulties faced by the London agents:

Everything is different here to the continent. For example, almost everyone supports the Russian revolutionaries. Very few of my reports contain information which was not extremely difficult to obtain and which simply could not have been acquired using methods which would have been sufficient on the continent.

As for complaints about the quality and number of letters intercepted, he pointed out that Rachkovskii himself had declared that such work was impossible to carry out in London but, despite that, he and Thorpe had taken great risks and done the impossible

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162 ibid., f. 4.
many times. To his superior’s comment that Russian revolutionaries were now ‘few on the ground’ in London he countered,

> You would not say that if you had witnessed, as I have, meetings attended by over 5,000 men, all sworn enemies of the Russian government who conduct themselves as if possessed, openly seeking to buy arms for revolutionaries in Russia. And they do not always confine themselves only to spoken propaganda, despite what they say!'\(^\text{163}\)

But no examples or other proof of the existence of these men or their activities were offered and Garting was neither alarmed nor swayed by the arguments of his ‘humble subordinate’.\(^\text{164}\) With most of Burtsev’s London comrades now back in Russia, the head of the Foreign Agency considered, with some justification, that his English office had lost its raison d’être and could therefore be run down, at least for the moment. Garting himself retained control of Paris operations but only until 1909 when he was obliged to flee the country following his dramatic exposure by an avenging Burtsev. This account, however, of Garting’s downfall and Burtsev’s new role as the ‘Revolution’s Sherlock Holmes’, properly belongs in an early chapter of a subsequent research project which, it is hoped, will be taken up before long. The first part of the narrative of Burtsev’s life, meanwhile, ends here.

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\(^{163}\) ibid. f. 5.

\(^{164}\) When asked in late 1905 to supply a list of the revolutionaries remaining in London together with the affiliation of each Farce was unable to do so. See HIA Okhrana Archive 54/VI/k/23c. Farce to Foreign Agency, 25 November 1905, f. 1.
Conclusion

The examination of Burtsev's early life and his first period of emigration is of value not only for the fresh light it throws on this intriguing and complex individual, but also for the new information it provides on the range of social and political events which he witnessed and which helped shape the man and his destiny. From the study there emerges a portrait of a fascinating (though, occasionally, contradictory) individual whose public persona was, at times, that of a fervent proponent of violent political action and, at others, that of a passionate advocate of unity and moderation. Burtsev himself was aware of how variously he was perceived by different sections of the Russian opposition:

While I am at heart an ardent Socialist, to the extremists I have always seemed lukewarm and inclined to the side of the democratic radical, while to the moderates I am the hydra of the revolution personified.¹

The confusion was caused, in part, by his refusal to align himself with any one party but, throughout, he remained a committed revolutionary, who, during the period under examination, was held by the tsarist autocracy to be one of its most fervent opponents and who, as such, became the object of an unparalleled, determined and relentless pursuit by the imperial police and their foreign associates. I would argue that no one in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement was ever subjected to such unremitting harassment and persecution and, for that reason alone, a study of his life has been long overdue.

A complete description of Burtsev, the private man, is more difficult to reconstruct, for, in general, he conducted his personal affairs with the utmost discretion. The picture that emerges from contemporary accounts is of a modest, mild-mannered, bookish, even shy individual. One colleague described him as resembling 'an ascetic from the Middle Ages rather than a man of the twentieth century'.² This reminiscence, however, post-dates the period of his association with Charlotte Bullier,

² Gol'denberg, 'Vospominaniiia', p. 124.
from which affair he emerges more as Lothario than Savonarola. And there is no
doubt that this quiet man was capable of great passions – with his ‘eyes full of fire
and tenderness and a magnetism which stirs to action’.

He was also, of course, a pioneering historian and journalist, who, even at this
crly stage in his life, was beginning to exhibit some of the qualities which, within a
few years, would earn him international acclaim as the ‘Sherlock Holmes of the
Russian Revolution’. In short, Burtsev’s personality cannot be simply defined: he was
an amalgamation of several complex, often contradictory, personae which are
examined below. All this set against the background of fin-de-siècle Europe in which
a sense of imminent political change and social upheaval hung heavy in the air.

The revolutionary detective

And as this kind, blue-eyed timid man spoke I could hardly
picture to myself the Bourtseff of whom I had read and who
had become a terror to the Russian officials and to the
revolutionists with consciences stained by the Russian Police
Department.

The international plaudits which Burtsev would later receive for his exposure as
agents of the tsarist police of the likes of Garting and Azef were well-deserved. Soon
after his return to Russia he had again become involved in journalism but, a few
months later, following his encounter with the disillusioned police official, Mikhail
Bakai, he began to focus less on the history of the Russian revolutionary movement
and more on the unmasking of police spies and provocateurs operating within the
ranks of that movement. The stunning successes he achieved in this field were based
on much more than the inside information supplied by Bakai, who, in any event,

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3 Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 61.

4 Excerpt from an interview with the American Journalist Herman Bernstein in The New York Times,

5 Evno Azef was exposed as an agent of the tsarist police in February 1909. That same month A.M.
Garting was also officially retired but managed to hold on to his post until July when exposure in the
retired from police service within the year. The world's first revolutionary counter-
intelligence service, which Burtsev built up from these early triumphs, was very much
his own creation and could not have been conceived by anyone who did not possess
that particular set of beliefs, skills and abilities which he had developed through his
early years and the period of his first emigration.

Burtsev was driven by two major passions: his love for Russia and his all-
consuming hatred of the stifling, despotic Russian autocracy. Which was the greater
of the two was, apparently, decided in September 1914, when he renounced (at least
temporarily) his struggle against Nicholas II in order to come to the defence of his
beloved country in the war against Germany. However that may be, it is hard to
underestimate the abhorrence he felt for the tsar and, given his first-hand experience
of the inequities of Russian life, the horrors of prison and the rigours of Siberian exile,
his antipathy towards the Romanov regime may be forgiven. Add to this his personal
betrayals by the likes of Gurovich, Landezen-Garting, Pankrat'ev, Beitner and, last
but by no means least, Charlotte Bullier and one can perhaps begin to understand the
peculiar aversion he felt also towards the emperor's political police.

The Bullier affair, which has heretofore passed virtually unnoticed by
historians, was, clearly, one of the major early causes of Burtsev's hatred of traitors,
provocateurs, and the secret police 'which remained in his soul like a wound which
would never heal'. Burtsev understood that the reaction was protected and
upheld by this police force and that, in order to hasten the collapse of the whole
hateful edifice, it would be necessary to weaken - or, better still, remove - this central
prop. This he placed as his central goal in life. Before setting out on his escape from
Siberian exile he left behind a letter addressed to the Russian government that
described the contempt he felt for the tsar and his secret police and that concluded
with the following defiant challenge:

I am making my escape to fight against you to the death. If you succeed in catching
me so much the better for you. For I give you warning that if I get free I shall arouse
the vengeance of the oppressed against you?

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These were brave and stirring words indeed, but the adoption of such a determinedly aggressive stance may also go some way to explain why the Russian authorities showed such urgency and persistence in their attempts to recapture the fugitive.

During the ensuing long years of pursuit by the Okhrana, Burtsev developed not only excellent first-hand knowledge of police tactics but also an uncanny ability to understand the workings of the mind of the provocateur. S.N. Motovilova recalled being the cause of great mirth when, on one occasion, she mistook Burtsev for a police agent but, she reasoned, surely, in order for him to be able to unmask so many spies and provocateurs, he himself must have had something of the spy in him? The historian S.P. Mel’gunov believed that:

the okhranniki related to Burtsev differently than they did to us. In him they saw one of their own who just happened to be working for the revolution. This competition between professionals, however, led to a certain intimacy.

However that may be, Burtsev could never have been accused of possessing the key traits of the spy: namely, the ability to dissemble or betray. Such a capacity was simply not in his make-up. He did, however, possess a fine analytical mind and a remarkable faculty for drawing together disparate strands of evidence. This combination, over the years, resulted in the exposure of numerous traitors to the revolutionary cause.

Other than these personal qualities, attention must also be drawn to another central aspect of his character commented on by many who knew him: namely, his dogged determination. The mere fact that he survived his early incarceration and exile is testament itself to Burtsev’s strength of mind, though there were later occasions when his resolve was stretched to the limits. He described one such instance from the early days of his imprisonment in England, when, in a state of deep depression, he had considered suicide and had gone so far as to experiment with hanging himself, but, at the last moment, as he began to lose consciousness, had managed to stop and struggle free. He went on to describe how the incident had left him with a sense of liberation

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8 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 206, l. 2.
10 Burtsev, Bor’ba, pp. 137–139.
and a renewed fortitude that remained with him for the rest of his life, helping him through the many trials still to come. It is significant that Burtsev could draw strength even from such a hopeless situation.

He was assisted, too, through these difficult times by his unshakable belief in the inevitable success of the revolution. This unwavering certainty of victory was a source of inspiration to many and was of considerable concern to the Russian government, which sincerely believed he had the ability to turn impressionable young revolutionaries ‘into fanatics capable of frightful crimes’. As we have seen, Burtsev understood the need to involve the youth of Russia in the revolutionary movement and would deliberately seek out the Russian student communities in the European centres of emigration in order to preach his inspirational ‘revolutionary gospel’. He understood, too, that this message could be delivered to a much wider audience via the medium of the printed word.

The Nestor of the revolutionary movement

Mild eyed, soft, kind, simple in his manners, a typical Russian book-worm in appearance – such is Vladimir L’vovich Burtsev, historian of the Russian revolution. An accomplished journalist in his own right, it should be remembered that Burtsev was the first to bring news of the atrocities of the Iakutsk massacre of 1889 to the attention of the West. With such reports he did much to inflame the anti-tsarist sentiments already beginning to smoulder in Europe and America following the publication of George Kennan’s accounts of his Siberian travels. Having experienced first-hand the rigours of exile, Burtsev wrote with authority on the subject in his journals and also retained valuable contacts with those still in Siberia. Moreover, from the earliest days of his politically active life, he had earned the respect and trust of many in the movement who, after his emigration, provided him with a steady flow of materials that allowed him to maintain an up-to-date chronicle of political events within Russia: from strikes and demonstrations to arrests, trials, imprisonment and

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11 Paléologue, The Turning Point, p. 60.

exile. The importance of his activities in this area and, in particular, in his pioneering work as an historical chronicler of the revolution must not be overlooked.\(^\text{13}\) The historian Boris Nikolaevskii was one who praised Burtsev's efforts, describing how he had,

started out in this field at a time when it attracted the attention of almost no-one. He was, however, never interested in history for its own sake, never as a pure science. The revolutionary and political journalist in him always prevailed over the historical researcher, and he always approached the study of the past with a desire to extract from it some useful lesson for those involved in the political struggle of the present day.\(^\text{14}\)

One such useful lesson, which he repeatedly drew from his studies and which has been largely ignored by Burtsev scholars, concerned his belief in the importance of a unified political opposition – hardly a notion new in itself but one to which Burtsev attached particular significance.

**The unifier**

> Enough of quarrelling amongst ourselves, now is the time to speak seriously about a working alliance of all parties for the struggle against our common enemy.\(^\text{15}\)

In one of his regular reports to Nicholas II concerning Burtsev, Police Chief Zvolianskii expressed the view that the troublesome revolutionary `stood out amongst the other émigrés in London thanks to his activities directed in the main towards the unification of the divided representatives of the old and new populist émigré

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\(^{14}\) Nikolaevskii, *Istoriia odnogo predatel'ia*, p. 11.

\(^{15}\) Burtsev in *Svobodnaia Rossii*, no. 3 (1889): 'Iz Sibirskoi zhizni', p. 20.
parties'. This was no new departure for Burtsev. From his earliest days in emigration he had witnessed first-hand the discord that existed amongst the opposition and, in the pages of *Free Russia*, long before his arrival in Britain, had urgently called for harmony. Following on from this, his first act upon arriving in London was to issue an appeal to the members of the Paris emigration to forget their differences and to ally themselves with Stepniak and the other Fundists. Throughout the remaining years of the century Burtsev and his colleagues would continue to search for ways in which they could close ranks, but it was not until the lead-up to the 1905 Revolution that such an alliance of the opposition was successfully formed.

Much has been written on the underlying factors that combined to bring this about, such as the important unifying influence of Struve’s journal *Osvoboždenie*. But here, recognition should also be given to Burtsev’s efforts in the field, not only as a supporter of Struve’s undertaking, but as one of his forerunners. Long before *Osvoboždenie* made its appearance Burtsev had, time and again, issued appeals for unity and, indeed, he would continue to do so long after the failure of 1905. During his visit to New York in 1910 he would again make the call with the same passion and conviction:

My plea is now for constructive work, for union, for a united opposition against the autocracy – and I feel that the Russian people are now ripe for a new, better, reconstructed Russia.  

But, unfortunately, Burtsev’s dilemma lay in the fact that he was quite incapable of practising what he preached. Over the years, his circle of political associates may

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17 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVII/1A. (Pt. 2). Burtsev to Gurovich – 9 January 1891, copy.


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have widened (in particular, following his release from prison in London) to include a number of Social Democrats and even liberals, but one would be hard-pressed to find, anywhere in his writings – even a glimmer of praise or support – in favour of their political platforms. To achieve unity requires a willingness on all sides to compromise but Burtsev was never a man to give ground: indeed, from the reminiscences of contemporaries, a more obdurate individual would be difficult to imagine.20 As he himself acknowledged, the moderates could never shake off their opinion of him as anything other than ‘the hydra of the revolution personified’ and, it must be said, he gave them no cause to think otherwise.

**The terrorist**

Like the Fundists, Burtsev called on the Russian people to support the revolutionaries in pursuit of their primary goal – the downfall of the autocracy – but he went further in asking them also to condone the use of violent action as a means to that end, openly proclaiming that, at a time of reaction, ‘to use terror against reactionaries is a good thing and has an enlivening effect on youth, on society, and on the workers on the one hand, and on the government on the other.’21 He was by no means alone in holding that belief: there were many who shared a similar point of view – for example, old Narodniki and anarchists such as, Zhuk, Alisov, Kashintsev, Cherkezov and L. Iakobson, who, in a letter to Burtsev, summarized the prevailing mood in 1901, declaring that it was at this precise moment, ‘when all revolutionaries are waiting expectantly for the first toll of the eternal bell calling them to revolutionary struggle that the necessity for terror in Russia must be proclaimed’.22

It is important to bear in mind that by this point in the development of the revolutionary movement – i.e. the beginning of the twentieth century – there was genuine and widespread public support within Russia for terrorist action. The earlier confident claim of the Executive Committee Of the Party of the People’s Will that ‘tsaricide excites in the minds of a majority of the people only gladness and

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20 See, for example, Gol’denberg, ‘Vospominaniia’, p. 124.

21 HIA Okhrana archive 197/XVIIId/1A. ‘Kopiiia pis’ma Vladimira Burtseva k studentu Shishakinu i drugim litsam’, f. 4. Undated attachment to: Director of the Department of Police to Rachkovskii. Doc. no. 2544 (alt. ref. no. 19). St Petersburg, 16/28 April 1894.

22 RGASPI f. 328, op. 1, ed. khr. 25, li. 1,2. Iakobson to Burtsev, 17 September 1901.
sympathy' was again coming into vogue. As the years had passed, with the reaction showing no signs of slackening and with all other forms of protest having failed, public support for extreme revolutionary measures had grown. Burtsev's journalism reflected this mood and, indeed, preceded the publication of similar sentiments by the SRs in their Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia. Burtsev was the first, since the heady days of the People's Will, to express such opinions in print in his Narodovolets but, in 1897, he was somewhat ahead of his time. The public, it appeared, was not quite yet ready to listen.

From the pages of Narodovolets it was abundantly clear that Burtsev was an advocate of bombizm, as it was sometimes known. The extent, however, of his own practical involvement in violent political action is unclear. There is some evidence, albeit circumstantial, that he may have served as more than a mere 'troubadour of terror'. For example, he himself admitted to being present when 'chemical experiments' were conducted in his Paris flat in early 1890 and there is also the testimony of Prelooker. Quite apart from the latter's intriguing advice to Burtsev that certain of his past dealings should be discussed 'only when he [Burtsev] was no longer amongst the living', Prelooker also believed that, following his escape from Siberia, Burtsev had become, 'the inspiring genius of the extreme party of Russian revolutionists, both by his political writings and his practical organising activity'. While the Russian Department of Police would readily concur, Prelooker was alone amongst the revolutionary's associates to hold such a view.

In his autobiography Burtsev chose not to mention his close association with anarchists such as Nettlau and Cherkezov but one should not surmise from this that he may also have secretly shared their views. On the contrary, as he pointed out while in police custody in Switzerland, he stood for everything that the anarchists were against: political freedom, a constitution and a republic. In fact, as one commentator has suggested, his personal involvement in violent action was probably no more than 'vicarious'. At no time did Burtsev himself ever admit to direct participation in terroristic activities; nor, for that matter, has his involvement in such practices ever

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been claimed by any of the leading activists of the day. Assertions to the contrary probably amount to no more than a personal slander.

The political victim

Burtsev laid the blame for his defamation clearly at the door of the Foreign Agency and, later, attributed it, more specifically, to the ‘malign influence’ of Landezen-Garting. It was this provocateur, claimed Burtsev, who from the moment of his introduction to the revolutionaries in Switzerland,

insisted in bringing up the subject of terrorism, a subject we had determined to avoid in our paper. He urged our immediate return to Russia and talked of the necessity of regicide. The talk and the futile movements of a little circle of refugees like ours without money or influence, faithfully reported by Landezen made the Tsar Alexander III and his Ministers tremble in St Petersburg. 26

There is no doubt that Landezen, Rachkovskii and, later, Rataev all had much to gain by exaggerating the extent of the émigré menace and by maintaining that fiction over the years. Thus, when no real threat existed, one would be plucked from thin air or ‘provoked’ into life. 27 By striking terror into the heart of the tsar and his Director of Police they could consolidate their own and the Agency’s position and ensure a steady stream of finance. And there was no better way of terrorizing the tsar than by invoking the name of Vladimir L’vovich Burtsev, that dangerous escapee, who may have been responsible for the murder of Sudeikin and whose sole aim in life now was the murder of his Imperial Majesty. Who better to fulfil the role of evil genius of the revolution and ‘director of the sanguinary exploits of his comrades in Russia’?

It is no surprise that the same fiction was readily accepted by the Foreign Agency’s counterparts in the other political police forces of Europe. As archival discoveries have shown, the relationship that existed during this period between Scotland Yard and the Foreign Agency was unofficial and was conducted on a strictly personal level. Chief Inspector Melville regarded Burtsev and his fellow


27 For examples of Rachkovskii’s tendency to fiction in his reports, see Taratuta. S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, pp. 472–473.
revolutionaries as no better than common criminals and was happy to assist Rachkovskii, his Russian friend, not only by providing him with access to the all-important British press but also by conducting surveillance of the London émigrés on his behalf and, finally, by engineering the arrest and conviction of his old adversary.

As Volkovskii pointed out at the time, Burtsev’s show trial in a British court in February 1898 was nothing but ‘a matter of political convenience of the moment’ brought about by a desire of Salisbury’s Conservative government ‘to pay a visible compliment to “one of our neighbours” at the lowest possible cost’. At best, it might be argued that the guilty sentence furnished proof only that the British public did not yet condone tsaricide. Burtsev, however, had never asked for the support of the British people. He wrote in Russian for a Russian audience and in his journal he called on no one but his countrymen to rise up against the tsar. Indeed, had his defence team taken more time to question the precise meaning of the section of the act under which he was charged, the jury might even have been persuaded that it did not, in fact, cover Burtsev’s particular ‘offence’!

The witness of change

Chief Inspector Melville had realised the personal benefits to be obtained by lumping together the Russian ‘Nihilists’ with other foreign extremists – be they Irish or American Fenians, or French or Italian anarchists – and terrorizing his government (and the British public) with embellished tales of the alien menace within. That neither Burtsev nor any of his Russian revolutionary comrades in London posed a threat to any foreign national or state was immaterial, for the spate of anarchist bombings and assassinations on the Continent in the early 1890s had already given rise to a new anxiety on Britain’s streets, which, with the coaxing of the likes of


29 It is a remarkable sign of the contemporary relevance of the Burtsev case that it was cited as recently as 2007 by counsel for the Muslim cleric Abu Hamza at his appeal against conviction. One of the grounds for appeal was the argument that section 4 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861 (under which both Burtsev and Abu Hamza were charged) did not cover incitement to the murder abroad of a foreign national by a foreign national. The appeal failed, in part, because the 1977 Criminal Law Act had amended the relevant section of the 1861 Act. See ICLR: King’s/Qwen’s Bench Division/2007/Regina v Abu Hamza – 2007 QB 659.
Melville and Salisbury, would ensure that public opinion would gradually turn against all and every foreigner in their midst.

Whereas in 1891 Burtsev had experienced the warmth of that welcome which Britain traditionally extended to political refugees, as the decade progressed he was also witness to a rise in British anti-alienism – first, solely on social and economic grounds but then, as early as 1894, hijacked for political ends by Salisbury. By the time of Burtsev’s arrest, public opinion had already swung violently against immigration, while the long-cherished British policy of political asylum itself was coming under attack. Indeed, Burtsev’s second ‘punishment’ – his exclusion from the British Museum, that great sanctuary for political refugees – could be seen as ominously symbolic of a wider change in attitude towards aliens in general which would result, a few years later, in calls for their exclusion from Britain itself.¹° This was, to all intents and purposes, the effect achieved by the Aliens Act of 1905, despite claims that political refugees were explicitly excluded from its remit. Those few who still opposed the Bill rightly saw in it, ‘a measure, calculated to stir up anti-foreign feeling and race prejudice, a reactionary measure that would bear very harshly on the victims of political or religious persecution’.³¹ But such warnings fell on deaf ears. The Act was duly passed and came into force on 1 January 1906. In 1891 Burtsev had, with some relief, arrived in Britain, the only remaining place of political refuge in Europe. By the time he returned to Russia some fifteen years later, he and his associates had already witnessed the sad demise of that last sanctuary.³²

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³⁰ It is significant that, a few years earlier, when the Principal Librarian raised the case of another imprisoned reader, the British anarchist David Nicoll, the Museum Trustees decided to take no action. See Harris, P.R. A History of the British Museum Library, 1753–1973. London: The British Library, 1988, pp. 436–437.


Post-script

Burtsev was well aware of the causes which lay behind his persecution and pursuit during his first period of emigration. As he explained in 1909,

I have been hounded by the rulers of Russia as no other refugee ever has been. My very moderate aims have been kept in the background by the Russian government while the greatest stress has been laid upon the forcible and direct methods I made use of in fighting for them.

I think future historians will agree that the Russian government feared terrorism at this time more than anything else and its efforts to stamp it out were carried to the bounds of absurdity. 33

Burtsev was, without doubt, one of the most dramatic casualties of this absurd mania which gripped the Russian government at the end of the nineteenth century and which, eventually, helped bring about its demise. Tragically, however, his persecution would not end with the fall of the house of Romanov.

Some years after the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power, Trotsky famously dismissed the old revolutionary with the phrase, ‘We were all continuously aware that Burtsev would never set the world on fire.’ 34 A disparaging remark indeed, but how much weight should be given to the opinion of a man who, on assuming power following the overthrow of the Provisional Government, immediately issued an order for the arrest of Burtsev and the closure of his journal? As a result of Trotsky’s actions Burtsev ended up once more in the Trubetskoi Bastion but, on this occasion, as the first political prisoner of the Bolshevik regime and, moreover, one of the earliest victims of a new climate of fear which was about to engulf his homeland.


Appendix

Memorandum communicated by M. de Staal, 5 March 1892. ‘Russian Anarchists in England’.¹

The number of Russian revolutionaries and nihilists based in England, which was already considerable, has acquired, during these past years, a number of recruits expelled from Switzerland, France and elsewhere. The activities of this emigration, under the aegis of the ‘right of asylum’, have grown in intensity and are currently conducted by such caryphées of terrorist revolution as Prince Kropotkin, Chaikovskii, Kravchinskii (the assassin of General Mezentsev, known under the name of Stepniak), Felix Volkhovskii, Vladimir Burtsev, Michel Voinich (Kelchevskii), Michel-Moïse Harmidor (Baranov), Hesper Serebriakov, Stanislaw Mendelssohn and his wife Marie, Aleksandr Lavrenius and many others besides.

In particular, for the past two years, sustained by the ‘Society of Friends of Russian Freedom’ the anarchists have regularly been publishing in their journal *Free Russia* the grossest calumnies against the Russian government which are received with only too much credulity by a public unfamiliar with Russian affairs.

It should be noted that the committee of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (*Société des Amis de la Liberté en Russie*) which has assumed responsibility for the overall management of the afore-mentioned anarchist journal is composed entirely of British subjects amongst whom are individuals who occupy the most honourable positions. Indeed, of the thirty–nine committee members there are ten members of parliament and four clergymen. The business of the Society is conducted by a secretary and an honorary treasurer, Robert Spence-Watson and Edward R. Pease. The principal editors and correspondents of the journal travel to a number of provincial towns to hold conferences and trumpet the successes of their Society. Moreover, the programme of ‘*Free Russia*’ is laid out in the first issue of the journal and developed in subsequent editions. There, revolution and civil war are preached freely, and collections of money are organised for that purpose. Certain persons in the public realm do not think to decry their actions or steer clear of these incitements to rebellion but rather offer assistance and preside at revolutionary conferences, for

¹ TNA, PRO FO 65/1429 ff. 87–92. [Translation from the French original: RH.]
example, Dr. Spence-Watson, President of the National Liberal Federation who gave a speech to the Cambridge Liberal Club entitled, ‘Sur les moyens qui ont les anglais de venir en aide à la liberté en Russie’; Mr. R. Maynard Leonard who, on 18 February 1891 at the Hounslow Liberal Club read a paper on the subject of ‘The Struggle for Russian Freedom’ in which he directly incited revolution; Professor Blakey in Edinburgh who thanked the revolutionary Volkovskii for the anarchist conference he had organized there. Yet other personnages, just as well known, took part in these meetings in Edinburgh such as, for example, Dr. Adamson, Messieurs. Holland, Marshall, James Ellis, Hope etc. In Bedford, meanwhile, the director of that town’s ‘Modern School’, Poole, assisted and spoke at a meeting presided over by the afore-mentioned Volkovskii.

An abstraction has been made of the general tone of the journal ‘Free Russia’ which has frequently carried insulting attacks against His Majesty the Emperor. The article ‘Alexander III’ published in issue No. 12 (December 1891) is sufficient proof of this affrontery.

But the ‘Society of Friends of Russian Freedom’ is not the only society which pursues anarchist ends and which prospers in England. There is another which has been set up under the presidency of Chaikovskii, Kropotkin and Kelchevskii (Voinich), which controls a ‘Help Fund for Russian Political émigrés’. There is another one in Poland whose committee is based in London which imports clandestine revolutionary publications into Russia. Alexandre Dembski, who was involved in bomb-making in Zurich, Stanislaw and Marie Mendelssohn, P. Bernstein, J. Meer, Jan Nadalski, Anne Podjnicki, Harry Pauker, Marie Schier, and Alexandre Vernicki are members of this committee. Later, another society of Polish political émigrés was founded, whose committee was composed of Alexandre Dembski, François Kovalski and V. Senjevski.

A Russian advert in Free Russia no. 8 (1891) informed the public that five émigrés: namely, Volkovskii, Kelchevskii, Stepniak, Chaikovskii and Shishko, had organised a society entitled ‘Fondes litteraires Russes’, for the publication of revolutionary works in Russian. The first publication of that society which appeared on 8 January is Stepniak’s brochure ‘What we Need and the Beginning of the End’. It develops the programme of the future revolution and directly specifies as legitimate means of action ‘les complot militaires. l’assaut nocturne du palais, les bombes. la
dynamite.' These publications are freely available for sale in a number of shops and notably at the depot of the ‘Society’: S. Kelchevskii, 3, Iffley Road Hammersmith, W.

The Polish group ‘Proletariat’ also devotes itself to written and spoken propaganda. It would appear that the Mendelssohns are at the head of this group. Mrs Mendelssohn holds socialist conferences at no. 40, Berners Street, Commercial Road.

This succinct exposé should serve as proof that the activities of the above-mentioned groups are not limited to socialist theory, but are rather given over in the main to direct revolutionary propaganda and that these groups will overlook no means which may help them achieve their ends.
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**Fiction**
