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The Trust

The letter that Alexandra wrote to Maria on December 17, 1923 was found among the latter's papers, and Maria's executor, the Oslo lawyer Finn Thrana, decided that it should be placed in the Quisling Archives at the Oslo University Library, together with a translation he commissioned—and adjusted to what Quisling and Maria had told publicly and privately about Quisling's marital situation.[1] Although the letter makes it clear that Quisling had, in fact, taken Alexandra *back* to the country he supposedly had rescued her from, Thrana (who married into the Quisling family) was convinced that Quisling had married her quite *pro forma* for the sole purpose of enabling her to escape from Russia, and his Norwegian translator, therefore, chose to write "my false [i.e., fake] husband" instead of "my unfaithful husband." Thrana did not suspect that the letter was important for very different rea-

1. NB, Quisling Archive, Ms. fol. 3920: XI: 9. This folder now contains an English translation by W. G. Yourieff and a Norwegian one by K. A. Seaver, in addition to the one produced by Thrana's translator.

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sons than the ones that caused him to file it in the Quisling Archive.[2]

Long before Alexandra became fully aware of the Trust's activities, as well as of what the Quisling Archives in Oslo contained, she had begun to suspect that when Quisling sent her off to the Crimea with her mother and Nina, he was already involved in a web of intrigue so compromising and complicated that he had quickly lost personal control over the course of events. She also supposed that Maria must have been involved in some way in this game because Zhósya Bortz had written that while Alexandra was in the Crimea, Quisling had several times been seen in Maria's company.

It is also important to remember that Maria did not enter Quisling's life until the spring and early summer of 1923. Had Quisling been mixed up with the developing intrigues at an earlier time, he would not first have taken Alexandra with him back to the Ukraine and then abandoned her to her fate in Paris. Most likely, he would have arranged to seclude her somewhere on the way *to* Russia that February. For many years, Alexandra and George searched the Russian and European memoir literature in the hope of discovering why, before Alexandra and Quisling left Russia together for the second time, Quisling had laid the necessary plans for pushing her aside and presenting Maria as his lawfully wedded wife.

The plans Quisling made before leaving Russia in the middle of September 1923 cannot have been based on agreements made with Nansen since it was not until October 17—weeks *after* Quisling had issued Maria's Nansen passport and abandoned Alexandra in Paris—that Nansen officially asked him to take on the Bal-

2. Both Alexandra and her Norwegian lawyer, Lars Tobiassen in Fredrikstad, received a full written report about the meeting that K. A. Seaver had in Oslo with Maria Quisling's executors Finn Thrana and Ralph Fossum on March 24, 1982.

kan assignment. In addition to the obvious advance reservation made at Mme. Glaize's, letters and other papers from the summer and autumn of 1923 also show that it was no mere impulse that made Quisling take Alexandra out of Russia again, away from everybody who knew her, and to abandon her while claiming that Maria Paseshnikova was his wife.

The available information suggests that Quisling's plans must have had their roots in something he and Maria were involved in jointly, and that highly placed individuals in the Ukrainian Soviet government were aware of what the two of them were doing. Otherwise, Maria would not have obtained Tsjubarov's statement along with her Nansen passport. However, Maria's Nansen passport and the letters Quisling wrote that autumn to the French and Austrian authorities concerning his "wife Mary Quisling" tell us only *how* he and Maria cleared the first hurdles. They do not explain *why* the two of them chose such an unusual course of action, nor why they, for years afterwards, made such efforts to obscure their whereabouts at any given time.

An attempt to discover what made Quisling risk his reputation, his marriage, and his career in this manner involves taking a closer look at what kind of organization the Trust was and at the implications of Alexandra's straightforward statement that Maria was involved in its complicated game.

Focusing on why it was important to the Ukrainian co-organizers of the Trust to recruit Maria in 1923 will, among other things, make it necessary to return our attention to the people for whom Maria worked in Kharkov. When Alexandra read the archival material I found in Oslo and at Stanford University's Hoover Archives, she was struck by the frequent occurrence of the names of her two former PomGol chiefs in 1922, Artamónov and Bashkóvich.[3] She thought that there might be several inter-

3. In this overview, Alexandra's and George's knowledge was of great as-

connections here, such as between these two men and her and Nina's experiences with Bashkóvich just after she had got to know Quisling well, and also involving whatever relationship Artamónov and Bashkóvich may have had both with the Trust and with Maria.

It took many years before the story of the Trust, an organization born in 1922 from a fixed idea of the Soviet Russian secret police (the GPU), became known in the western countries. The very existence of the Trust depended on only a few people being party to the secret of its purpose. During her first unhappy Christmas in Paris, Alexandra was not only ignorant of the degree to which Maria had usurped her position with Quisling, but she also had no idea of the cobweb of Soviet Russian intrigues that was now sticking to her own life by means of Maria. Completely unaware of how much her dear friend Zhósya had risked by warning her that Maria was one of the Trust's many tentacles, Alexandra, in her attempt to chatter on as if nothing was the matter, had assumed an insouciant tone when writing to Maria about the latter's highly placed protector and about Maria's working "for some Trust." She was actually considerably more upset by what Zhósya had said about Maria and Quisling having been seen together while she herself was in the Crimea.

She certainly entertained no suspicion of a connection between her hated former superior, Bashkóvich, and Maria, or of Maria's having been sailing under a false flag when she "begged" to have Alexandra's old job at the PomGol telephone exchange. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Alexandra did not know that Bashkóvich had continued in the PomGol after the March 1922 events that had led to his supposed removal from his position due

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sistance to my own research. It also needs noting that this overview touches only on those aspects of the Trust that directly concern the subject of this book. Those who want further information about the organization will find it in several other places, including in the books listed in the end notes.

to his behavior toward herself and her friend Nina. When she saw him on the platform on the day she departed from Kharkov in 1923, he did not have a sign around his neck saying that since early in May 1922—precisely the time Maria had started to work for him—he had merely occupied a higher position and another office building.

As the ARA archives clearly show, and as Chapter Six noted, Bashkóvich ruled with an iron fist in his new position and did not shy away from classic intrigue-making in order to have his way. It would lead too far off course here to recount all of Bashkóvich's documented sprees; interested historians will find more than enough in the Hoover Archives to see that he knew how to use his power as a high-ranking Soviet bureaucrat in the Ukraine. All told, his modus operandi was an important aspect of the man who was still Maria's superior when Quisling's and Maria's paths crossed in the spring of 1923 and on whom Quisling was dependent while carrying out his assignments for Nansen, both after Artamónov's departure for Odessa in May 1922 and throughout the spring and summer of 1923.

Documentary evidence shows that Artamónov left Kharkov in the middle of May 1922 (that is, at about the same time Maria started working for Bashkóvich) because ARA's district head in Kharkov wrote on May 13 that "Mr. Artamonov leaves for Odessa next Tuesday."[4] As shown earlier, Quisling's close cooperation with Artamónov had already landed the Norwegian officer in trouble with the Polish authorities and given rise to a fair amount of correspondence on that score in the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs. We do not know whether Quisling saw Artamónov again after the latter had moved to Odessa, but it is likely that he did so, both because Quisling was in Odessa later that

4. H, ARA Russian Section, box 147, nos. 27, 32 (correspondence between ARA Moscow and A.R.A. Kharkov, March of 1922); box 121, "Reports."

early summer to negotiate with the Soviet authorities there about matters related to the Nansen Mission and because Artamónov would have been a useful person to know in connection with Captain Fredrik Prytz's negotiations with the Soviet authorities regarding his Russian saw mill interests.

Chapter Six sketched Artamónov's background and his friend Woyciechowski's contention that Bashkóvich's immediate predecessor in the "new" PomGol position in Kharkov was an intelligence agent for the Polish General Staff and also a committed and loyal Monarchist, while others claimed that Artamónov was a double agent for the Russian secret police, the GPU. Of greater importance in the present connection is the fact that, regardless of where Artamónov's true loyalties lay, he appears to have been deeply involved in the Trust.[5] In addition, many ARA documents demonstrate that he and Bashkóvich worked together even after they were living in separate cities in 1922 and 1923.

Woyciechowski knew nothing about what Artamónov was doing in the period between 1921 and August 1923, when Artamónov turned up in Berlin, only to move to Warsaw by December of that same year. Alexandra's recollections, ARA documents, and the Quisling papers in Oslo fill in some of the gaps, however. In addition, the documents in the Hoover Archives show that Artamónov personally asked to be transferred to Odessa in the spring of 1922, where he continued to work as the "Plenipotentiary Representative" and as the liaison officer linking the central government, the Ukrainian authorities, and all the foreign relief organizations. On the face of it, the only difference in his professional status was that he now had his headquarters in the port city of Odessa instead of in Kharkov.

The move nevertheless constituted an important change for Artamónov because his position in Odessa soon afforded him en-

5. Woyciechowski, *The Trust*, Chapter 23.

try onto the Board of Trade. On August 31, 1922, ARA's Grove reported from Odessa that Artamónov, *at his own request*, had been relieved of his PomGol responsibilities so that he could concentrate on foreign trade.[6] He had, in fact, been active in this area for quite some time, while at the same time occupying his position within the Bolsheviks' international relief administration.[7]

A position on the Board of Trade provided a Soviet citizen with his most reliable chance of obtaining visas from European governments suspicious of the Soviet regime. Whether Artamónov was a genuine Monarchist or a GPU agent, he played his cards well when he moved over to the Board of Trade just when a new organization, "The Monarchist Union of Central Russia," was off to a good start and needed people who could travel about in Europe—as, it will soon become clear, Artamónov did.

In 1922, the Cheka police had been reorganized into the GPU under the leadership of the dreaded Dzerzhinsky, and it was now directly accountable to Stalin. Stalin had just been elected General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and had built up a surveillance network and a loyal bureaucracy that would be only too happy to see both Lenin and Trotsky out of the picture. In the meantime, many prominent Lenin supporters were still in high positions, among them the Ukrainian president Rakovsky—a name that turns up frequently in the Nansen and Quisling archives, both alone and in connection with Bashkóvich.[8] By the middle of 1922, the newly formed GPU had organized "The Monarchist Union of Central Russia," which was just another name for the Trust.

6. H, ARA Russian Section, box 121, "Reports" and "Grove Correspondence."

7. H, ARA Russian Section, box 121, folder 2 (letter from W. R. Grove to C. J. C. Quinn, August 22, 1922).

8. See, for example, the letter from Quisling to Nansen dated May 24, 1923. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, A_5A.

The organization's real purpose was to identify the most important counter-revolutionary leaders and to persuade them to return to Russia—usually to certain death. In a textbook example of double-dealing and infiltration, genuine Monarchists both inside and outside of Russia were made to believe that Bolshevik rule was weakening and that the Trust would help counter-revolutionary leaders travel in and out of Russia with impunity, enabling them to organize Monarchist resistance to the Bolsheviks. Those who headed the organization naturally knew better, and they had reason to expect their venture to be successful. Setting up a fake anti-Soviet organization just to see who took the bait was a formula that had already been well tested by the tsar's secret police. And the Trust was successful for several years—evidently the most successful undertaking of its kind in the history of espionage. The official count shows 37 volumes in the KGB's archives containing documents about the activities of the Trust. No less a person than Sidney Reilly, the master spy, was deceived by the organization.[9]

The Monarchist Union or the Trust was carefully camouflaged as the Moscow Municipal Credit Association, a commercial firm permitted to trade abroad under NEP rules. That enabled the Trust to obtain funds by means of trade, and because Russians traveling abroad as representatives of the Board of Trade were able to obtain visas and temporary residence permits in European countries otherwise closed to Soviet Russian citizens, written messages passed easily in and out of Russia under the organization's auspices. The same was true of the forged (and sometimes genuine, but unimportant) Russian documents by which the GPU

9. Phillip Knightley, "How the Russians Broke the Ace of Spies," *Observer Review*, April 12, 1992, pp. 49–50. Knightley remarks (p. 50) that the officers who saw to the daily running of the enterprise received little in return for their efforts. All but one of those who were responsible for the imprisonment and murder of Reilly fell out of Stalin's favor and were themselves shot.

obtained foreign currency. These fake documents were made in Russia under the supervision of the GPU and then sold through its agents in Europe.[10]

In this trade, the Trust took advantage of the great demand in Europe for any kind of information about Russia. Berlin was the center for much of this traffic.[11] It is, therefore, very interesting that Artamónov left Odessa for Berlin in August 1923 and then moved to Warsaw in December, as Woyciechowski noted. Artamónov was thus present in various European capitals just at the time Quisling and Maria Paseshnikova were traveling, both together and separately, to the same places. All of this travel took place during a period of intense activity for the Trust in its transfer of messages between Russia and countries abroad. Replies from Moscow to messages sent from Paris or Berlin could be received within a week.[12]

An episode from the Balkans illustrates how effective the sale and dissemination of forged documents might have been.[13] On April 16, 1925, a bomb exploded in the Bulgarian capital Sofia during the funeral ceremony for General Ghergieff, who had been assassinated in the street a few days earlier. The Bulgarian government was generally against Bolshevism and any other form of Leftist politics, and this had led to a great deal of unrest. According to London's *Daily Telegraph*, the fount of terror had now been traced directly to Moscow, "operating through propagandist agencies in various localities, of which Vienna and Varna are respective and notable examples." The Communist International

10. Kettle, *Sidney Reilly*, pp. 108–10; Lockhart, *Reilly*, pp. 138–151, 154–70; Woyciechowski, *The Trust*, Chapter 23.

11. Robin Bruce Lockhart, Jr., *Reilly, Ace of Spies*. Penguin Books, 1967, pp. 149–50.

12. Kettle, *Sidney Reilly*, pp. 110–11.

13. William Peyton Coates and Zelda Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*. London, 1943, second volume, pp. 200–203. The tone of this work, written at the height of World War II, is decidedly pro-Soviet.

categorically denied any connection with the Sofia outrages. As for the "documents" that had purportedly incriminated the Communist International (especially a letter sanctioning payments for secret couriers), they were forgeries, said the *Daily Herald* on May 5. Later still, the *Berliner Tageblatt* wrote that the actual forger was a certain Drujelowski, who had been arrested for forging documents early in May. A full report about this was printed in the *Manchester Guardian* on June 27, 1925, based on a cable from the paper's Berlin correspondent, who said that he could personally corroborate the main points in the German article.

Securing such efficiency and unrest required both money and couriers able to travel freely on ostensibly legitimate errands. Soviet Russian citizens with official appointments to the Board of Trade, such as Artamónov, could travel in and out of Russia with relative ease and also move around in Europe to some extent. Even so, travel within Europe might still raise many problems for a Soviet Russian citizen, as Maria's difficulties with her passport and visa demonstrated. Furthermore, such Soviet representatives had a relatively high profile and were, therefore, poorly suited to clandestine assignments. Access to a European diplomatic passport—or to any European passport—would be extremely helpful in the work of procuring both the necessary money for the Trust's activities and the necessary access to White Russian émigrés.

The unrest in the Balkans in 1925 was not much different from the conditions Quisling encountered there during his work for Nansen in 1923–24, and it does not seem to have put off Maria after she arrived with the documents she received from her superiors in Russia. Tsjubarov's request that GPU agents and their associates at the railroads treat her well in Russia safeguarded her for as long as she was still inside the Soviet Union, and her Nansen passport guaranteed her admission into France. But without Quisling's diplomatic passport, which was no doubt his greatest asset, she would neither have been able to travel around nor to stay in

France to deliver documents and infiltrate White Russian meeting places as industriously as she evidently did. Without Quisling's diplomatic passport, it is unlikely that Maria Paseshnikova would have been placed in a position to compromise him in a way that would have ended his career if the true story of her Nansen passport reached the ears of Nansen and the Norwegian authorities. A man could not so easily obtain a different citizenship through marriage, but a woman could—whether the "marriage" was the result of true love or a situation forced by the cynical use of sex.

When I shared this last thought with Alexandra, she said that the use of sex to compromise young girls and force them to dance to the tune piped by ruthless people was so common at that time that this had been the thought uppermost in hers and Nina's minds when Bashkóvich tried to abduct them. Equally common was the practice of luring men with the help of women who were now part of the game. Until Alexandra had read L.T.'s remarks, however, it had never occurred to her that she herself had been in an exposed position as a direct consequence of both her work at the telephone exchange and her friendship with Quisling. Nor had it occurred to her that Bashkóvich probably had intended to compromise her and subsequently use her as sexual bait to hook her unsuspecting foreign friend. As we know, she torpedoed those plans by first reporting Bashkóvich's behavior and then marrying Quisling.

When Quisling and Alexandra returned in 1923, Bashkóvich and his cohorts had a fresh opportunity to sink their claws into Nansen's assistant. It was a brilliant idea to force Alexandra to ask for Quisling's help in obtaining her old telephone exchange position at the PomGol for Maria. Moving from Bashkóvich's office in the PomGol's political-administrative section in another building placed Maria directly under Quisling's nose, handily disguised as his wife's needy acquaintance whom he had been able to help. With one stroke, Maria was not only close to both the

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unsuspecting Quisling and to Alexandra, but she also controlled the switchboard through which all the foreign relief organizations were still forced to make calls—and she could listen any time she pleased.

Because attractive women were so often used to ensnare men in the Soviet bureaucracy's net, and because it was clear to Alexandra that Quisling had, in some way, allowed himself to be outwitted, the thought naturally occurred to her in later years that Maria's entrance into her life might have been due to a plain case of Quisling's having been suckered. But how could the intelligent Quisling have allowed himself to be fooled, especially when he had so frequently lectured her about eternal fidelity and about the importance of avoiding gossip?

The likely answer is that Maria's supervisor, Bashkóvich, was fully aware of Quisling's vulnerability right from the moment Quisling and Alexandra turned up again in Kharkov in March 1923, when the cook-and-spy made such an issue of the fact that the Captain and his wife were not sharing a bed. For people on the lookout for a human weakness they could take advantage of, this news would have been enough to make a target of the inexperienced Quisling. His somewhat obvious conceit and ambition did not make him any less exposed, and his reputation as Nansen's assistance and his military rank also made him vulnerable to blackmail.

Maria's secretarial work for Quisling, for which he praised her (Chapter 19), probably began at the end of April or beginning of May 1923, by which time she was well within firing range. On April 15, Quisling had written to Nansen complaining about how hard it would be to find an assistant, which he would certainly need when Miss Tidemann of Kharkov's Nansen Mission returned to Norway at the end of that month.[14] As many documents from

14. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988, RU_3B.

1922 and 1923 demonstrate, when Quisling needed local workers, he had to use people who had been approved by the local Soviet authorities. Maria was already in place at the switchboard, and it would have been reasonable to suggest that she also do some work for Captain Quisling.

There is also Alexandra's account of how eager Quisling was to send her off to the Crimea, with her mother's relocation as a bonus, and Zhósya's information tells how Maria and Quisling kept each other company in Alexandra's absence. Perhaps the exact sequence of the events that followed may never be known, but at least it appears that the seduction had taken place before Alexandra returned from the Crimea. Whether the free train tickets and the stay down there were also a direct or indirect gift from the Trust will probably also remain a secret, but it is reasonable to suppose that such was the case. All told, it seems that the Soviet authorities in Kharkov left little to chance. L.T. said that shortly after Quisling and Alexandra had left in September, there were rumors that he had divorced Alexandra and taken her to Paris so that she could resume her ballet training.

Even as new answers are now emerging, new questions arise. Did Bashkóvich ask the beautiful, ambitious Maria to seduce Quisling so that she could go to Europe as the Captain's wife and a Soviet agent, or was it her own idea? For how long did Maria serve her Soviet masters after she arrived in Europe? And was Quisling ever personally active abroad on behalf of Soviet Russia, except for the fact that his diplomatic passport was so obviously useful to Maria in her work for the Trust?

It should be clear from Alexandra's further story, although it continues on the personal and not the global plane, that there are many fields of inquiry here for future historians if and when they gain full access to Russian archives concerning the time and the places involved.