

## An Intricate Workplace

Nansen had no reason to complain about his industrious representative. Quisling's workday was at least as long as Alexandra's, under conditions as horrible as the ones she described. In a letter to John Gorvin at Nansen's Moscow office on February 18, Quisling said that in Kharkov alone there had been registered 9,104 cases of epidemic disease in November–December 1921, a number that did not include soldiers and people who lay ill in their own homes.<sup>1</sup>

Quisling had already, on February 14, sent Nansen a telegram describing the horrendous conditions in the Ukraine. One day earlier, according to a Russian report, "Nansen's representative Captain Queensling [*sic*]" had been in a long meeting with "Dr. Boscovitsch" (the liaison between the Ukrainian Soviet-Socialist Republic and the foreign relief organizations) and Comrade Kaplan, "temporary president of the Central Committee of Relief for the Starving People attached to the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee." A Mr. Mathews, ARA's representative in the Ukraine, was also present and was told that since he was in no

1. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988 RU<sub>3</sub>B.

position to negotiate anything at all, he ought to follow Captain "Queensling"'s example and cooperate with the authorities.<sup>2</sup>

"Dr. Boscovitsch" or Bashkóvich is identical to "Baskowitz" in *Maria Quislings Dagbok* (p. 29) and to Alexandra's chief during her first period at the PomGol, which she describes below. A busy man in the Soviet hierarchy and a key person in the story of Alexandra, Vidkun and Maria, he will reappear in later chapters, as will the elegant Konstantin Artamónov, to whom Alexandra also refers in this chapter.

The head of ARA's Kharkov office, George P. Harrington, informed his Moscow headquarters on March 1 that Mr. Artamónov was Mr. Eiduck's special representative in Kharkov, and on March 13 he wrote: "All matters are now taken up with a Mr. Artamonov, who is the special government representative for foreign organizations and who is in direct touch with Mr. Eiduke in Moscow. We call him the Ukrainian Eiduke. Things have been running much smoother since he has been here and I think that in a short time, there will be no trouble outside the usual ones of exasperating delays."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, real changes had occurred in the PomGol's administration within the barely six weeks that Quisling had so far spent in the Ukraine, and there were soon to be more. One would expect that Quisling, who had been introduced to Artamónov immediately after his arrival in Kharkov, would also have felt this political turbulence. As early as May 16, 1922, the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs received a complaint from the Polish authorities stating that not only was Captain Quisling politically active and pro-Soviet to an unacceptable degree, but he also had a poor relationship with the ARA and was too familiar

2. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms. fol. 1988 RU<sub>3</sub>B; H, ARA Russian Section, "Ukraine—Childfeeding."

3. H, ARA Russian Section, box, nos. 27,127.

with “a Bolshevik Kommissar named Artamonoff,” to whom the Soviet government had attached him.<sup>4</sup>

The Polish complaint must be taken with a large pinch of salt for two reasons: first, Quisling was forced to contend with the political conditions and, second, he had to cooperate closely with all levels of the Soviet bureaucracy in order to accomplish what Nansen expected of him. We will nevertheless look more closely at what was being said about Quisling’s relationship with Artamonov, but first, here is Alexandra’s view of the situation from the inside.

Bashkovich, our PomGol chief, did not usually have much contact with the general office staff. I was, therefore, surprised when he summoned me to his office one day and told me that he had some very secret and important documents needing to be typed immediately and in complete confidence. He gave me his address and told me to be at his home by seven o’clock PM. I did not dare disobey by telling him flatly “no,” but I was not completely naïve. I knew the power of such men and had been well warned not to trust this kind of summons. I was scared, and when I returned to our office, I said to Nina:

“Listen, he tells me to go to his place for some typing this evening, and I don’t feel safe. Let’s go there together; I’d feel much better.”

“Sure, of course!” Nina replied. We loved each other like sisters and always helped each other. I have missed her friendship and company all the rest of my life.

When evening came, Nina and I went to Bashkovich’s place together. We rang the doorbell, somebody opened the door, and we found ourselves in a luxurious apartment. After greeting us, Bashkovich led us into a very large room, but instead of a work-

4. NB, Nansen Archive, Ms fol. 1988 RUO<sub>1</sub>, letter dated May 16, 1922.

room with a typewriter, we saw a large dining table laden with all kinds of rare foods and bottles of wine.

Nina and I both felt very embarrassed, and I said, "It seems you're having a party here. We'd better go. We can come back and do your typing some other time."

"But why have you brought a second typist?" Bashkóvich asked, with obvious displeasure.

"Didn't you say you had a lot of urgent work?"

"Well, forget about it, it's all right, perhaps two are even better than one," he said with a helpless gesture. "Let's have something to eat first—let's have a drink or two, and then we'll get down to work."

The food was really tempting, but while Bashkóvich was talking to us, a couple of other men came in and were looking at Nina and me in a way that made us even more uncomfortable and scared, especially because they were clearly not sober. So we said:

"No thanks—you know, we can't stay long anyway; it's better for us to go. Our mothers are waiting for us."

Thus, Nina and I managed to get away.

When we came to the office the next day, Bashkóvich acted as if nothing had happened. He did not even mention his urgent typing job, and we thought the danger was past.

A week or two later, when Nina and I were leaving the office, Bashkóvich was standing in the driveway next to a big, open touring car, talking to the driver. When he saw us, he said:

"Look here, I've just got a new car and want to try it out—come along for a ride, girls! We'll take you to the park and back."

We hesitated. It was hard to refuse such an attractive invitation. Bashkóvich continued: "Come on, come on, get in the car; we'll be back in ten minutes."

Sheepishly, Nina and I said all right, as long as we were to be back that soon.

I believe it was the first time in my life that I rode in an open car, or perhaps in any car. It was lovely. We drove fast, it was early spring, and a fresh, fragrant wind blew into our faces and streamed through our waving hair. We reached the park in a matter of minutes, but instead of turning back, the driver kept going farther and farther into the park.

“Where are we going?” I said. “This is the park! It’s getting late, let’s go back.”

Bashkóvich just smiled. “No, we just decided to go to our dacha in the suburbs. Our friends are waiting for us there. We have plenty of good food for you—chocolate bonbons and other nice things—you’ll like it, you’ll see.”

Now Nina and I were mortally afraid. We understood that we had been tricked into something dangerous, and we both started to protest vigorously: “No, no, it’s out of the question, we have to go home right away! Our mothers are waiting for us!”

“Never mind,” he said. “I’ll send the driver or somebody else to your homes to assure your poor mamas that you are in good hands.”

“Then save yourself the trouble and take us home right now!” said Nina, but the driver and Bashkóvich just laughed and drove on. There was no doubt now that the whole thing had been carefully planned for some sinister purpose that we could not even bear to think of. It took Nina and me only a few whispered words to agree that we must try to escape at the very first opportunity and resist our abductors with all our strength.

When the car finally slowed and stopped near a lonely country house, we jumped out and started running. Bashkóvich and the driver tried to stop us, but we broke away. The place was surrounded by big trees, and we had to be careful not to lose sight of each other in the growing dark. Meanwhile, several more men had come out of the house and joined the chase. But we were

young, sober, and scared, and, being drunk, they could not keep up with us.

When we were certain that we had shaken off our pursuers, we sat down on a log and wept, utterly exhausted and boiling with anger and fear. We became even more frightened with the realization that we were far from people and had no idea where we were. It had become completely dark, and there was still some snow on the road; with nightfall, the freezing cold had returned. And there we sat, in our thin dresses and worn shoes, alone and defenseless on a deserted country road while danger and lawlessness lurked everywhere.

Crying, we walked the many kilometers back to town and, without being arrested this time, managed to reach our homes in the middle of the night. As expected, we found our poor mothers beside themselves with worry.

Although Nina and I were proud to have outwitted Bashkóvich again, we were badly shaken by this second demonstration of what now looked like determined harassment. We decided that only a counterattack could save us, and as soon as it was morning, we went to see an important Party woman from the RABKRIN—the same woman who had helped Mama and me when we were evicted to give the People's Actress Sófía greater scope.

Listening to Nina's and my story, she grew very indignant and vowed to do everything in her power to "punish the unworthy man who has usurped his power and for his own personal, dirty ends betrayed the trust placed in him by the government." Then she took us to a highly-placed government official who also listened to our story with great interest and said that in such cases, Party men should be punished even more severely than ordinary citizens. He also made it clear that he had never trusted or liked Bashkóvich anyway.

It seemed that Nina and I had succeeded in setting the internal Soviet judicial system into very fast motion. When we re-

turned to our office the next day, we found that Bashkóvich had already left “on a temporary new assignment,” and that the PomGol had a new chief. Changes were made in office routines, and investigators took confidential depositions.

Somebody high up had decided that Bashkóvich should be judged in a closed Party court rather than at a public trial. Looking back, I assume that the trial was rigged, but at the time I suspected nothing. It turned out during the hearings that Bashkóvich and his cohorts had done far worse things in other instances; Nina and I had escaped very lightly. Together with several other witnesses, Nina and I had to give testimony in front of the judges in the Party court, where we were ordered not to divulge anything to anybody about what had taken place.

The trial and the court’s decision were never made public, and nobody seemed to know what had happened to either Bashkóvich or his comrades.

I took it for granted that the entire episode was an example of Nina’s and my vulnerability as young girls. It never occurred to me that I had been singled out to be compromised, or that these events had any kind of connection with Captain Quisling’s and my friendship. Most important to me at that time was the fact that our PomGol tormentor had been replaced by a much more likable person.

Our new chief, Konstantin Artamónov, was an exceptionally handsome and elegant man. According to his lifelong friend S. L. Woyciechowski (in whose book there is a picture of “Yúryi Aleksandrovich Artamónov,” whom I instantly recognized as my former PomGol chief), Artamónov was educated at the exclusive Emperor Alexander’s Liceum and was a volunteer in the Tsar’s Mounted Guards during World War I. Later, he fought against the Soviets on the northwestern front in the Civil War until that front collapsed in 1919. He then lived in Revel (now Tallinn) in

Estonia from 1921 until some unknown date.<sup>5</sup> To the best of my knowledge, nobody has managed to account for how he secured a trusted position in the Soviet hierarchy by the spring of 1922. In fact, Woyciechowski cannot account for any of the time between 1921 and August 1923, when Artamónov surfaced in Berlin before moving to Warsaw by December of that same year.

Artamónov's haughty and fastidious air had earned him a reputation for being a snob, but I believe he was also highly valued as an administrator, and Captain Quisling found him easy to get along with. We in the outer office admired Artamónov's style and loved catching sight of his equally elegant wife when she came to the office to see her husband. Scruffy and ill-dressed ourselves, it gave us a lift to see the beautiful and exquisitely groomed Artamónova in her silk dresses and smart hats.

Artamónov was supposed to deliver weekly Marxist lectures to his staff in order to educate us on political and social subjects. During one of those sessions, as he proudly and condescendingly sat in his armchair, rocking back on its two rear legs, he suddenly lost his balance and disappeared from sight, landing under and behind his desk. We greeted this performance with an explosion of loud laughter. Fortunately, he had the sense to laugh right along with us, which made him rise in our esteem.

He was nevertheless capable of losing his poise, such as one time when he thought we were trying to kill him. One of the nice young Americans from the ARA had given us a bottle of perfume, and we women had all brought from home small, empty bottles—reminders of the good old days—ready to divide our lovely present. Carefully, we counted out the precious drops: "Ten for you, Zimovnova, and ten for you, Nina," and so forth, until the job was done and we put the teaspoon we had used

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

back on Artamónov's tea tray. A couple of hours later we heard Artamónov's loud exclamations as he came tearing out of his office, clutching his throat and shouting that he had been poisoned. The situation was quickly explained, but I did not so soon forget Artamónov's look of real terror and his conviction that somebody might actually want to kill him. I was happy to learn from Woyciechowski's book that my old chief lived to a ripe old age and died of natural causes in São Paulo, Brazil in 1971.

Artamónov's position as the head of our PomGol office in Kharkov and the liaison between all foreign relief missions and the central Soviet government lasted only a couple of months. Then, he left as quietly as he had appeared among us. My friends and I took it more or less for granted that he had fallen out with the authorities, but we had no idea what might have happened to him.

Nor did Alexandra and her colleagues know that Bashkóvich was, in reality, still the "PolPredPomGol" (Ambassador to the Foreign Relief Organizations to Help the Starving), but with other, more extensive duties. Because the responsibility for the daily running of PomGol was left to others, he no longer worked in the same offices as Alexandra.

The same spring that Bashkóvich appeared to have been removed from his job for having bothered Alexandra and her friend Nina, he was promoted to the post that Comrade Kaplan had held on a temporary basis in February: "President of the Central Committee of Relief for the Starving People attached to the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee." (It was in this new and more prominent position that he served as Maria's employer.) The reason Artamónov also disappeared from Alexandra's and her friends' view was that, as "PolPredPomGol," Artamónov had moved into the other, new offices where Bashkóvich had already gotten his desk in May 1922, when he temporarily assumed this

higher position himself. Konstantin Artamónov occupied that position for just a short time, from the time he ceased being responsible for the daily routine of the regular PomGol office until he left Kharkov around May 13, 1922. On that date, ARA's district head in Kharkov, Harrington, wrote to Grove in Odessa: "Mr. Artamonov leaves for Odessa next Tuesday. His successor, Dr. Boskovitch [*sic*], and I are very friendly, and I think that there will be no great troubles."<sup>6</sup>

Harrington spoke too soon. Documents at the Hoover Archives reveal Bashkóvich as a man with a firm grip on everything under his authority and with a thorough grasp of intrigue. He placed his own people in key positions and made sure that they stayed there. His ruthless *modus operandi* is obvious in the story of a certain Mr. Skvortzov.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1922, Skvortzov had been in Kharkov for just a short while after arriving from Moscow with glowing recommendations from the ARA headquarters there. The word was that he had been a great help on several occasions because of his good relationship with the central authorities. Harrington wanted Skvortzov to work for him in Kharkov and wrote to the Communist Central Committee requesting their permission for this to take place. This permission was granted, but with the stipulation that Skvortzov had to go to Ekaterinoslav. When Skvortzov had settled in Ekaterinoslav, however, he soon developed a reputation among the ARA personnel there for being anything but helpful.

A year later, on May 10, 1923, ARA's Mr. Murphy in Ekaterinoslav was arrested by the local Cheka, which was under Skvortzov's command. Skvortzov claimed that "Boscowitz" in Kharkov had given the arrest order, while Bashkóvich maintained

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

7. H, ARA Russian Section, box 84, folder 7; box 122; box 123; box 124 no. 2; box 145 no. 30.

that the idea was entirely Skvortzov's own. A very irritated George Harrington—now in Ekaterinoslav—wrote on May 13 that it would not surprise him if Bashkóvich stood behind a plot aimed at provoking Murphy to the point where he would assault one of Skvortzov's men, whereupon he could be arrested (both happened). A soothing telegram from ARA in Moscow said that when Bashkóvich returned to Kharkov from Moscow on Sunday, he would immediately replace Skvortzov with another man.<sup>8</sup> A letter from Kharkov to Ekaterinoslav on June 2 nevertheless advised: "I have been requested by Dr. Bashkovitch to ask you to deal in the future exclusively with Skvortzov and not with the Gubispolkom."

We know little or nothing about how Quisling got along with Bashkóvich personally in 1922 and 1923. In March 1922, while Quisling reported to the international relief headquarters in Geneva on the increasingly desperate situation in the Ukraine, Artamónov still represented the local bureaucracy with which Quisling had to coordinate his work.<sup>9</sup> We shall, therefore, take another look at Artamónov here.

Artamónov's friend S. L. Woyciechowski claimed that Alexandra's elegant former PomGol chief was actually an intelligence officer for the Polish General Staff. It may seem somewhat odd, then, that it was the Polish authorities who complained about Quisling's friendly relations with Artamónov. It is equally strange that others considered Artamónov a double agent for the Russian secret police, the GPU. The third oddity is that Woyciechowski

8. Documents from this period show that Bashkóvich was often away on long inspection tours in his district, but it is also clear that he had his hands full in Kharkov at the same time, where he continued to be the liaison with the foreign relief organizations while a Dr. Batkis took care of the daily work in Kharkov's PomGol. H, ARA Russian Section, box 146 no. 30, letters from ARA/Kharkov to ARA/Moscow.

9. H, ARA Russian Section, box 120, no. 1; box 113, folder "Student Feeding."

himself believed that Artamónov was a dedicated and loyal monarchist. The fourth curiosity, but by no means the least, is that regardless of which side Artamónov in fact supported, he appears to have been deeply involved in an organization that later became known as the Trust and that, we will see, came to play a central role in Alexandra's experiences with Maria.<sup>10</sup>

Hoover documents show that Artamónov personally asked to be transferred to Odessa in the spring of 1922, and that at the end of August that same year, at his own request, he was freed from his PomGol duties in order to concentrate on foreign trade.<sup>11</sup> By that time, Vidkun Quisling and his young Russian bride were on their way back to Norway.

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

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