

Iain Lauchlan

Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia¹

Iain Lauchlan

Chapter published in Ian Thatcher (ed.), Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects. Essays in Honour of R. B. McKean (Manchester UP, 2005), pp.44-63.

The Okhrana is one of the great grey areas of late tsarist history. ‘Okhrana’ or more accurately ‘okhranka’ was the nickname for a loosely bound collection of police and intelligence agencies waging war against the forces of revolution and left-wing terror in the Russian Empire from 1881 to 1917.² Like many other espionage agencies, the secrecy surrounding the Okhrana meant that it has been the subject of rumour, exaggeration and myth.³ It has been depicted as a progenitor of the Cheka,⁴ yet its members were systematically arrested and executed by the early Soviet secret police. It was frequently referred to by the totalitarian school as a prototype of the all-seeing Big Brother police system,⁵ and yet the Okhrana was a relatively small organisation— with only a few thousand employees in a country of over 140 million people. It has been cited both as one of the principal causes of the revolution and as the pillar of Russian reaction, and yet it was reviled by revolutionaries and reactionaries alike. Many have presented the Okhrana

¹ The research for this article was completed thanks to generous grants from the British Academy’s Studentship and Post-doctoral Fellowship schemes and its Elisabeth Barker fund.

² The principal archives of the Okhrana are the Department of Police records held in Moscow, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [hereafter GARF], see: GARF, *Putevoditel’. Tom 1. Fondy GARF po istorii Rossii XIX- nachala XX vv.* (Moscow, 1994); & Stanford University, California, Hoover Institution [hereafter Hoover], Okhrana Collection.

³ See Iain Lauchlan, ‘Separate Realm? The Okhrana Myth and Russian Otherness’ in Chris Chulos (ed.), *Imperial and National Identities in Pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia*, (SKS, Helsinki, 2002) pp.70-99.

⁴ For example, Orlando Figes argued in his study of the Russian revolution that: ‘This constant battle with the police state engendered a special kind of mentality among its opponents. One can draw a straight line from the penal rigours of the tsarist regime to the terrorism of the revolutionaries and indeed to the police state of the Bolsheviks’: Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy. The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London, 1996), p.124

⁵ See for example, Amy Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Boston, 1990); Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).

as evidence of the anachronistic and backward nature of the late Imperial regime,⁶ and yet with its records have also revealed that it was a technological and methodological innovator in the arts of political control and surveillance.⁷

To gain a more realistic picture of this paradoxical organisation we must first look at its origins. Most of the Okhrana's leading officers were recruited from—and members of—the Separate Corps of Gendarmes. This was a paramilitary force distinct from the ordinary police. Up until 1880 the Separate Corps enjoyed a great deal of independence—it was subordinated only to a special office of the tsar's court: the Third Section. Some have seen the Third Section as evidence of a uniquely Russian brand of police despotism, yet it was based on similar organisations in Metternich's Austria and Napoleonic France, and part of a pan-European process systematising modern police methods.⁸ The Third Section was tsar Nicholas I's response to the liberal Decembrist uprising of 1825: whereby the emperor borrowed and re-tailored his opponents' ideas to prove that autocracy was the best possible means of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The true founder of the Third Section, Count A. Kh. Benckendorff, frequently reminded the gendarmes of their noble mission: 'Every man will see in you an official who through my agency can bring the voice of suffering mankind to the throne of the tsars, who can instantly place the defenceless and voiceless citizen under the protection of the sovereign emperor.'⁹

However, the gendarmerie was soon distracted from this utopian dream, notably by threats to the status quo from Polish parts of the empire in the 1830s and 1860s and from a burgeoning radical *intelligentsia* in Russia proper. In response the Third Section took on the role of a more mundane security police agency—as defenders of the state

⁶ See for example: F.S.Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police in Russian Society, 1880-1917* (London, 1996).

⁷ This process of reappraisal began even before the opening of the Russian archives: see example, D.C.B.Lieven, 'The Security Police, Civil Rights and the Fate of the Russian Empire, 1855-1917,' in Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (eds.), *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1989). This was certainly the view portrayed by the archivists of the Okhrana's foreign agency records during the Cold War, see: Andrew Kobal's preface and introduction to the Hoover Institution Archives. *Russia. Departament Politsii. Zagranichnaia Agentura, Paris. (A Guidebook)*.

⁸ On this subject see: Clive Emsley, *Gendarmes and State in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Oxford University Press [hereafter UP], 1999); & Sidney Monas, *The Third Section: Police and Society in Russia under Nicholas I* (Oxford UP, 1961).

⁹ P.S.Squire, *The Third Department: the establishment and practices of the political police in the Russia of Nicholas I* (London, 1968), p.78.

rather than guardians of the people's happiness. Consequently, the benign posturing of the new higher police force came to be viewed by many as a purely cynical method of socio-political control; and not without some justice: 'Public opinion,' the founder noted, 'has the same importance for the authorities as a topographical map has for an army commander.'¹⁰ In other words gendarme surveillance of the 'mood of the populace' (*nastroenie naseleniia*) was merely a means of defence *against*— rather than a purer form of— democracy. The gendarmes' particular brand of meddling altruism won them few friends amongst the new intelligentsia, who referred to these snoops as 'unwanted guests'.

Benckendorff envisaged an organisation that would be 'feared and respected.' Events in the 1860s and '70s seemed to indicate that the Third Section had failed on both counts. The old methods of open, demonstrative repression through arrest, exile and censorship were rendered partially obsolete by a number of new developments. Society had changed: the growing pace of urbanisation, a free peasantry and the granting of university autonomy in the 1860s gave birth to more radical, home-grown ideologies: particularly what Turgenev dubbed 'nihilism'— based on D. I. Pisarev's calls for society and state to be smashed and built anew on a scientific basis, rejecting the passive acceptance of all tradition and superstition, including old codes of morality and respect for authority. Technology was also a crucial factor in this process: rail travel, the high-speed rotary printing press (1865) and the invention of dynamite (1866) gave the radicalised opposition groups mobility, the chance for wider dissemination of their ideas and a weapon to intimidate the flesh and blood representatives of autocratic power. And the tactics of oppositionists had changed. Police repression was substantially to blame for this: as radical groups moved away from esoteric intellectual debate, calling themselves Populists, they sought to engage and learn from the peasantry and 'ordinary' Russian folk. The gendarmerie responded with wide-scale arrests of the young radical agitators 'going to the people' (particularly in the summer of 1874). Consequently, one section of the opposition movement turned away from open non-violent action and devoted itself to conspiracy and terror. By 1879 the new elements had crystallised into the People's Will movement. The gendarmerie was ill-equipped to deal with the changed methods of subversion: decked in rather extravagant blue uniforms, with white gloves, frock-coat and

¹⁰ Ibid., p.201.

sultan spike of white horse hair on the lamb skin parade helmet they were hardly what you would call a *secret* police force. Their founding directives in 1826 explicitly rejected conspiratorial work as dishonourable. People's Will had good reason to believe that through secret cells – so-called *piaterki* ('groups of five')– they had identified tsardom's Achilles heel.

Moreover, the training of gendarmes equipped them with only a shallow understanding of the difference between harmless freethinking and hostile radicalism. For example, the head of the gendarmerie in Kiev at the turn of the twentieth century, General V. D. Novitskii, was said to be so out of touch that he considered the poetry of Lermontov and Pushkin to be subversive and to have never heard of Marx, Plekhanov or Lenin.

Added to this was the fact that civil rights in Imperial Russia were codified for the first time in 1864. This seemed to vindicate tsarist claims that the autocratic legal system was the mildest in Europe. The state's ability to crush political unrest through judicial methods was significantly curtailed at the very moment when violent attacks on the state began. Many judges and juries of a liberal persuasion tended to allow political considerations to influence verdicts: for example, at the Nechaev trial of 1871 60 of the 87 were cleared despite clear evidence against them and in 1878 Vera Zasulich was acquitted of the attempted murder of the Petersburg Governor-General despite the fact that she did not even try to conceal her guilt. It seemed that the selective assassination of leading government figures – what Populists called the 'propaganda of the deed'– would 'give history a push' and topple the out-dated regime. This campaign culminated in the assassination of tsar Alexander II in 1881.

And yet the tsarist regime did not collapse. The revolution-reaction duet merely grew in complexity. Just as police repression prompted the birth of People's Will, so in turn the latter's wave of terror prompted a reconstruction of the security police system. Starting from the 1870s the state created loopholes in the liberal legal system, which allowed governors to declare states of emergency. The governors could then grant extra-legal powers of search and arrest to the gendarmerie and police, and to three agencies in particular: St Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw 'security sections' (*okhrannye otdeleniia*). The government attempted to rationalise and harmonise the hotchpotch of laws and

institutions by means of the Security Law (*Polozhenie ob okhrane*) of 14 August 1881 and the unification of all policing institutions under the Interior Ministry's Department of Police. This was intended in many ways as a reformist gesture: the hated Third Section was, after all, dissolved in 1880 in an attempt to rein in the arbitrary powers of the political police. Thus, the direct connection of the gendarmerie to the tsar was severed. Divorced from court milieu political policing was to be a cog in the bureaucratic machine. These measures were intended as a preliminary to the creation of a consultative legislative assembly. 'Ironically, such suspensions [i.e. the security laws] were the hallmark of transitions from absolutist to constitutional rule, from early modern *Polizeistaat*, or rationalised absolutism, to the rule of law.'¹¹ Yet, inevitably given the timing of events, the new system was viewed as a step backwards, a knee-jerk reaction to terrorism. The bureaucratic reforms combined with the devastating wave of political arrests in the early 1880s created the impression that Alexander III had created a vast new 'security' (*okhrana*) organisation: 'all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-capable.'¹² There was no official government agency called 'the Okhrana' (*okhranka*). Yet the term surfaced at this point in time as a convenient soubriquet, coined by the opposition to denote the confusing mass of secret police agencies. This invention allowed them to put a name to the intangible, invisible, central pillar of Russian reaction.

On the face of things the radical opposition had good reason to fear the new organisation: as a section of the Interior Ministry it was now part of the largest government institution outside the army. By 1900 the Department of Police had 50,000 employees. With the assistance of the commune watchmen, there were roughly 100,000 policemen in the Russian Empire. The Interior Minister also had control of the entire 15,000-strong Corps of Gendarmes. The Interior Minister was directly answerable to the tsar alone. A series of gifted, forceful (to the point of ruthlessness) and courageous Interior Ministers, such as V.K.Plehve, P.N.Durnovo and P.A.Stolypin, took an active interest in the war against subversives and came to embody the tsarist regime's "terrible mystique of

¹¹ J. W. Daly, 'On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia.' *Slavic Review*, 54, no.3 (1995), p.603. See also: P. Waldron, 'States of Emergency: Autocracy and Emergency Legislation, 1881-1917', *Revolutionary Russia*, 8 (1995), pp.1-25.

¹² V. Zhilinskii, "Organizatsiia i zhizn' okhrannogo otdeleniia vo vremena tsarskoi vlasti." *Golos minuvshago*, nos. 9/10 (Sept./Oct. 1917), p.306.

power”.¹³ Many Okhrana officers relished this fearsome reputation: ‘scattered throughout the country, with its departments, investigation points, and gendarme directorates, patiently listening to the reports of countless spies and scouts, constantly arresting, hanging and deporting, strong in its fund of bottomless human baseness, strong in the amount of blood and tears shed, strong in the annual ten million ruble fund, the Okhrana affected directly and indirectly all the measures of the government... The Okhrana set the tone...’¹⁴

Nevertheless, the fight was far from over. George Kennan remarked on Russia in the 1890s that ‘we have at present a strange spectacle. Before our eyes there has taken place something like a duel between the mightiest power on earth armed with all the attributes of authority on one side, and an insignificant gang of discharged telegraph operators, half-educated seminarists, high-school boys, and university students, miserable little Jews and loose women on the other, and in this unequal contest success was far from being on the side of strength.’¹⁵

But was this really an ‘unequal contest’? Russian nihilistic Populism did not fade away, it fused with Marxism, refined its methods and gave birth to the Socialist Revolutionary party and a ferocious campaign of terror that would claim the lives of over 10,000 government officials from 1901 to 1914. Contrary to popular perceptions, Russia was relatively *undergoverned*: the tsarist empire at the turn of the century had only 4 administrators per thousand inhabitants compared to 7.3 in England and Wales, 12.6 in Imperial Germany and 17.6 in France. To be sure, the Corps of Gendarmes was on the face of things an imposing political police force, with a staff of 15,000. However, only 2,500 were even vaguely connected to the political security policing (and most these were not involved in actual investigative work). As a force for social control the Okhrana was even weaker: In the villages it was dependent on the local police for all information. Even in the cities the co-operation of the ordinary police was essential in performing arrests and

¹³ See Jonathan Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866-1905* (Dekalb, Illinois, 1998), pp.149-50.

¹⁴ V.N.Russiiian, ‘The Work of Okhrana Departments in Russia’ MS in Hoover, Russiiian Collection, pp.4-6.

¹⁵ G.Kennan qutd. in W. B. Walsh, *Russia and the Soviet Union* (London, 1958), p.395.

mundane surveillance work.¹⁶ Russian per capita spending on the police was half that of Austria-Hungary, Italy and France and a sixth that of Great Britain. As a result ordinary Russian police were extremely under-equipped, poorly educated and paid less than most factory workers. In the countryside one constable with a few sergeants might have a beat of 1,800 square kilometres encompassing fifty to a hundred thousand inhabitants. So, instead of walking a beat, three-quarters of Russian police constables, even in the cities, were positioned at stationary posts and supposedly ‘slept like hibernating bears’.¹⁷

The Okhrana was not, therefore, an administrative megalith. The centralised and specialised structure— not the size— was the source of its power. Overall supervision of all police affairs, including Okhrana operations, was carried out by Department of Police at its headquarters on the Fontanka canal (no.16) in St Petersburg. Staff steadily increased in number over the decades from 161 full time employees in 1895 to 387 in 1914. The overwhelming majority of these officials, however, were not directly involved in security police affairs— they worked instead in nine Secretariats dealing with non-political and non-secret operations. A separate office inside the Department of Police exclusively devoted to secret political security policing— the Special Section (*Osobyi otдел*)— was only created in 1898. This occupied the entire top floor of the Fontanka HQ. As its name indicated the Special Section was different from the other offices of the Department of Police— it was closed to outsiders with an office staff of about 15 intelligence officers representing an elite, ‘a breed apart’.¹⁸

Beneath the Special Section, and the principal source of information, were the ‘Security Sections’. These were the active directors of the physical collation of intelligence and the executive arm of police repression. They carried out surveillance, infiltration, arrests and interrogations. Officers in these sections were usually gendarmes with a military education. Directors of the Department of Police, in contrast, were usually university educated, legally trained, career bureaucrats. The Special Section meanwhile involved a mixture of the two types of personnel and provided a link between operatives

¹⁶ See: Richard G. Robbins Jr., *The Tsar's Viceroys. Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (London, 1987).

¹⁷ Neil Weissman, ‘Regular Police in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914’, *Russian Review*, 20 (1985), p.65

¹⁸ For insiders accounts of the workings of the Okhrana see: P.E. Shchegolev (ed.), *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima* (7 vols., Leningrad, 1924-27); quotation from vol.III, Komissarov, p.145.

in the field and analysts at HQ. Security Sections— outside St Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw— were only created in the rest of the major cities of the empire in 1902.

Employees of Security Sections consisted of three types of personnel: At the top were the gendarmes and bureaucrats who acted as directors, case-officers, interrogators, recruiters, record-keepers, clerks and analysts. They came to be known as *okhranniki*. Secondly there were surveillance operatives (known as ‘external agents’) who secretly tailed ‘political unreliaables’ and acted as bodyguards to government officials. Many of their training manuals survive and seem to have been imitated by the KGB.¹⁹ These show that external agents received highly competent training in the art of surveillance. Nevertheless, they had their critics: Their appearance was a curious juxtaposition of the inconspicuous and the blindly obvious. Prime Minister Sergei Witte noted that they ‘can usually be spotted by their umbrellas and bowler hats.’²⁰ They usually wore ex-army issue greatcoats, which were easily recognisable. This poor attempt at urban camouflage gave rise to another nickname: ‘Green coats’. All the same, they were often the only source of information, and the very rumour of their existence tended to unnerve revolutionary conspirators. The third breed of spy was the infamous ‘internal agent’: informers who were in contact with— or even members of— the political opposition. The internal agency was the most valuable source: ‘without the Internal Agency’ wrote General Aleksandr Gerasimov (the Petersburg Okhrana chief, 1905-09), ‘the director of the political police is blind. The internal life of a revolutionary organisation, acting underground, is a wholly separate world, completely inaccessible to those who do not become members of the organisations.’²¹ Rather than sending loyal police officers out to infiltrate revolutionary cells, it was simpler for the Okhrana to scout for spies amongst ready-made members of the political underworld. These agents would usually be recruited after arrest. The technique of ‘turning’ a committed radical into a loyal servant of the Okhrana, developed at the tail end of the nineteenth century, involved subjecting an arrested radical to a

¹⁹ See: C. Andrew & V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 1999), p.31 with reference to Dmitrii Gavrilovich Evseev, *Basic Tenets of Intelligence* & idem, *How to Conduct Intelligence*. (Training manuals for the *Chekisty* in the 1920s). Compare: ‘Essential Handbook for KGB Agents,’ (published in London by the industrial Information Index, 1978), pp.23-40, ‘Instruction for External Surveillance’; & instructions on the Okhrana’s external surveillance: ‘Instruktsiia no.298’, Hoover, Okhrana, box 41, folder VI.f.

²⁰ Sergei Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, ed. Sidney Harcave (New York, 1990), p.433.

²¹ A. V. Gerasimov: *Na lezvii s terroristami* (Paris, 1985), p.56.

carefully paced, individually tailored 'seduction': a mixture of solitary confinement, tea and sympathy, threats of dire punishment (prison, exile or execution), and the promise of serving a good cause once more, or of money, power, prestige etc.

Secrecy was the key to the entire plan of attack. Officially, the very existence of the Special Section was secret. The location of a city's Security Section was, on the other hand, usually well-known; nevertheless, these fortified offices maintained a multitude of points of entry and exit so that officers could sneak in and out unnoticed. Group photographs of Okhrana employees were banned after one picture fell into the hands of the revolutionary underground in 1911. Most Okhrana chiefs wore plain clothes rather than gendarme uniform, they frequently changed address and often lived under an assumed name.

There was even a furtive air to the tsarist regime's acts of political repression. Like the NKVD, the Okhrana preferred to perform its arrests at night. Security Section officers often avoided attending these arrests in person in order preserve their anonymity. Bail was usually set at a large amount. If evidence was too flimsy for a trial the political prisoners were either released or banished from the locality in secret. Arrests, whenever possible, were performed simultaneously to prevent the opportunity for the arrestees to destroy any compromising materials. These operations were referred to by the suitably opaque bureaucratic term 'liquidation'. A liquidation would thus often lead to the sudden disappearance of a whole group of acquaintances over night. It is not difficult to see why the term began to take on the sinister connotations that reached fruition in the Stalin era.

One of the most secret aspects of the Okhrana's work was the establishment of so-called 'Black Cabinets'. These were concealed offices based at major postal depots, which supplied the political police with access to all correspondence by mail and telegraph throughout the empire. The Okhrana's legal right to intercept and copy mail, known as perustration, was tenuous to say the least, and consecutive Ministers of the Interior were obliged to deny that the practice even took place. Nevertheless, most opponents of the tsarist regime knew full well that the authorities read their mail.

The high level of secrecy meant that revolutionaries could only guess at the size and nature of the Okhrana. Consequently, the opposition seem to have over-estimated the omniscience of the secret police. Most thought that there was a Black Cabinet in

every city and even many towns of the empire. When one Soviet historian dredged the archives he only found evidence of seven such offices with a grand total of 49 employees before 1914; reports of others, he noted, ‘were sheer hallucinations.’²² Activists in the political underground imagined the cities to be infested with watchers and informers, and feared that their ranks were riddled with traitors. Early detractors of the Okhrana estimated that it employed up to 40,000 spies and referred to it as the most important prop to the tsarist regime. Yet when the police archives fell into the hands of the Provisional Government in 1917 they only managed to uncover 600 informers. Recent surveys of the archives have revealed that the Department of Police never employed more than 2,000 informers at any one time and most of these were not high-level spies.²³ The entire Okhrana budget usually accounted for less than ten percent of the total expenditure on police, reaching a peak of around five million rubles in 1914: generous, but hardly what one would expect for a ‘police-state’.

This level of expense on the Okhrana was shared between a reasonably modest number of agents. St Petersburg Security Section at its height had 750 employees: 25 officials of officer rank, 250 detectives engaged in bodyguard duties, 220 shadowing ‘political unreliaables’ and performing various other miscellaneous tasks, 70 case officers and intelligence analysts, and 200 informers. St Petersburg’s security force was about twice the size of the Moscow branch. The Okhrana had a ‘Foreign Agency’ based in Paris, which became notorious in western Europe. Yet this branch was also rather small—with four case officers, 40 detectives and 25 secret agents. The entire Okhrana outside these three centres probably amounted to little more than a thousand employees. Low staff numbers may well have been the key to their success: It meant that salaries were high and consequently they attracted more talented and ambitious officers than the ordinary police or military (though also, of course, a fair number who were greedy and unscrupulous). From 1905 to 1911 the Okhrana was used as a model for imitation by the other security services: the ordinary police, criminal investigations and military intelligence.

²² R. Kantor, ‘K istorii chernykh kabinetov,’ *Katorga i ssylka*, vol.XXXVII (1927), p.93.

²³ Z.I. Peregodova, ‘‘Istochnik izucheniia sotsial-demokraticheskogo dvizheniia v Rossii’’, *Voprosy istorii*, no.9 (1988), p.96.

The *okhranniki* were imitated because they were pioneers in the science of modern espionage. Just as the 1860s brought technical innovations which strengthened subversive movements, the 1890s saw developments which greatly enhanced police counter-subversion across the globe. The tsarist secret police were among the first in Europe to utilise new ‘tradedcraft’ and technology such as fingerprinting, Bertillon’s anthropometric system²⁴, photographic identification, photo-fits, code-breaking, bugs, phone taps, typewriters, telegraphy, bullet-proof vests, tear gas, ‘tranquilising guns’ etc.²⁵ They also made prophetic warnings about the possible use of aeroplanes and trains for terrorist acts.

Technological breakthroughs, ambitious personnel and the unscrupulous practise of conspiracy, espionage, disinformation and intimidation formed a potent combination. Most inside accounts depict the offices of the Okhrana as an incredibly dynamic milieu: ‘like an enormous machine... the surveillance agents spied, the translators translated, the “region” wrote to the province, the “top secret” office tried to get copies of letters, the “clearing” office cleared, the office recorded and reported to higher authorities, and clerks dashed from office to office, they were always busy pounding typewriters, using hectographs, making inquiries, and writing endless memoranda.’²⁶ The whole impression is of an organisation that never rested and never slept (indeed a large part of its business was conducted at night).

When considered purely in terms of data collation the Okhrana’s intelligence output was exceedingly impressive: By 1900 the Special Section had amassed a card index of 55,000 names, a library of 5,000 revolutionary publications and 20,000 photographs. By 1917 the card index was rumoured to contain up to three million names. Reports were regularly issued to the lower rungs of the Okhrana through twice monthly circulars and in a twice-weekly synopsis that was sent to the Minister of the Interior and the tsar. To disseminate a digested form of this information the Department of Police produced an ‘alphabetical list of persons under investigation’, a sort of who’s who of the revolutionary underground. The 1889 list had only 221 names and in 1899 still only 624 names, but the 1910 list contained some 13,000 names in a series of huge grey volumes.

²⁴ The measuring and recording of physical dimensions of prisoners as a means of future identification– a system still employed by Interpol to this day.

²⁵ For example, see: A.T.Vassilyev, *The Ochrana: The Russian Secret Police* (London, 1930), pp.93-95. David Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The story of Secret Writing* (New York 1976).

²⁶Russian, ‘The Work’, pp.4-5.

Department of Police's card index was said to contain: 'the names of all social activists, a card for almost any intelligent person who at one time in life had ever thought about politics.'²⁷

The Okhrana handled this data with greater subtlety and cunning than is often recognised. It has been viewed as a heavy-handed reactionary forefather of the Soviet terror machine. It has also been cited as evidence of the Russian *Sonderweg* or 'exceptionalism'.²⁸ However, it must be borne in mind that the Okhrana was by no means unique in Europe and was an organisation that had originally based its methods on western systems of political surveillance and control.²⁹ Rather than evolving into the Cheka, the Okhrana was the most notable case of discontinuity between tsarist and Soviet regimes. For example, while large sections of the lower ranking tsarist bureaucracy went on to work for the Soviet state (e.g., up to 90% of the staff of the Soviet Justice Commissariat were inherited from the tsarist regime), there are only a handful of documented examples of Okhrana officers joining the Cheka.³⁰ In fact the revolutionary Cheka avoided any association with the counter-revolutionary Okhrana. By the mid-1920s the Soviet secret police spearheaded a witch-hunt for former Okhrana agents as a means of 'purging' society. In contrast to the Cheka, attitudes of the *okhranniki* to their deadly enemies were surprisingly moderate. True, both policemen and revolutionaries were hardened by the protracted conspiratorial struggle. Yet even Soviet historians admitted that, aside from isolated examples, the Okhrana did not systematically employ any kind of torture. Attitudes varied of course, but S.P. Beletskii, a vigorous and aggressive police chief, gave a fairly typical insight into Okhrana attitudes to the radical opposition when he said that: 'I understand the struggle with the revolution, with the enemies of the state order. It is an honest struggle, eyeball to eyeball. They blow us up

²⁷ Zhilinskii, "Organizatsiia i zhizn", p.267.

²⁸ See, for example: Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pt. 3, pp.151-52. R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (London, 1974), p.302.

²⁹ For a discussion of this see: Iain Lauchlan, *Russian Hide-and-Seek. The Tsarist Secret Police in St Petersburg, 1906-1914* (Helsinki, 2002), pp.57-74.

³⁰ I.A.Zybin, the head of the Okhrana's cryptology section continued work in this area for the Soviets. General V.F.Dzhunkovskii, the Assistant Minister of the Interior 1913-15 was pressured into working briefly as a consultant for the Cheka. Henri Bint, the French head of the Foreign Agency's team of detectives in Paris, appears to have helped establish OGPU surveillance operations abroad.

and we prosecute them and penalise them.³¹ This counter-subversive war was less bitter than under the early Soviets because the tsarist secret police pursued enemies of the state not ‘enemies of the people’; it aimed to contain, not annihilate, hostile elements; to control, not transform, society.

The Okhrana’s attitudes to the liberal political parties have often been misunderstood. The small number of spies in the centre parties and the comments of police chiefs seem to indicate that the Okhrana, particularly between 1906 and 1914, was never as anti-liberal as its enemies claimed. Relations with the moderate reformist Kadet party were soured not due to their ‘liberalism’, but by the simple fact that the Kadets refused to condemn left-wing terrorists and that their slightly naïve demands for wider civil liberties might make them a Trojan horse for the revolutionary movement.³² The *okhranniki* felt that they had a fairly valid reason to cling to their authoritarian ways: they observed that revolutionary violence was worse after, rather than before, the liberal October Manifesto. They were driven by Stolypin’s conservative belief that: ‘The punishment of a few prevents a sea of blood.’³³ In assisting Prime Minister Stolypin in the ‘coup’ of 3 June 1907— whereby parliament was dissolved and a more conservative electoral law introduced— the Okhrana could, paradoxically, even be said to have helped to have saved the Duma from complete abolition at the hands of the tsar. Events following the brief flowering of liberty in 1917 seemed to vindicate the policy of extreme caution.

The hostility of the liberal parties to the tsarist state has also perhaps been overstated. Russian moderates were shocked by the mass, spontaneous, revolutionary violence of 1905-07 and briefly recognised that they should fear the masses, “more than all the government’s executions, and must bless this regime which alone, with its bayonets and prisons, still protects us from the people’s wrath.”³⁴ Many moderates even recognised after 1917 that they were as much to blame as the tsarist regime for failing to find a workable compromise between security and reform in the long run.

³¹ S.P.Beletskii qutd. in C.Ruud and S.Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsars’ Secret Police* (Quebec, 1999), p.307.

³² Melissa Kirschke Stockdale, ‘Politics, Morality and Violence: Kadet Liberals and the Question of Terror’, *Russian History*, vol.22 (Winter 1996), pp.455-80.

³³ S.A.Stepanov, *Zagadki ubiistva Stolypina* (Moscow, 1995), p.34.

³⁴ M.O.Gershenson qutd. in: D.Lieven, ‘The Security Police, Civil Rights and the Fate of the Russian Empire’, in Olga Crisp (ed.) *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1989), p.262.

Rather than viewing the opposition groups as a single amorphous mass, the Okhrana established separate desks to study different parties: with tactics individually tailored and changing over time to meet the varying threats of mainly Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, anarchist communists, other Russian Social Democrats, Jewish workers' parties, Polish socialists, Latvian SDs, Armenian nationalists (Droshak/Dashnaktsutiun), the Georgian Social Revolutionary federalist party (Sakartvelo), the Party of Active Resistance in Finland, Zionists, and the liberal Union of Liberation (1904-05). There is a tactile quality to the Okhrana studies of the revolutionary movement: SRs were registered on red cards, Social Democrats (SDs) on blue cards, anarchists on green cards, students on yellow cards and all others involved in politics on white cards. All houses in major cities were colour coded in the police records if the buildings had any connection with the movement of revolutionaries (not only if a political suspect lived there, but also if one ever happened to visit). The analysis of the tangled mass of ideologies, parties, individuals and social groups was graphically represented in vast spidery synoptic charts.

The intelligence processed was not merely the fuel for repression: security police often sympathised with some of the grievances which gave rise to rebellion. For example, one gendarme reported in 1885 that: 'Having had the opportunity to examine closely the life of factory workers I can find very little difference between their position and that of the earlier serfs; the same want, the same need, the same rights; the same contempt for their spiritual needs... [As yet the workers do not seem to be interested in politics, but] that evil day is coming closer and closer.'³⁵ The pressure from such reports had led to progressive Bismarckian Factory Acts in 1882, 1885 and 1897 and the Factory Regulations of 1886 and Sickness and Accident Insurance Bill of 1912. The reasoning behind Okhrana conciliation was summed up by the head of the secret police in Moscow, Sergei Zubatov, thus, "economics are for the working man infinitely more important than any political principles. Satisfy the people's requirements in this respect, and they will not

³⁵ Quid. in Norman M. Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement under Alexander III* (Harvard UP, 1983), pp.33-34.

only not go into politics but will turn over to you all the radicals; revolutionaries without the mass are generals without an army.”³⁶

Zubatov’s mentalité goes some way to explain why in general the more sophisticated security police officers were loath to ‘liquidate’ revolutionary groups unless it was felt to be strictly necessary: indiscriminate arrests and harassment only tended to widen opposition to the tsarist regime. Consequently, the Okhrana appears to have given oppositionists a fair amount of room to slip in and out of the police net (as the pre-1917 careers of Lenin, Stalin, Trotskii et al. testify). Yet, when the Okhrana did act, the impact on the revolutionary movement was profound. Plehve and Sudeikin decimated People’s Will in St Petersburg thanks to their spy Sergei Degaev; and A.S.Skandrakov, a director of Moscow Okhrana, was able to annihilate the leading cells of Black Repartition in 1884 thanks to information of his spy, S.K.Belov. The Okhrana effectively took control of Socialist Revolutionary party’s terrorist campaign after 1905 when their agents Evno Azef in St Petersburg and Zinaida Zhuchenko in Moscow were promoted to the top rank of the SR Battle Organisation. The SR leadership fled abroad once more in the post-1905 years of ‘Stolypin reaction’, but the Okhrana was never far behind: from 1910-14 of the 140 registered members of the SR party in Paris fourteen were spies.³⁷

Police Director S.P.Beletskii pursued a particularly devious strategy of divide and rule against the Marxist Social Democratic party, so as to prevent the evolution of a broad-based popular socialist party on German lines. The key agent in this campaign was the party activist Roman Malinovskii, who was persuaded to shift from the moderate wing of the SDs (the Mensheviks) to the more extremist Bolshevik faction to promote division among Marxists and weaken their influence over the trades unions. Malinovskii went on to become the leading Bolshevik representative in the State Duma. The Okhrana produced detailed analyses of divisive issues within the SD Party. This entailed developing a holistic approach to intelligence gathering. For example, the secret police monitored not just their movements and beliefs, but their personal lives, and those of their families. The Bolshevik party was consequently riddled with Okhrana spies at the highest

³⁶ Kyril Tidmarsh, ‘The Zubatov Idea’, *American Slavic and East European Review*, 19 (Oct. 1960), pp.342-43.

³⁷ See: Anna Geifman, *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Delaware, 2000) & Nurit Schleifman, *Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement: The SR Party 1902-1914* (London, 1988).

level– including the editor of *Pravda*, Miron Chernomazov. It was rumoured that at the Prague conference of January 1912 ten out of the thirteen Bolshevik delegates were Okhrana informers. Allegations persist that Stalin himself was an Okhrana spy.

The system backfires

And so the Okhrana achieved great success. But at what cost? Repression decimated the political opposition at the expense of the moral credibility of the tsarist regime. The Okhrana was viewed as ‘the living symbol of all that is most repressive, cruel, mean and revolting in autocracy.’³⁸ Consequently– to put it in newspeak– the regime lost the battle to win hearts and minds in the war against terror. The Habsburg Ambassador in St Petersburg, Count Alois von Aehrenthal, observed in the wake of the assassination of the Okhrana’s chief architect, V.K. von Plehve, in 1904 that: ‘The most striking aspect of the present situation is the total indifference of society to an event that constituted a heavy blow to the principles of the Government...I have found only totally indifferent people or people so cynical that they say that no other 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 the part of the highest authority.’³⁹

Secrecy enabled the Okhrana to sow suspicion and discord among the radical opposition, but it also aroused many of the same feelings inside the government itself. Well-to-do members of society, the court camarilla and senior officials (viz. the Okhrana’s natural constituency of supporters) looked askance at an organisation that concealed its activities even from Russian officialdom.

Moral concerns over the actions of the Okhrana inside the government led to disputes over security police methods. Consequently a rival camp emerged inside the Separate Corps of Gendarmes. These opponents came mostly from those officers not directly involved in secret political work: those assigned to police provincial towns, canals, railways and border areas: the ‘crumbs’ of security work, as one bored gendarme put it. These gendarmes considered themselves to be of the old school and resented the fact that this new breed of secret policemen had pushed them into the second rank of political investigations. The *okhranniki* had little respect for the ordinary ‘blues’ who attempted to

³⁸ Azeff quoted in Boris Nicolaievsky, *Azeff: the Russian Judas* (London, 1934), p.129.

³⁹ Qutd. in Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, 1988), p.54.

penetrate the exclusive world of espionage: ‘In the environs of the Corps of Gendarmes some amateurs liked to play Sherlock Holmes. But in reality they usually proved to be bad detectives.’⁴⁰

The SR Viktor Chernov mocked this as a ‘battle of mice and frogs.’ In 1910 he characterised the contrasting behaviour of the two competing police cliques with a theatrical analogy: the conservative style of the reactionary camp in court under Kurlov versus the ‘reactionary *style moderne*’ of *okhranniki* under Stolypin: ‘One proceeding proscenium, face to face, the other backstage: one proceeding officially— carrying out searches, seizures, arrests, formal investigations; the other — the exact opposite, conducting everything with a monopoly of secrecy...He who does not risk, does not gain—that is their slogan. The old gendarmerie would have had a completely different slogan—there’s would have been “A bird in the hand”... And so the friction grows. The Okhrana looks on the gendarmes with contempt. The gendarmes look on the *okhranniki* with mistrust. They speak different languages, they are “barbarians to one another”.’⁴¹

These internal feuds meant that the supply of intelligence was sometimes tainted by the desire of police officials to cultivate powerful patrons. Patronage could elevate a talented security official to the helm of the Okhrana, but it also meant that amoral intriguers often rose to the top. Attempts to cultivate the support of courtiers were partly to blame for the rank flirtation of some maverick *okhranniki* with extreme right-wing parties between 1905 and 1914, the composition of dubious reports on the dire threat of Russian Freemasonry and their shenanigans involving shady characters in court such as Rasputin.⁴²

The human factor

A second flaw in the machine-like system— based as it was on a frantic work-load and claustrophobic levels of secrecy, deceit and danger— was that it took a heavy toll on the human cogs. For example, the security police officials became, not surprisingly, the principal targets for terrorist attacks. Three out of the six Ministers of the Interior were

⁴⁰ A. P. Martynov, *Moia sluzhba v otdel'nom korpuse zhandarmov* (Stanford, 1972), p.24.

⁴¹ V. Chernov, ‘Iz mira merzosti i zapusteniia.’ *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.2 (Paris, 1910), pp.114 & 119.

⁴² See: Iain Lauchlan, ‘The Accidental Terrorist: Okhrana Connections to the Extreme-Right and the Attempt to Assassinate Sergei Witte in 1907’, *Revolutionary Russia*, vol.14, no.2 (Dec.2001), pp.1-32.

killed by terrorists between 1902 and 1911 (Sipiagin in 1902, Plehve in 1904 and Stolypin in 1911). Two attempts were made to kill another, P.N.Durnovo, in 1905 and 1906. During the more tumultuous months of 1905 police were often too afraid to leave their homes as Okhrana offices were subjected to bomb attacks; and assassins – prepared to take pot-shots at anyone in a uniform– could be hired in the western provinces for as little as three rubles.⁴³ A police report in 1909 lists 190 high government officials who were victims of political attacks from 13 May 1903 to 2 March 1909, of these 58 were senior police officials (29 killed, 18 wounded and 11 other attempts). From February 1905 to May 1906 over 700 police officials of various ranks were killed in terrorist attacks.

Even the Petersburg Okhrana officers who escaped assassination often ended their careers in disgrace as they were blamed for any security mishaps. The Director of the Department of Police, A.A.Lopukhin, was branded a murderer by his boss for failing to prevent the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei in 1905. The head of St Petersburg Security Section, L.N.Kremenetskii, lost his job after the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1905, even though the atrocity was carried out by soldiers, and not the security police. A.V.Gerasimov himself was undone by the Azef scandal and the virulent wave and bureaucratic back-stabbing which followed it in 1909. And the Assistant Minister of the Interior, P.G.Kurlov, was dismissed for dereliction of duty after the assassination of his boss, the Prime Minister, Stolypin, by the Okhrana agent Dmitrii Bogrov in 1911. These cases were all the more poignant because all of them were the result of ‘turned’ spies betraying their Okhrana supervisors and rejoining the revolutionary cause. Okhrana officers were often literally hoist with its own petard. This danger had been apparent ever since the pioneer of the internal agent system, G.P.Sudeikin, was shot and beaten to death by a gang directed by one of his own secret agents, Sergei Degaev, in 1883.

The psychological pressure of this sort of work was immense. The Moscow revolt of December 1905 caused the head of the local Security Section, A.G.Peterson, to have a nervous breakdown. A Department of Police circular records a ‘lamentable episode’ in 1909 in which the Okhrana warned a local Governor that terrorists were planning an attempt on his life. The anxiety prompted by this warning caused the unfortunate

⁴³ Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917* (Princeton UP, 1993).

Governor to die of a heart attack.⁴⁴ Fear and stress undoubtedly contributed to the moral degeneration of a number of agents. Okhrana officers of the besieged Warsaw and Riga sections were accused of torturing prisoners.⁴⁵

The root of this alleged ethical breakdown was the fact that the Okhrana occupied such an ambiguous position: as fanatical defenders of tsarism, working in confusingly close proximity to the revolutionary underground it was nigh on impossible for any security chief to pursue a lengthy career in this labyrinth of deceit without getting a little sullied in the working. The lines between right and wrong, ally and enemy, reactionary and revolutionary were wholly blurred. Some of the leading police chiefs – such as S.V.Zubatov,⁴⁶ P.I.Rachkovskii,⁴⁷ M.E.Bakai,⁴⁸ L.P.Menshchikov,⁴⁹ and A.M.Harting,⁵⁰ – began their conspiratorial careers as revolutionaries. Zubatov's trades unions spiralled out of control and were the direct cause of the 1905 revolution.⁵¹ Bakai and Menshchikov crossed back over to the revolutionary camp after 1905.

In fact the secret police had always been locked in a strange symbiotic relationship of mutual fear and imitation with the revolutionary movement. Like the revolutionary movement it was a polycentric, amorphous entity, constantly evolving, defying simplistic definition. Like the revolutionary movement, the secret police traced its roots to the

⁴⁴ Hoover, Okhrana Collection, Box 158, folder 10, S.E.Vissarionov, Police circular 5 Jan.1910.

⁴⁵ See: Karl Mitsit ("Martyn"), 'O pytkakh v Rizhskom sysknom otdelenii', *Byloe*, 13 (Paris 1910), pp.139-48.

⁴⁶ Zubatov (1864-1917) was recruited by Moscow Okhrana in 1886, he was exposed a spy in 1887 and was soon after taken on as an officer in the same branch. In 1893 Zubatov became assistant head of Moscow Okhrana, and in 1895 head. He went on to become head of the Special Section from 1902 to 1903.

⁴⁷ Rachkovskii (1851-1910) was intermittently a revolutionary and Third Section spy during the 1870s, from 1885-1902 he was head of the Foreign Agency, and from 1905-06 head of the 'political section' of the Department of Police.

⁴⁸ M.E.Bakai was recruited as an Okhrana spy in Ekaterinoslav from 1900 and soon after took up a position in the offices of Warsaw Okhrana. He began secretly working for Burtsev while still employed at Warsaw, he was caught and exiled to Siberia in 1907; in 1908 he escaped from exile and went to work for Burtsev in Paris.

⁴⁹ L.P.Menshchikov (1869-1932) was a member of People's Will until his arrest and recruitment into Moscow Okhrana's internal agency in 1887; 1889-1902 he worked in Zubatov's office; 1902-06 in the Special Section; he was sacked in 1906 for sending a letter to an SR identifying party members as Okhrana spies; in 1906 he moved to France and began working for Vladimir Burtsev.

⁵⁰ Harting worked as an agent of the Third Section and the Okhrana in the early 1880s under his original name of Gekel'man; he was forced to flee abroad after his exposure in 1884; in Zurich he began working under the name of Landezen for Rachkovskii; in 1900 he changed his name to Harting and became head of the Berlin branch of the Okhrana; in 1905 he worked with Rachkovskii in the Special Section and went on to become head the Foreign Agency from 1905 until his exposure in 1909.

⁵¹ Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St. Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton UP, 1976). Jeremiah Schneiderman, *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism* (Cornell UP, 1976).

Decembrist uprising of 1825. Each side largely existed because of the other. Both claimed to serve the interests of the people. Tsarist police repression was unleashed to combat violent radical opposition; and the radical opposition to the tsarist regime grew often because the regime unleashed police repression. People's Will developed conspiratorial cells and the Okhrana trumped them with 'an ultrasecret form of organising political investigations.'⁵² Nechaev conceived the 'Revolutionary Catechism' and gendarmerie responded by attempting to cultivate a 'moral superiority over the enemy...[whereby] revolutionary fanaticism must be counterbalanced by fanatical loyalty to the service.'⁵³ *Okhranniki* claimed that the revolutionaries 'preyed on the psychologically disturbed'⁵⁴ in order to recruit new members. The same accusation could be levelled at the Okhrana's methods of enlisting secret agents: 'Some provocateurs,' a police chief confessed, 'exhibit an element of sadism... [they seek] to derive pleasure from a double degradation of people... To dominate people, to send them to the gallows, to play with them as a cat plays with a mouse.'⁵⁵

Both secret police and revolutionaries were prey to corrosive effects of prolonged submersion in the conspiratorial milieu: 'The very way of life of the terrorist has a stupefying effect. It is the life of a hunted wolf... Apart from five to ten like-minded persons, one must deceive from morning to night literally everyone; one must hide from everyone, suspect in everyone an enemy... One needs extraordinary fortitude to think and work at all under such unnatural conditions. But even those who possess it, unless they extricate themselves quickly from the quagmire of their situation, quickly go under. For individuals of less calibre, these perpetual intrigues with spies, false passports, conspiratorial apartments, dynamites, ambushes, dreams of murders and escapes prove even more disastrous.'⁵⁶

The secret police and revolutionary underground were so interconnected that it was not always entirely clear who benefited most from the actions of Okhrana spies. Vladimir Burtsev, a leading émigré opponent of tsarism, launched a campaign of counter-

⁵² Chernov, 'Iz mira merzosti', p.116.

⁵³ J. Schneiderman, 'From the Files of the Moscow Gendarme Corps: A Lecture on Combating Revolution', *Canadian Slavic Studies*, II, no.1 (Spring 1968), p.89.

⁵⁴ Martynov, *Moia sluzhba*, p.42.

⁵⁵ Russian, 'The Work', p.24.

⁵⁶ Lev Tikhomirov, one-time ideologue of People's Will who went on to work for tsarist censors, qtd. in Richard Pipes, *The Degaev Affair: Terror and Treason in Tsarist Russia* (Yale UP, 2003), pp.17-18.

Okhrana publicity, whereby he persuaded a number of police agents to defect to the revolutionary camp and expose this 'world of vileness and desolation'.⁵⁷ Yet the exposés seem to have depressed and embarrassed the revolutionary movement more than it damaged the Okhrana. On the other hand, Roman Malinovskii's election to the Duma had been made possible by the assistance of the Department of Police. In the Duma Malinovskii proved an inspiring orator, speaking on 22 occasions in the first session of the Fourth Duma and on 38 in the second session, he signed 54 interpellations and made five legislative proposals. This could hardly have been defined as doing only the bare minimum in order to preserve his cover. Lenin may well have been aware of and tolerated Malinovskii's Okhrana connections because this police agent was so useful to the Bolshevik fraction. It is also odd that the most successful Okhrana spy, Evno Azef, was alleged to have masterminded a total of 28 terrorist attacks on government officials. Rumours circulated that the *okhranniki* were themselves 'secret revolutionaries' and that they plotted the assassination of rivals inside the government.

A war against society

A third and fatal flaw in the tsarist security police system was the fact that it was designed to isolate and remove individual troublemakers: to infiltrate and paralyse small, conspiratorial subversive groups. Yet the political struggle had widened exponentially by 1905 and came to involve, to varying degrees, all sections of society. The cancer could no longer be dealt with by surgical extraction. Attempts to do so often only made matters worse and alienated moderates such as ex-police chief A.A.Lopukhin: 'The whole political outlook of the ranks of the Corps of Gendarmes boils down to the following propositions,' he wrote, 'there is the people and there is the state... As a result [of this bipolar view], the protection of the state... turns into a war against all of society... By widening the gulf between the state and the people, the police engender a revolution.'⁵⁸

The upheavals of 1905 were the turning point in this regard. Peasant *jacqueries* ravaged central Russia from 1905-1907, destroying around 2000 estates. From 1905 to 1910 alone over 9,000 persons were killed in 'terrorist' attacks, the overwhelming

⁵⁷ A phrase used by V. Chernov.

⁵⁸ A.A. Lopukhin, *Iz itogov sluzhebnogo opyta: Nastoiashchee i budushchee russkoi politsii* (Moscow, 1907), pp.32-33.

majority of whom were government officials. The Okhrana specialised in the infiltration and suppression of small conspiratorial cells. Yet these attacks were, on the whole, not perpetrated by organised groups. Affiliates of the main pro-terror party– the SRs– claimed direct credit for less than ten terrorist attacks from 1901-1904, only 44 out of a total of 591 committed in 1905, 78 in 1906 and 62 in 1907.⁵⁹ In the face of mass spontaneous violence the Okhrana’s subtle tactics tended to fall by the wayside: “either the revolutionaries will use us to adorn the Petersburg lamp-posts,” the capital’s Okhrana chief said, “or we must send them to jail and the gibbet.”⁶⁰ St Petersburg Security Section directed the arrest of nearly 2000 people from 25 December 1905 to 25 January 1906. In all, the Interior Ministry arrested 70,000 people between October 1905 and April 1906.

The pursuit of organised subversive groups inevitably spilled over into ordinary society as the these groups sought to hide behind various non-partisan legal organisations– such as trades unions, professional associations and pressure groups which were permitted to exist after the 1905 October Manifesto. Police repression from 1907 to 1910 reduced the trade union movement in St Petersburg from 63,000 members (22% of the labour force) to 12,000 members (5% of the labour force). This created the unnerving impression, albeit erroneous, that the Okhrana was omniscient: ‘There was not a single party, nor a single mill, factory, nor a single organisation, nor society, union, club committee, university, institute, there was not even a single newspaper editorial staff in which among its members and collaborators there would not have been several secret agents.’⁶¹

The Okhrana did not have the resources to combat mass opposition. Consequently, the military often had to be called in to lend a heavy-hand. The regime had to fall back on the services of the army on 1,500 occasions from 1883 to 1903 to curb large-scale public disturbances. This was a disastrously clumsy policy: soldiers do not usually make good policemen. It resulted in massacres in St Petersburg on 9 January 1905 and in the Lena Goldfields in April 1912. From 1896 to 1912 3767 persons were

⁵⁹ M.Perrie, ‘Political and Economic Terror in the Tactics of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party Before 1914’, in Wolfgang Mommsen & Gerald Herschfeld (eds.), *Social Protest and Terror in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (London, 1982), p.67.

⁶⁰ Qutd. in Boris Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, trans. by George Reavey (London, 1934), p.163.

⁶¹ A.Volkov, *Petrogradskoe okhrannoe otdelenie* (Petrograd, 1917), p.14.

sentenced to death after summary trial by District Military Courts.⁶² Stolypin introduced even more extreme measures, under some pressure from the tsar, with the institution of the Field Courts Martial in August 1906. During the short duration of their existence these courts executed over 700 people a year. The tsarist military-police counter-revolution claimed the lives of over 14,000 people in 1905 and 1906 alone. The tsarist regime executed a further 14,000 mostly through military tribunals in the last four decades of its existence. This level of violence may well have paled in comparison with subsequent upheavals; nevertheless, it was a bloody reign of brutality by the standards of the age.

Relying on the armed forces to do the work of policemen was particularly troublesome because the army itself was not the reliable pillar of old: there had been over 400 mutinies from 1905 to 1906. The Okhrana's answer to this was to recruit spies inside the military in an attempt to expunge revolutionary influence. This caused a great deal of resentment among the army's top brass. And they came to influence the security police when the gendarme 'old school' gained ascendancy inside the Okhrana in 1913 with the appointment of V.F.Dzhunkovskii as Assistant Minister of the Interior. Dzhunkovskii declared that the secret police should 'sniff rather than stink.' He launched what the press called a 'purge' of the Okhrana—sacking many leading security police officers. He slashed the police budget and ordered the dismissal of all spies in the army. This was a popular gesture but it critically weakened the state's ability to monitor the reliability of the armed forces on the eve of war.

In the end it was the war and not the revolutionary movement that was the undoing of the tsarist regime. The Okhrana recognised that society and state had little chance of surviving a protracted military conflict. The so-called Durnovo Memorandum to Nicholas II in February 1914, which seemed to predict the cause and course of all the later disasters, is perhaps the most striking evidence that the *okhranniki* fully understood the gravity of their situation. Imperial Russia was teetering on the edge of an abyss and security police measures would be insufficient should the regime fall over the brink. The

⁶² W.C. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia 1881-1914* (Princeton, 1985), pp.49, 144-53. John Bushnell, *Mutiny Amid Repression: Russian Soldiers and the Revolution of 1905-1906* (Bloomington, 1985), pp.15-21. D.Rawson, 'The Death Penalty in Tsarist Russia: An Investigation of Judicial Procedures', *Russian History*, vol.11 (Sept., 1984), p.37.

Okhrana zealously continued to do its job all the same and paralysed the organised opposition from 1914 to 1917. The professional revolutionaries were, after all, conspicuously absent from the February Revolution. ‘The development of mass revolutionary consciousness in the form of a commitment to a specific socialist party or political philosophies was fundamentally a phenomenon of the months after the fall of Nicholas II, when the politicisation of the masses began in earnest.’⁶³ The Okhrana secured a futile victory: it had won the battle of wits against the revolutionary underground but lost the war.

⁶³ R.B.McKean, *St. Petersburg Between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries June 1907-February 1917* (London, 1990), p.494.