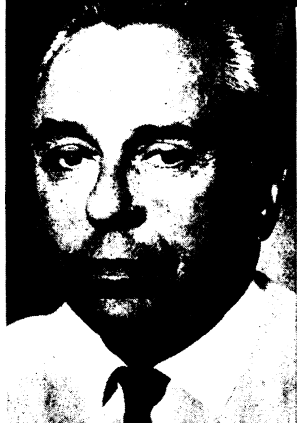


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A DEFECTOR FROM THE K.G.B. TELLS HIS STORY



Secrets of Russia's Security Police

by YURI KROTKOV

YURI KROTKOV, a gay, handsome Russian, was well known in Moscow in the Fifties and Sixties as a writer and witty raconteur and one of the few Soviet citizens who was ready to meet and mix freely with Western diplomats (*writes DAVID FLOYD*). Although the ease with which he accepted invitations from foreigners made him suspect to the harder-headed members of the diplomatic corps, many a Western embassy remained open to him.

Western suspicions of Krotkov were fully justified. Throughout the period when he was circulating among Westerners in Moscow he was operating under the direct supervision of the Soviet secret police. From 1946, when he was first "co-opted" into the service of the Soviet intelligence agency

in the moment in 1963 when he succeeded in "choosing freedom" in London his every contact with foreigners was carefully planned and directed by senior officers of the Soviet State Security organs. In those 17 years he played an important part in many operations against prominent Western diplomats, including French and Indian ambassadors.

He was so deeply involved in fact that even after he had been granted asylum in the West, the intelligence agencies of the Western powers would not permit him to tell his story in public. Only in the last few weeks has he been released from his vow of silence to tell for the first time from the inside how the Soviet secret police organizes its supervision of all foreigners in the Soviet Union.

Even while he was involved in plots and intrigues among Moscow's foreign colony Krotkov was also busy writing his novels and film scenarios in the hope that he could one day fulfil his ambition to make a career as a writer. Since his arrival in the West, apart from writing the story of his involvement with the secret police in Russia, Yuri Krotkov has made his name as the author of brilliant satirical studies of the Stalin period published in Russian émigré literary reviews.

Other defectors to the West have told the story of what it is like to live in the Soviet police state. Yuri Krotkov is the first to be able to tell the story from the point of view of a secret police agent himself working in Moscow.

house near Tbilisi (Tiflis), had made his sketches from real life, and that our whole family had been on friendly terms with Vsevolod Merkulov, Beria's right-hand man and no more and no less than the head of the M.G.B.

This was Yegorov back a little. He had not known it. With a wry grin he said: "Oh dear, we shall have to be careful with you. Otherwise you'll be coming one day full of his ambition to make a career as a writer. Since his arrival in the West, apart from writing the story of his involvement with the secret police in Russia, Yuri Krotkov has made his name as the author of brilliant satirical studies of the Stalin period published in Russian émigré literary reviews."

I supposed I could have exploited this circumstance to get out of the invitation. But I didn't.

I was ordered at once to provide myself with a secret nickname. I chose the word "Suliko," which means in Georgian "darling." It was at the same time the name of a Georgian song, then popular in the country and, according to the evidence of people in the know, liked by Stalin himself.

At the end of our interview I had to sign a paper saying that everything we had discussed and the fact of my recruitment was a state secret to be disclosed to no one.

Yegorov gave me his telephone numbers and from that moment I became a secret member of the Soviet secret service, combining that work with less painful and less shameful activity in the field of literature. My life became a treble deceit.

It is difficult for a foreigner, an outsider to the extent of the network of "co-opted" members of the K.G.B. which operates in my country. Everyone who has any experience of life in the Soviet Union knows of course that the K.G.B. has its committees, offices and departments in each of the 15 republics which make up the U.S.S.R. It also has its offices and representatives in every provincial centre, in every district, in every city and town and village, and in every Soviet institution and enterprise, big or small.

Devilish system

As Soviet citizens we long ago became accustomed to living with the leather-padded doors, the little peepholes and the "No Entry" signs. Unless authorised. Most employees in the Soviet Union have been forced to accept the presence everywhere of the usually grim and uncommunicative people who work in those "Special Departments" whose members must run into millions. But apart from them there are also the "personnel officers" who are also tied up with the K.G.B.

It is a devilish system. But I am not not content with the K.G.B. network itself so much as with the "official", or part-time agents—the "co-opted" members. They constitute a spider's web which covers the whole of the Soviet Union. They are informers, nose-parkers and provocateurs in every walk of life. They are, practically nothing, to be kept quiet, because its members are recruited primarily on patriotic grounds. It's a clever scheme. It was, after all, Lenin who declared that every Communist should also be a "Chekist," that is, a secret police agent. Actually in the Soviet Union no distinction between people who are in the party and those who are not. They have no choice but to be Communists and to love their Communist country, and are therefore obliged to help its enemies.

And the party knows best who are enemies and who are friends. Anyone who tries to stir up doubts in the eyes of others is accused of lack of patriotism.

The point is that it is organised in the Soviet Union: that is, the authorities keep track of everything every day. Apart from that I had no Soviet system. I suppose it is also the way any totalitarian, police system works.

Here are a few examples from real life which illustrate the depths to which the tentacles of the K.G.B. penetrate into people's everyday life: For nearly 25 years I lived in a flat in a Moscow suburb. It was a communal flat, with every convenience. It had 11 rooms and provided accommodation for nine families. Apart from that I had two telephones, one bathroom one lavatory, four TV sets, six radio receivers with short waves, and eight gas-rings in the kitchen.

And of the 20 occupants of our flat four were tied up in one way or the other with the K.G.B. One was a K.G.B. colonel, working in the security of state communications, and the other was a retired "co-opted" member, myself and the colonel's Anna, were given the name of the foreign embassies. And every Soviet citizen employed in a foreign

embassy—every one, without exception—is certainly a co-opted member of the K.G.B.

I recall a conversation I had with a well-known film producer who has since died, Ivan Pyrev. It was he who made films of Dostoyevsky's "The Idiot" and "The Brothers Karamazov." For many years he was chairman of the organising committee of the Union of Cinematograph workers. On one occasion I told Pyrev that, on Khrushchev's orders, I had been decided to put not one but two families in each of the newly constructed three-roomed flats.

Pyrev said with a smile: "Quite rightly, too. Supposing they were to let a family live on their own in a flat, who would know what they were up to, what they were saying, or what they were thinking? But if there are two families, then they can keep an eye on each other, listen to what's being said and check up on everything. — It's safer that way, you know."

In 1956 I wrote a scenario for the Lenfilm studio. I had on several occasions to make changes in it, and on one occasion the changes were so substantial that I decided to go off on my own. With the aid of the K.G.B. I managed to obtain a ticket on the Molotov, a steamer which cruises between Moscow and Astrakhan on the Volga. I had a large cabin to myself and I tapped away on my typewriter from morning till night and managed to allow even the cleaning woman to come into the cabin for fear she would mix up my papers.

When the Molotov arrived in Astrakhan eight days later I was standing in the stern, watching the ship being unloaded, suddenly two men in caps came up to me and said quietly: "You'd better come along with us to our cabin, citizen." I didn't start to argue, guessing instinctively who they were. In the cabin they showed me the same little magic red folder with the three gold letters. They were actually members of the waterways section of the K.G.B. (There are sections for waterways, for railways and for airlines.)

They had already searched my cabin, without my permission of course, and they had started to read my scenario. They wanted to know who I was and what I was doing. I showed them my papers and my contract with Lenfilm. The two of them smiled with relief. They even apologized.

It turned out that the captain of the boat had informed the radio office of a passenger who was behaving suspiciously, who had locked himself in his cabin and spent the whole day tapping on his typewriter.

Co-opted 'army'

The army of people "co-opted" into the service of the secret police includes people of all sorts and stations, of all ordinary people—the cogs in the machine, so to speak—as well as people of high position, even members of the Soviet élite, living at the very top of our hierarchy. The highly-placed people receive nothing for their services; but the little people, and especially those of the female sex, may occasionally be lucky enough to be thrown a few crumbs. As an incentive. The highly-placed people are often so rich themselves that they could well pay the K.G.B. Here it's a question of a quite different form of currency: to enjoy the confidence of the authorities, to have a certain authority oneself, to be able to travel abroad, and so forth.

But among the big fish and the smaller fry there are also patriots, people who are devoted to their country, to save on the "operational" expenses provided by the K.G.B. and put some of them back into their own pockets. The K.G.B. knows this and encourages it. Nobody is ever asked to render an account for his expenses. There is also the system by which people are rewarded for the provision of housing. Some co-opted members of the K.G.B. receive free accommodation in return for special services.

People ask me could I really not have refused when Yegorov put his revolting proposition to me? I think it is better to put the question the other way round: Why did I agree to his proposal? After all he was a man of great writing my modern "War and Peace."

Apart from any other reasons, undoubtedly, there was a very personal, individual reason I do not say this because I do not wish to minimise my personal responsibility. That is not possible. But the fact is that I found myself in serious trouble in love was in serious trouble. I had to get her out of it, and it seemed to me that if I turned her down that the secret police began to have their doubts about me. It would undoubtedly throw suspicion also on that woman. And the fact that I agreed to

do as he suggested made her situation easier, I believe, though she knew nothing about it herself.

Of course, I knew I was all well what I was letting myself in for. "First the saucer, then the cup," as they say. But I had been great longing to get involved in what was going on around me, not to stand aside from all the filth and ugliness of life but to suck everything up like a sponge. I was carried along by this desire and discovered in my character a great interest in the whole business of secrets, provocations and intrigues.

It was enough for me to take the first step for all that side of the business to sweep me off my feet. Nevertheless I do not think I ever lost control of myself; nor did I lose the ability to stand aside from myself and study what I was doing.

In the course of time I came to despise my "secretary." But the more I despised it the more it seemed to be part of my character.

Apart from that I have to confess that there was an element of childishness in the process going on in me. I seemed to derive a sort of mischievous pleasure from the consciousness of my superiority to other, ordinary people. It was as though I were the master, rewarding me with immortality in the sense that there was more life in me than in them; I was living two lives, while they had only one.

There was another factor. I had faith in my future as a writer, and I thought that to write something really worthwhile I needed food and raw material. In my position I had the opportunity of observing life in its true, absolutely real forms, to examine the medal, so to speak, from both sides.

'Sold' myself

From time to time a co-opted member of the K.G.B. discovers that one of his friends or acquaintances is in the same position, perhaps even engaged on the same "operation". This can give rise to some embarrassing or simply amusing situations.

I recall one occasion when I was involved in the same operation with a well-known producer. In order to be able to win the confidence of a certain British diplomat, I had to make a number of plicated preparatory work we managed to get ourselves invited to the home of a member of the British Embassy in Moscow, and in the course of the conversation we tried to outdo each other in our anti-Soviet opinions. The Englishman was delighted. We both hung all the time full of advantage of the Soviet system, and we found it came amazingly easy, almost natural.

One argument followed another, as if there was no end to them. We had the permission of the M.G.B. to do as we wished, to take full advantage of the opportunity. But occasionally our eyes would meet and we would both feel a little scared. Perhaps I've overdone it, I thought, maybe he'll denounce me and say in his report that I sounded like the fool of fools. By the fright in the eyes of my companion I realised that the same thought was passing through his mind.

More or less the same thing happened to me in Berlin, where I "sold" myself to the British intelligence service and had the right when met foreigners, of expressing my distaste for Stalin, even for Stalin. I did it with the greatest pleasure, simply saying what I really thought about him. All the same, and with the permission of the M.G.B., I had had a little fear.

In the course of 17 years of collaboration with the M.G.B.-K.G.B. I came to the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of people co-opted into the Soviet secret police are people who are, within themselves, opposed to the Soviet régime. It is true that some may seem to an outsider, I am convinced, that it is true that the K.G.B. knows it. That the service nevertheless continues to recruit such people is probably because genuine patriots are not the easiest people for the K.G.B. to work with. A patriotic man, that is, if he is not so scared, can even object on the grounds of his conscience and principles, and can argue about the functions of the secret police and their limits.

In practice this never happens, because there are no genuine patriots, but the K.G.B. still prefers us, that is, it prefers to build its castle on a sound foundation of fear and deception.

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NEXT: Inside No. 7 Mezhdunarodny Street: How plots to entrap Western ambassadors and journalists were set up.

Early-morning knock on the door that began a life of treble deception

IT happened in the summer of 1946 in Moscow. Early one morning I heard a knock on the door of the room I occupied in a "communal" flat, in which there were 11 rooms and something like 20 occupants. I opened the door and found a young man of medium height and wearing civilian clothes standing in the corridor. He smiled. I asked him what he wanted.

Without uttering a word he showed me a little red warrant card with the three letters M.G.B. printed clearly in gold. I knew very well they stood for the Ministry of State Security, now known as the Committee of State Security, or K.G.B. He told me to get dressed and join him outside, and he said it in a half-whisper so that my neighbours should not hear what he was saying. Of course I put my clothes on at once, and we went down from the third floor and out to the street.

Even there I did not have the courage to demand what was going on. And he, still smiling agreeably, announced that we had to go to a certain place. A certain place. I knew of one place from which visitors seldom returned home. That was called the Lobbyanka, the secret police headquarters in the middle of Moscow. But to my relief we went by underground trains to a quite different station, and

the kindly smile of the young man, who introduced himself as Volodya, also helped to put my mind at rest. (Volodya was a lieutenant in the M.G.B., still under training and only just out of special college.)

In a big block of flats on Chaplygin Street, in a two- or three-roomed flat which was simply furnished but well concealed, we were greeted by a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed man of about 30. He gave his name as Rummyantsev—Sergei Ivanovich. His real name was Yegorov and at the time he was a major in the M.G.B.

We talked for a couple of hours. At Rummyantsev's request I told him all about myself, while he listened with apparent attention and understanding. Then Rummyantsev and Volodya started to talk about the supreme importance of intelligence work in the Soviet Union. They spoke of "enemies of the people", of foreign spies, of diplomats who were out to cause trouble, of the intrigues of capitalist agents, and so on and so forth. They emphasised, of course, that it was the duty of every Soviet patriot to help the M.G.B.

All this dreary talk was largely wasted on me. They knew very well from the outset that I was in no position to turn down their proposals or that I had very little hope of doing so. From the very beginning

they felt themselves on top of the situation, because their weapons included the force of fear, or rather a force which evokes fear in human beings. Nevertheless they wanted to observe the proper forms. I was supposed to give my agreement, so to speak, voluntarily and not under duress.

In this way I was invited to collaborate with the M.G.B. It was actually at the beginning, a rather vague invitation, a sort of general proposal. I was given to understand that my task would be extremely interesting and that it would benefit me as a writer.

Of course Rummyantsev-Yegorov already knew my life story—the whole of it, so he thought—that I had studied at the literary institute of the Soviet Writers' Union, that I had worked for TASS and Moscow Radio, that I had been writing articles not only for the Soviet Information Bureau but also on a sort of freelance basis, as well as plays and film scenarios, although so far none of my works had yet had any success.

One thing Yegorov did not know, to the later sorrow of the M.G.B.-K.G.B. He did not know the depths of my soul I dreamt of writing sometime my "War and Peace" without listening to anyone else's orders or instructions.

Yegorov hinted to me that my work would be mainly connected with foreigners and that it was quite likely that I should have to travel abroad. I came to the conclusion that I had fallen into the clutches of the Foreign Department of the M.G.B., probably because I spoke a little English and because, as a correspondent of the Anglo-American section of Moscow Radio, I had often met foreigners. In particular I had acted as guide to (Lady) Clementine Churchill on her official visit to the U.S.S.R. in March, 1944.

I wondered who could have recommended me to Yegorov. After much thought I decided that it must have been an announcer in the Anglo-American section of Moscow Radio, Jo Adamov, with whom I had been friendly and who was reputed to be tied up with the M.G.B. I used to get into the company of Americans and English outside Moscow Radio.

I mention Jo Adamov, whose voice I still hear today on Moscow Radio, because later on I was myself responsible indirectly for bringing people into the K.G.B. network. I provided K.G.B. officers with the names of people who seemed to me to be suitable candidates: both men and—especially—women. That was one of the essential functions of a person "co-opted" into the K.G.B.

The only real deviation from the standard procedure on such occasions in the course of our "chat" was the fact that Yegorov had mentioned to my late father had been a well-known artist in Georgia and was the man who had painted the "famous" portrait of Lavrenti Beria, who had been the second or third man after Stalin in the Russia of the time.

I let Yegorov know that my father had been a visitor to Beria's country