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F.B.I. Reportedly Knew Of Russian's Activities

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LOS ANGELES, Oct. 5 — A priest said today that he told Federal agents two years ago that a parishioner, Svetlana Ogorodnikova, was active in pro-Soviet activities. He said he had been told, "We know all about her."

Mrs. Ogorodnikova and her husband, Nikolay Ogorodnikov, were arrested Tuesday on charges of participating in an espionage conspiracy involving the cooperation of an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Richard W. Miller, a bureau agent for 20 years, was arrested Tuesday on charges of selling counterespionage secrets to the Ogorodnikovs. It was the first known instance of an agent being charged in an espionage case.

The Russian couple, who came to this country in 1973, attracted considerable attention in the Russian immigrant community here for their openly pro-Soviet views. Mrs. Ogorodnikova distributed Soviet-made movies and magazines.

Son Forced From School

The Rev. Stephen Fitzgerald, pastor of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Hollywood, said in an interview today that he learned two years ago that Mrs. Ogorodnikova had persuaded a parish family of five to return to the Soviet Union. He said she had gotten the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco to pay for the move, as well as to promise a full scholarship to a Soviet university for one of the family's children.

Father Fitzgerald said that as a result, he made Mrs. Ogorodnikova withdraw her son, Matthew, from the church school. Angry, she "said we couldn't do that, that she would come back here with a hundred people and that she would tell the F.B.I.," Father Fitzgerald said.

The priest said he called the F.B.I. himself and was informed that "they were well acquainted with her activities." An F.B.I. affidavit, filed Tuesday in Federal District Court in Los Angeles, said Mrs. Ogorodnikova was interviewed by agents often between February 1982 and August 1984.

Bill Baker, an assistant director of the F.B.I. in Washington, said that she had given the bureau information and could have been acting as a double agent.

In 1983 and 1984, Mrs. Ogorodnikova received welfare payments of \$242 a month and \$72 in food stamps for herself and her son, claiming the absence of her husband, according to a spokesman for the Department of Public Social Services. Some Los Angeles County supervisors have called for an investigation of the awarding of those payments.

She Called Herself an Agent

According to the bureau, Mrs. Ogorodnikova identified herself to Mr. Miller as "a major" of the K.G.B., the Soviet security agency, and talked of promises from Soviet officials that her son could attend a prestigious Soviet school in return for her efforts. Bureau officials in Washington said Mr. Miller was believed to have had a sexual relationship with Mrs. Ogorodnikova.

Many in the Russian community here, said to be the largest outside of New York, said they wondered whether Mr. Miller was seduced not by a professional spy but by an ambitious freelancer.

Father Fitzgerald, for one, rejected the notion that she was actually a K.G.B. agent. "A K.G.B. groupie, maybe," he said.

"She made no effort to fit in here," he said. "She was a chain-smoker, dressed like an aging punk-rocker. No, she was bragging. How could she be a K.G.B. agent who was so open about Soviet sympathies?"

The publisher of a popular Russian Jewish magazine here, Almanac-Panorama, echoed the priest's view.

"I wouldn't say they were very smart people," said Alexander Polovets, the publisher. "I'd be surprised if they worked for the K.G.B. I think they were just happy to play some special role, to get some respect from our people."

The bureau affidavit said that a search of the couple's apartment turned up such equipment as cipher pads, code books, concealment devices and microdots, as well as bureau documents and records of payments to Mr. Miller.

Two Russian Communities

There are two Russian immigrant communities in Los Angeles, the Russian Christians and the Russian Jews. Recent émigrés are said to number about 15,000, with many more the descendants of earlier immigrants, dating principally to the period surrounding the 1917 Communist Revolution.

Both immigrant communities are centered in the aging neighborhoods of Hollywood and West Hollywood. They share Plummer Park there as a gathering place, primarily for the elderly, and for cultural activities. But each Russian community has its own cultural center, its network of social-service agencies and its own popular publications, Panorama for the Jews and The California Messenger for the Christians.

There have been three major waves of Russian immigration to Los Angeles: after the Russian Revolution and World War I, after World War II, and from about 1973 to 1980, when the Soviet Government relaxed immigration policies regarding Jews. The recent Jewish arrivals are known here as "the Third Wave."