

HIROAKI KUROMIYA

Indiana University

Jerzy Niezbrzycki (Ryszard Wraga) and the Polish Intelligence in the Soviet Union in the 1930s

Abstract

Jerzy Niezbrzycki (born 1901/2 – died 1968) was a key figure in Polish intelligence during the Polish Second Republic. After WWII, he lived abroad where he engaged widely in the analysis of Soviet affairs and published under the pen name of Ryszard Wraga. His unfinished memoirs written in English not only illuminate the battle between Polish and Soviet intelligence before WWII but also suggest that even the most experienced foreign intelligence operatives like Niezbrzycki were misled by elaborate Soviet disinformation.

Jerzy Niezbrzycki (1901/2–1968) was a key figure in the Polish intelligence during the Second Polish Republic. Basic information on him and his life is readily available,¹ although somewhat contradictory. For example, a number of different dates and places of his birth are recorded: 3 March 1901, 31 March 1901, 3 March 1902, 28 July 1902 for his birth date and

¹ See Andrzej Peplowski, *Wywiad Polski na ZSSR 1921–1939* (Warszawa: Gryf, 1996), 36–37; Włodzimierz Bączkowski, „Jerzy Niezbrzycki (R. Wraga 1902–1968),” *Niepodległość*, No. 23 (1990): 99–124; Andrzej Krzak, „Kapitan Jerzy Antoni Niezbrzycki,” *Rocznik Archiwalno-Historyczny Centralnego Archiwum Wojskowego*, No. 2 (31) (2009): 300–310; Łukasz Ulatowski, „Niezbrzycki – wybrane aspekty biografii wywiadowczej kierownika Referatu «Wschód», available at [Historycy.org](http://www.historycy.org/index.php?act=Attach&type=post&id=16066), accessed July 1, 2016, <http://www.historycy.org/index.php?act=Attach&type=post&id=16066>; and Jan Jacek Bruski, „Przyczynek do biografii Jerzego Niezbrzyckiego. Misja wywiadowcza w Kijowie w latach 1928–1929,” in *Studia nad wywiadem i kontrywywadem Polski w XX wieku*, ed. Wojciech Skóra and Paweł Skubisz, Vol. 3 (Szczecin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2016), 209–220, and many others.

Warsaw and Vinnytsia (Pol. Winnica, in today's Ukraine) for his birthplace. (In his memoir written in English after World War II, Niezbrzycki states that he was born in "Podole," or Podolia, where Vinnytsia is situated, in the Russian Empire. He claims one ancestor of Tatar origin, who later converted to Catholicism in Poland).² In any case, like many of his contemporary Poles, he was born a subject of the Russian Empire. He completed an eight-year education at a Russian gymnasium in Vynnytsia and a Polish gymnasium in Proskuriw (Pol. Proskirow, Khmel'nyts'kyi in today's Ukraine). In 1917, the year when the Russian Empire collapsed, he joined the Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* – POW) and from September 1917, shortly before the Bolsheviks seized power, became an intelligence operative in the city of Kyiv (KN-3).³ He actively took part in the Soviet-Polish war and was twice wounded. He was once arrested by the Bolsheviks, but escaped from captivity. In 1919 he completed training in the POW cadet school. For his contribution to the Soviet-Polish war he was awarded the Cross of Valour (*Krzyż Walecznych*). In 1920 he joined the Second Department (intelligence) of the Polish High Command (*Naczelne Dowództwo*) or General Staff. He engaged in intelligence in Romania and Istanbul. He also led intelligence posts in Kishinev (Pol. Kiszyniów, today's Chişinău in Romania) and Odesa (Odessa). In 1921 he was accepted to the Faculty of Law at the University of Warsaw.⁴

In the relatively peaceful 1920s he advanced in his military career while simultaneously studying at the University of Warsaw and the School of Political Sciences in Warsaw, although he did not complete his studies in either institution. He appears to have had a strong intellect and was academically talented. During his work in the Polish Army in the mid-1920s, he completed a monograph on the military-geographic nature of Polesia (Pol. Polesie). He was also temperamental, and while working in Polesia, he had an altercation with a village elder and was tried and sentenced to a seven-day house arrest for assault.⁵

² "300 years ago one of my ancestors decided to be Polish. He received the «indigenat», which means that by a bill of Parliament he was accepted with full rights into the Polish gentry." Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, Zespół 109, Archiwum Pułkownika Ryszarda Wragi (Jerzego Antoniego Niezbrzyckiego) 1921–1980 (hereafter: Zespół 109), sygn. 2, „Fragment wspomnień Ryszarda Wragi; zaproszenia, korespondencja”, ch. 1, 2–3.

³ Paweł Libera, "Wywiadowca na Ukrainie: Ryszard Wraga (Jerzy Niezbrzycki przed Komisją Historyczną KN III," *Arcana*, No. 5 (95) (2010): 96, suggests that his joining POW was likely to be later, in 1918.

⁴ Libera, "Wywiadowca na Ukrainie," 97. This essay contains Niezbrzycki's account, written in 1922, of his activity from 1918 to 1920 in Ukraine (99–199).

⁵ Krzak, "Kapitan Jerzy Antoni Niezbrzycki," 301–303.

From 1928 to 1929 Niezbrzycki controlled Polish intelligence operations in Kyiv (Pol. Kijów). His work proved highly effective. Andrzej Peplowski counts him among the “most distinguished officers of the Second Department”.⁶ Perhaps for this reason, in December 1929 he was expelled for his activity in Kyiv.⁷ His effective work led to his appointment in 1930 as the head of the intelligence unit of Section “East” (Pol. *Wschód*) of the Second Department of the Polish Main Staff (Pol. *Sztab Główny*), a post he held until September 1939. He thus became the virtual head of Polish intelligence against the Soviet Union.

In addition to his intelligence work, he engaged in academic and journalist activities, writing under his pen name (Ryszard Wraga) numerous books, essays, and articles on the Soviet Union and international affairs. After the destruction of the Second Polish Republic by Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, Niezbrzycki continued to work in Polish Intelligence in exile. After the war, he lived and worked in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States where he eventually settled. All the while he was actively engaged in research on the Soviet Union and continued to publish academic and journalistic work. Some of his work from the 1920s through the 1960s is listed in a short biography written by Włodzimierz Bączkowski after Niezbrzycki's death in 1968 in Leesburg, Virginia.⁸

Niezbrzycki's cerebral yet temperamental character worked both in his favor and against him. His intense absorption in his work no doubt contributed to his effectiveness as an intelligence analyst. Yet his temper often got the better of him. As mentioned earlier, already in the 1920s he had had one brush with the law. Subsequently, he is known to have accused a number of his colleagues and fellow citizens of treachery.⁹ Suspecting that Czesław Miłosz was an agent of Communist Poland, Niezbrzycki broke off relations with Jerzy Giedroyc and his circle around the journal *Kultura* (which Giedroyc edited in Paris).¹⁰ He in turn was accused, by one of his former colleagues, of being a Soviet agent since the 1920s,¹¹ almost certainly an absurd charge.

⁶ Peplowski, *Wywiad Polski na ZSSR*, 36.

⁷ See *Документы внешней политики СССР*, Vol. 12 (Москва: Госполитиздат, 1967), 774. For more of his work in Kyiv, see Bruski, „Przyczynek do biografii Jerzego Niezbrzyckiego.”

⁸ See Bączkowski, “Jerzy Niezbrzycki,” 109–121.

⁹ See, for example, Przemysław Olstowski, “O genezie i istocie konfliktu między mjr. Janem Henrykiem Żychonim a kpt. Antonim Jerzym Niezbrzyckim. Garść refleksji,” in *Studia nad wywiadem i kontrwywiadem Polski w XX wieku*, ed. Skóra and Skubisz, Vol. 1 (Szczecin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012), 461–477.

¹⁰ Bączkowski, „Jerzy Niezbrzycki (R. Wraga) 1902–1968,” 104.

¹¹ See Władysław Michniewicz, *Wielki bluff sowiecki* (Chicago: WICI, 1991), passim, especially 18–19.

After his death, Niezbrzycki's personal archives were given by his widow Natalia to the Józef Piłsudski Institute in New York. One of the documents is an autobiographical document written in English. This is of much interest to those who are interested in him and his work as well as those interested in Polish intelligence in the 1920s and 1930s in general. As far as is known to the author of the present essay, this document ("Fragment wspomnień Ryszarda Wraga") has not been utilized by scholars. The present essay reproduces parts of Chapter 19 and Chapter 20 of this document, which concern Polish intelligence against the Soviet Union, Niezbrzycki's main professional duty for two decades.

This document provides interesting details on methods of intelligence gathering (including provocations and use of blackmail). Chapter 20 is particularly revealing of the circumstances of the assassination of Sergei M. Kirov (1886–1934), the Communist Party boss in Leningrad. Niezbrzycki was familiar with Soviet methods of provocation and closely observed the situation in Leningrad from before the Kirov murder. He was almost certainly correct in his analysis that the accused Latvian diplomat Georgs Bisseniek was a "dupe" trapped in Soviet provocation.¹²

Unlike many foreign observers and intelligence officers who failed to see through Soviet operations, Niezbrzycki was well informed of all sorts of Soviet disinformation, camouflage, provocation, and intrigue, let alone blackmailing, kidnappings, and murders. The document reproduced below suggests that the Soviet secret police were in one way or another involved in the Kirov murder.¹³ While Niezbrzycki was critical of most foreign

¹² The Latvian diplomat in question was Mr. Georgs Bisseniek (born 1885 – died 1941) – former Latvian Ambassador to Britain who was married to an English woman. The OGPU had long harassed his consular staff. In February 1934 an English diplomat found Mrs. "Bissineks" (Bisseniek) "very nervous because the OGPU (see annotation 19) are paying the Latvian Consulate too much attention." Consul Bisseniek told the English diplomat that "two Russians had come (not together) asking whether they might escape into Latvia." The Russians were told that "if the applicant could run faster than a bullet he might succeed." After that, "no further attempt at provocation had been made." See Julian and Margaret Bullard, eds., *Inside Stalin's Russia: The Diaries of Reader Bullard 1930–1934* (Charlbury: Day Books, 2000), 237. After Kirov was murdered, Bisseniek was named as the instigator and was expelled. In fact, the night before he "had received an anonymous telephone call from a supposed well-wisher informing him that he was going to be arrested by the GPU (the Soviet secret police) and charged with complicity in Kirov's murder. He was told it would be advisable to get out of Leningrad as quickly as possible. Fearing for his life he left by train that very night and returned to Latvia." See John Murray, *A Spy called Swallow: The True Love Story of Nora, the Russian Agent* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), 46–47. In 1940 when the Soviet troops invaded Latvia, Bisseniek was arrested, accused of his involvement in the Kirov murder, and then executed.

¹³ This is a view shared by many western Sovietologists. A recent work by an American historian who utilized archival sources in Moscow and elsewhere implausibly contends that Stalin and his secret police were not involved in the assassination. Matthew E. Lenoe, *The*

intelligence services (except those of Finland),¹⁴ he, like many other foreign observers, may have been fooled by elaborate ruses of the Soviet secret police. He was well aware of one of the most notorious case of Soviet disinformation, Operation Trust, which outwitted foreign intelligence services, including those of Poland, in the 1920s.¹⁵ Yet he seems remarkably accepting of Soviet information about the existence of critical young Communists in Leningrad, including the Kirov assassin Leonid Nikolaev (1904–1934). Elsewhere he even mentions that he was in contact with the “largest Ukrainian separatist organization” while he worked in Kyiv in the latter half of the 1920s.¹⁶ We now know that the organization (The Union for the Liberation of Ukraine or Ukr. *Спілка визволення України /СВУ/*) did not exist: it was a fabrication by the Soviet secret police then headed by Vsevolod A. Balits’kyi, who is mentioned in the Niezbrzycki document reproduced below.¹⁷ Likewise, one should not take at face value Niezbrzycki’s uncritical belief in the existence in Leningrad of an opposition group of young Communists and in Nikolaev’s participation in a secret Trotskyite group. No such evidence has surfaced so far. Moreover, little evidence has emerged that Stalin indeed regarded Kirov as a threat to his power and wanted to assassinate him. It is more likely that the police intended to simulate an assassination as an excuse to carry out cleansing and terror in Leningrad to consolidate further the power of Kirov and the Communist Party. The assassin, Nikolaev, wittingly or not, ended up actually killing Kirov. This was a complete miscalculation on the part of the secret police.¹⁸ Niezbrzycki’s accounts suggest that even the hardened foreign intelligence experts like him, who were familiar with the history of Operation „Trust”,

Kirov Murder and Soviet History, tr. by Matthew E. Lenoe, documents compiled by Mikhail Prozumenshchikov (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, Zespół 109, sygn. 1, [document titled only] Kpt. Niezbrzycki Jerzy, 8–13.

¹⁵ He even penned an essay on this subject: Ryszard Wraga, “«Trust»,” *Kultura*, Nos. 4–5 (21–22) (1949): 156–177, although his essay was subjected to criticism see Michniewicz, *Wielki bluff sowiecki*. The most recent literature on this operation is Marek Świerczek, *Największa kłeska polskiego wywiadu: Sowietcka akcja dezinformacyjna “Trust” 1921–1927* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2020).

¹⁶ „Byłem wówczas w kontakcie z największą organizacją separatystyczną Ukrainy, jaka kiedykolwiek istniała, z tzw. Związkiem Wyzwolenia Ukrainy /z Jefremowym i Nikowskim na czele/,” see Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, Zespół 109, sygn. 1, [document titled only] Kpt. Niezbrzycki Jerzy, 2.

¹⁷ See Володимир Пристайко and Юрій Шаповал, *Справа Спілки визволення України: Невідомі документи и факти* (Київ: ИНТЕЛ, 1995).

¹⁸ See Hiroaki Kuromiya, “Political Provocation as Stalin’s Foreign Policy: The von Twardowski Affair, 1932,” *Historia est testis temporum, Bibliotheca Europae Orientalis*, ed. Jan Malicki (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Studium Europy Wschodniej, 2017), 105–126.

were likely further misled by disinformation spun by the Soviet secret police. Stalin's "total espionage" and "total counterespionage" nearly paralyzed almost all foreign intelligence services inside the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Niezbrzycki is revealing the clandestine actions of the Soviet secret police and responses of foreign legations in Leningrad up to Kirov's murder in December 1934.

Niezbrzycki's English prose in the fragment reproduced below is far from perfect. There are quite a few grammatical, syntactic, and spelling errors and other stylistic issues. Yet it is perfectly comprehensible. Therefore his original English prose is reproduced below with only minor spelling corrections added in square brackets. The original pagination is also indicated in brackets in the text.

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Józef Piłsudski Institute of America in New York, Zespół 109: Archiwum Pułkownika Ryszarda Wragi (Jerzego Antoniego Niezbrzyckiego) 1921–1980, sygn. 2, Fragment wspomnień Ryszarda Wragi; zaproszenia, korespondencja, chapter 19, ll. 7–13; chapter 20, ll. 1–8.

CHAPTER XIX. [7] In due time The Red Police Force became a State wide institution, numbering in its ranks hundreds of thousands [of] uniformed men and millions of secret agents. It was not only a constant menace looming over the head of every human being but formed a special form of aristocracy. The members of the O.G.P.U.¹⁹ had exceptional rights and advantages and almost unlimited financial possibilities. Especially privileged were those employed abroad. For the organization of Yagoda²⁰ did not limit its activity only to Russia. The suspicious attitude of the Party towards the army and foreign communists alike gave Yagoda a perfect opportunity to build up his agencies beyond the frontiers, gradually pushing into the background both the Military Intelligence and Comintern Information Service. The foreign department of the O.G.P.U. grew to gigantic demensions [dimensions]. Special schools were organised for the agent's

¹⁹ Joint State Political Directorate (Rus. *Объединённое государственное политическое управление*) name of the Soviet secret state police from 1923 until 1934. Previously known as GPU (State Political Directorate – *Государственное политическое управление*). Later the function of secret police was transferred to the NKVD (abbreviation from Russian *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел* – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).

²⁰ Генрих Г. Ягода (Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda, born Yenokh Gershevich Iyeguda) (born 1891 – died 1938) – head of the Soviet Secret Police (O.G.P.U., from 1934 N.K.V.D.) from 1934 to 1936. He was tried and executed in 1938. See *Генрих Ягода. Нарком внутренних дел СССР, Генеральный комиссар государственной безопасности. Сборник Документов* (Казань: [n.p.], 1997).

training, which sometimes lasted for several years. In 1932 and 1933 we managed to smuggle a couple of our own men into such schools in Minsk and Moscow. I must admit that when they reappeared, one in Polish territory [and] the other in France, their instruction in espionage was up to the mark and both seemed [8] perfectly prepared to work in the chosen countries.

Nevertheless the orthodox and narrow[-]minded Soviet point of view had its detrimental effect on the schooling of even those picked aristocrats. The bulk of the studies was impregnated with political propaganda. False information about living conditions in Europe and capitalistic civilization was drummed into pupils['] heads with a tremendous stress laid on class war, so that the future secret agent went out to do his job into what he regarded as a tottering Western world, where lack of principle and general putritude were the law and money ruled over everything.

Soon however, it became obvious that this very "putritude" proved most attractive to these communistic avenging angels. With voluptuous thrill they ducked into "capitalistic chaos" and emerged feeling a still keener appetite for its delights. Having money, they squandered it right and left simply gorging themselves with those soul destroying dangers and against which they were supposed to "protect the Revolution".

Here We saw our chance. Having watched the behaviours of Soviet agents arriving from Russia to foreign countries and letting them operate unmolested for quite a period of time, we came to the conclusion that they were the best material we could use for espionage. We only had to play on their reluctance of returning to their native "Paradise".

I remember a case in France. It happened when I was there in 1938 during the International Exhibition.

We had Paris well under observation. It was crammed with Soviet agents operating not only against France, but also her [9] Allies, and Poland was one of them. Moreover French industry was commissioned with several important orders from us in arms and equipment and we were interested that information should not leak out to the Russians.

Curiously enough Soviet Intelligence found many helpers among the Russian White Emmigrants [Emigrants]. One of the most important was Count Ignatiev,²¹ former Colonel and Military Attaché under the Tsarist Regime. After a few years in exile his sympathies turned suddenly to the

²¹ Алексей А. Игнатъев (Aleksiej A. Ignatiev) (born 1877 – died 1954) – general major of the Russian Army after the February revolution, representative of the Russian Army in France when the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, after which he chose to stay in France, but in the 1920s accepted the Soviet government and worked for the Soviet Intelligence. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1937.

Red Banner and he tried to live up to his new convictions by joining the Soviet Secret Service both military and political. Soon he organised a net of informers picked out mostly from amongst his colleagues, officers of the White army. Count Ignatiev had brains and good social contacts. He might have proved to be quite dangerous to France if it were not for his swagger and conceit.

We had an eye on him for a long time and this put us on the track of Ignatiev's boss, an agent of Soviet political police masquerading as a member of some economic mission and duly provided with a diplomatic passport. This chap had toured Europe already for a couple of years and his role consisted in gleaning information from several operating agents such as Ignatiev. Having had the opportunity of a few draughts from the capitalistic delights he spent his time in expensive restaurants and night clubs and was especially susceptible to feminine charms.

For a month or so we concentrated our observation on his person. The results were not spectacular as regards political information but we managed to collect a thick dossier of his goings on. As I arrived in Paris the file was produced for my inspection and a [10] proposal put before me. My collaborator suggested to make use of the Soviet agent on the force of his record. He was prepared to bet anything that after a short conversation with the person in question we could secure him as an informant. I wasn't too optimistic, but we risked nothing and it was worth trying.

One of the many girl friends of our Red Don Juan worked for our Intelligence. As we had instructed her[,] she signalled the day and hour of his prospective visit. We were on the spot to meet him. When we arrived we sent the girl off to the pictures and started a friendly chat. My colleague did all the talking, I preferred to remain in the background and observe. Item after item, all his activities of the last few weeks were put before him in minute detail. Among them were many which proved great frivolity on his part and complete lack of obedience to the rules of Sovietic Secret Service whose rigoristic intransigence was notorious.

Others disclosed his contacts and as well as paralysed his future work. The summing up was short and straight to the point. If we disclosed the collected material before the Soviet authorities he was sunk. It meant immediate recalling, farewell to Europe, personal independence [independence] and women. We did not mention further consequences, they were obvious and would be unpleasant to discuss. Here was our offer cut and dry: we shall stay mum but in return we want him to pass on to us all information destined [destined] to his superior.

I was sitting apart slightly in the shadow, and watched with interest the reactions of our unfortunate Red agent. He was a member of the Party, an honor in itself, bestowed only upon the best.

[11] He was strong and tough and looked brutal. I expected him to react violently or at least remain unbending as a Communist should to such a proposal. Instead I saw him crumple up completely before the possibility of returning to Russia. The vision of a forced labour-camp in contrast to the pleasures which had already become a necessity outbalanced any patriotic feeling or vestige of honor still lingering. He accepted. Later on we received through him, several times, important and valuable information. Especially interesting were details about the part played by Colonel Ignatiev in the kidnapping of General Miller in 1937.²²

The experiment proved successful but did not last very long. After a time our new informant was recalled and we never heard of him again.

Another similar case happened in Poland. In one of our provincial towns a stranger appeared whose behaviour seemed rather suspicious. We had him trailed and soon there was no doubt that he belonged to the Soviet Secret Service. He had plenty of money [and] well faked documents, managed to make a few friends and even provided himself with a sweetheart, a perfectly decent and unsuspecting girl. At first he kept himself well in hand, was careful and well disciplined. But soon the atmosphere got the better of him and started off the usual psychological process. Cabarets, parties and weekend trips to Warsaw with his girl-friend succeeded one another. Finally he decided to take a holiday in Zakopane[,] a lovely winter sports resort in the Tatre [Tatra] [M]mountains. There he was arrested.

[12] It transpired that he was a captain of the Red Army General Staff and had had a long training in Intelligence schools, first in Kiev then in Moscow. Being of Polish extraction he could speak the language with only a faint trace of accent and was therefore sent to Poland. A characteristic detail – although schooled by the army Intelligence Corps and charged with purely military investigation, he was subordinated to the Foreign Department of the Political Police, then already called the N.K.V.D.

A few hours of interrogation were enough to make him switch over and offer himself for work against Russia. When this information reached me I decided to travel down and see him. He was a young man, intelligent, the son of an artisan in a small town of the Ukraine [Ukraine]. When he was still studying in the Military Academy his father and family were deported and forced to settle on the banks of Peczara [Pechora] River, Northern Russia. He himself was summoned before the authorities and threatened with severe consequences if he did not agree to enter the Secret Service

²² Евгений К. Миллер (Evgenii Miller) (born 1867 – died 1939) – lieutenant general of the Russian Army, chief of staff of the 12th and later 5th Army, commander of the 26 Army Corps during the Great War, a prominent leader of the anti-Bolshevik émigré movement, was abducted by Soviet agents in Paris in 1937, taken to Moscow, and executed in May of 1939.

and operate on Polish territory. Apparently as an officer of not proletariat birth he had everything to fear. He told me how, under duress, he eventually signed a declaration committing himself to what they wanted. He never got his Military Academy Degree but was instead trained in a special school for Spies.

Evidently he was telling the truth, but during the conversation I discovered him to be a thoroughly demoralised and weak character. I gazed at him, pondering what to do. There he was sitting before me, terrified, covered with sweat, begging us to use him as a spy against his own country.

[13] «Do I understand you want us to help cross the frontier? – I asked him. – Are you willing to act there as our observation agent and informer? Contact your old friends and superior to betray them»

He trembled and winced with fear. No, no! on no account would he go back to Russia. Let us use him here in Poland. Under our instructions he would provide the Bolsheviks with false data. I could see he was well trained in the art of insinuation. However I did not see how we could accept his offer. It was not sound and he was too weak to be trusted. One thing was clear: A captain of the Red Army was shaking in his shoes at the very thought of going back to Russia. He preferred a Polish prison, preferred to abase himself, anything but not that. He filled me with disgust and for a short moment I thought of setting him free, just handing him over to Soviet authorities and good riddance. No punishment could be greater. Then I took pity on him and anyhow it was against the law. He would be tried and sentenced to jail. I shall never forget the flicker of relief in his eyes at my decision.

[1] CHAPTER XX

Personal contact with the “capitalistic” way of life was not the only factor tending to demoralise the Soviet political police. Symptoms of moral decay were visible everywhere, even in Headquarters and among Yagoda’s deputies to particular Republics of the Union.

For a couple of years I had the chance to observe two Soviet officials of high rank: Balicki[,]²³ chief of the G.P.U. for the Ukraine and Zakowski,²⁴ chief of G.P.U. in Leningrad.

²³ Всеволод А. Балицкий (Vsevolod A. Balitskij) (born 1892 – died 1937) – Commissar of State Security 1st Class, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, he directed the NKVD of Ukraine during the Great Famine. Executed in 1937. See Юрій Шаповал and Вадим Золотарьов, *Всеволод Балицкий: Особо, час, оточення* (Київ: Стило, 2002).

²⁴ Леонид М. Заковский (Leonid Zakovskij, born Henriks Štubis) (born 1894 – died 1938) – a Latvian. Commissar 1st Class of State Security. Noted for his terror in Belarus. Appointed in Leningrad after Kirov’s murder, he carried out terror in Leningrad. Executed in 1938.

Balicki kept the Ukraine [Ukraine] throttled in an iron grip. Trying to squeeze out the last breath of national life he recurred to the most unbound terrorism and was responsible, together with the public prosecutor, for constructing a case against the Ukrainian [Ukrainian] Freedom league. As you already know this monstrous trial was held in 1930 in Kharkov.²⁵

But Balicki, immoral to the very core, greedy and debauched, and craving even more power[,] did not stop at persecuting those who from the Bolshevik point of view could be dangerous to the Soviet Regime. Around himself he created such an atmosphere of delation and intrigue, launched such an army of stool-pigeons that his methods turned against the Government itself and especially the economic administration. It gave an opening to the enemies of Soviet Russia. Some years after the Kharkov trial I had a long conversation with a representative of Ukrainian [Ukrainian] Nationalists who informed me that his organization had decided to take advantage [2] of the situation by infiltrating agents into Balicki's web. Thus the Soviet political police would be used as an instrument to create confusion in the management of Soviet affairs. I was impressed, every detail of the plan was fixed and probably would have been carried out in full if it were not for the liquidation of Yagoda. Balicki was bound to share his fate. I remember how at the time rumours were spread by the Red press that Balicki had been a Polish agent. This was not true but I cannot deny that caught in his own maze of intrigue and doublecrossing, he sometimes did exactly what we desired, believing to act for the good of his party.

If possible Zakowski had an even more repulsive personality, completely degenerate with a superiority complex he would stop at nothing to make a brilliant career. He believed himself to possess exceptional intellectual power and in his self[-]confidence did not hesitate to pass verdict on the most imminent scholars and scientists, declaring them orthodox or heretic on the strength of his judgment. In reality he was out to destroy the Russian Intelligentsia, always ferreting there for enemy agents or saboteurs. As far as I can judge He [he] was deeply entangled in the web of German espionage.

These two specimens of O.G.P.U. officials give an idea of the atmosphere that reigned behind the scenes of Kirov's murder.

The stage was set in Leningrad. This capital of the Tsars was [3] even before the Revolution one of the most revolutionary towns [cities] of Russia, with a class-conscious proletariat and a large group of leftist Intelligentsia. To these two potential centres [centers] of sedition, constant reinforcement

See Никита В. Петров and Константин В. Скоркин, *Кто руководил НКВД. 1934–1941. Справочник* (Москва: Звенья, 1999), 198–200.

²⁵ It refers to the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (see note 16 above).

was added by the vicinity of the Baltic Fleet which was under a strong influence of Bolshevik propaganda. The early phases of the 1917 Revolution were mostly enacted in Leningrad. Later, when the Bolsheviks seized power[,] a split occurred among the Communists and some of them stood out in protest. And so in Leningrad was born not only the Revolution but also the first opposition against Bolshevik domination.

After the Bolsheviks had the capital transferred to Moscow, Leningrad remained for a few years under the governorship of Zinoviev,²⁶ the most deadly after Trotsky²⁷ enemy of Stalin [the most deadly enemy of Stalin after Trotsky]. Soon[,] however[,] Zinoviev was liquidated and the office of Secretary to the Leningrad Committee of the Party was bestowed upon Miron Kirov.²⁸ In fact, he became the all powerful Deputy not only of the Central Government and Moscow Politbureau but of Stalin himself. Of all the men who after the disappearance of Lenin's old group had been at one time or another members of the Politbureau, Soviet Supreme Council, Kirov was certainly [by] far the most remarkable. Unflinching and severe he was intelligent, a born leader and without any doubt a thoroughly convinced Communist. Soon people began to consider him as the future successor to the Dictator, only a more attractive and popular one, owing to his pure Russian blood. Of this general opinion Stalin must have been certainly aware. Stalin has never been inclined to appreciate presumptive successor to himself. Yagoda and his O.G.P.U. decided to take advantage of such feelings.

The situation was involved. Since 1932 the Party watched with growing misgivings the ever more powerful O.G.P.U. It was a constant threat not only to the community but to the Party itself. General corruption [4] and abuse seemed to accompany this excess [excess] of power. At that time the Party still had among its [its] members a few sincere revolutionaries with an idealistic outlook, who condemned the atmosphere of dissipation prevailing in the corps of the "Defenders of the Revolution". Tacitly the Party was preparing an act of accusation against them. More than likely this critical attitude of the Party was not entirely divided [shared?] by Stalin. He was never inclined to put all his eggs into one basket and surely preferred to use as his tools not only the Party, but the army and the police as well. A balance of power was essential for this

²⁶ Григорий Е. Зиновьев (Grigorij E. Zinov'ev) (born 1883 – died 1936) – one of the most prominent Old Bolsheviks. Executed by Stalin in 1936.

²⁷ Лев Д. Троцкий (Lev D. Trockij) (born 1879 – died 1940) – one of the heroes of the Bolshevik Revolution, creator of the Red Army who later became the bitterest enemy of Stalin. He was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929 and in 1940 was murdered in Mexico by Stalin's order.

²⁸ Сергей Миронович Киров (born 1886 – died 1934).

purpose and to limit the role of the police would dangerously add to the party's importance. Yagoda, obliging as always, understood only to[o] well the secret intentions of his boss and so started a most extraordinary conspiracy which came to be a climax with the death of Kirov.

In 1935 and 1934 I had among the staff of our Leningrad Consulate a most trustworthy agent whose task was to observe the O.G.P.U. activity over there. Leningrad was then still a fairly lively cultural and economic centre. It had several foreign consulates, was visited by missions and delegations, scientific and commercial. This, given the O.G.P.U. methods, created ample opportunity for intrigue and provocation.

Normal consular work was difficult under such conditions and so to obtain some sort of security I instructed our agent to concentrate his observations on the O.G.P.U. especially so, as Leningrad was important to us in our commercial dealings with Russia. He handled his task perfectly, as it turned out almost to[o] well. Very soon he had the O.G.P.U. interested in his person and in consequence could boast of several confidential contacts among it's [its] officials, some of them quite important. Our agent was cautious but thorough. He succeeded to give the impression [5] of being especially interested in anti-Stalin organizations of the opposition. Information flowed in. T[h]rough one channel, details about Kirov who was supposed to be, next to Stalin, the greatest despot in the Party and a serious menace to international relations; through another, hints that a branch of the Young Communists organization was active in Leningrad. This organization, directed against the tyranny of Stalin and Kirov, was supposed to aim at a change of government and a return to a milder Socialist Regime, less dangerous to Russia's neighbours. The informer never missed an opportunity to remind my agent about the ever more aggressive plans of the Politbureau in connection with Europe. Then, [he] always pointed out Kirov as the chief instigator of these plottings.

All this information was of course prepared by the O.G.P.U. and cunningly administered in careful doses to their patient. On the other hand we were able to check that similar stories, and coming from the same sou[r]ces, were whispered into the ears of other representatives of foreign countries, especially the Germans, Estonians, and Latvians. Every possible artifice was used to lure them into the trap. The German Consul was tackled by the same stool-pigeon that frequented our Consulate. However[,] he pulled a blank there. The old Teuton was a sly fox, well seasoned in such matters. He had spent a couple of years in Kiev.²⁹ At that time he dem-

²⁹ He is likely to be Rudpolf Sommer (born 1877 – died ?), who severed in Kyiv from 1928 to 1933, when he was transferred to Leningrad. See *Degeners Wer ist's?*, Vol. 10 (Berlin: [n.p.], 1935), 1515.

onstrated great enthusiasm for Russo-German collaboration, organizing gorgeous parties for Soviet and German generals at the occasion of the Red Army manoeuvres held in the vicinity of Kiev under German supervision. Probably this gave him the opportunity of discovering something about the O.G.P.U. and he had learnt his lesson.

I had no doubts to the purpose of the whole intrigue. Obviously the O.G.P.U. was preparing an attempt on the life of Kirov and wanted to shift the blame on to "Capitalist Enemies". Those[,] of course[,] who would [6] fall into the trap. That is why several possible dupes were selected. If one would shy, another may perhaps be willing to nibble at the bait. There was however something I could not understand. The personality of the Chief of Leningrad Political Police was well known to me and I wondered why such an astute man played his cards so impatiently.³⁰ His game seemed to[o] transparent for so serious a gamble. My amazement was even greater when I heard that O.G.P.U. agents abroad were trying to tempt with the murder of Kirov two or three groups of Russian Emigrees at once. Then, one day I received an extensive report from our Leningrad agent. The O.G.P.U. stool-pigeon had made a definite proposal; would we provide explosive bullet weapons and hand grenades of a specially dangerous type, to certain indicated persons?

This really seemed going to[o] far and I could not understand the reason for such stupid, naive provocation. Only later I realised that the O.G.P.U. was completely taken in by the artistic performance of our agent who was most convincing in his enthusiasm to overthrow the Soviet Government and help Russia back into the grove of moderate evolution. The unfortunate stool-pigeon, already sure of his prey, must have had quite a shock when our agent reacted violently to his proposal, telling him to get out and threatening him with the police. He probably received the same reception in other places for only the Latvian Consul's name figured later on the list of instigators to the crime, so he must have been the only dupe.³¹

For the killing took place against all the odds and Kirov was murdered. A tool of course had to be chosen by the O.G.P.U. They picked a young hysterical [hysterical] communist Nicolaiev [Leonid Nikolaev] who shot Kirov in protest, acting on the part af [of] the Young Communist's Organization. The original aim was not obtained, "Capitalist Elements" not being involved. Nevertheless the [7] murder of Kirov has it's [its] importance as a[n] ominous precedent. It opened a long list of political crimes

³⁰ He refers to Филипп Д. Медведь (Filipp Medwied) (born 1890 – died 1937). He was demoted after the Kirov murder and in 1937 was executed, accused of being a member of the POW.

³¹ This refers to Georgs Bisseniek (born 1885 – died 1941). See note 12 above.

and was the first symptom of that rage of terror which was to be loosened [unleashed] against the Party and the whole nation.

The choice of a representative of the younger generation was not a matter of mere chance. At that time some of the young Communists really organised themselves in opposition groups and could have become dangerous. I do not think that terroristic murders were included in their program. That was an invention of the O.G.P.U.[,] which with one stone wanted to kill two, even three birds: liquidate Kirov, a presence uncomfortable to the dictator, give Stalin the excuse to start a campaign of violence against all opposition and demonstrate to public opinion how indispensable was the political police if order and security were to be maintained.

Nicolaiev's person was also chosen acrefully [carefully]. He was the last really active member of the young Bolshevik Opposition. His organization[,] however[,] did not aim at a moderate socialistic evolution. It followed the ideas of Trotsky and believed in the necessity of permanent revolution. Nicolaiev's motive for killing Kirov was not purely altruistic. He wanted personal revenge as well. Kirov had seduced his wife, a young and lovely girl. Slowly and painstakingly the O.G.P.U. worked on Nicolaev, acting in this drama Iago's part to Nicolaev's Othello. At a certain stage our Leningrad agent had had the opportunity of watching this diabolical performance when the stool-pigeon wanted to contact him with the future murderer.

The close of the drama was pure Soviet style. Every trace of the double [double] [8] crossing game was carefully obliterated. The police, true instigator to the crime, got reprimanded for carelessness and negligence in protecting the precious life of Kirov, "Comrade in arms and beloved friend of Stalin". National honours were given at the victim's funeral. Yagoda, Chief of the O.G.P.U. which armed the hand of the murderer, remained still fast in Stalin's favour. And a vigorous "purge" took place among the petty officials of the O.G.P.U. in Leningrad.

As to our agent it was to[o] dangerous to leave him where he was. He had to be recalled. One of our old and experienced Intelligence Officers was sent in his place. He confirmed every detail of his predecessor[']s story and added a few more which have shed a revealing light on the back-stage of Kirov's murder.

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STRESZCZENIE

Hiroaki Kuromiya, Jerzy Niezbrzycki (Ryszard Wraga) i polski wywiad na Związek Sowiecki w latach trzydziestych XX w.

Jerzy Niezbrzycki (ur. 1901/2 – zm. 1968) był kluczową postacią polskiego wywiadu okresu II Rzeczypospolitej. Początkowo służył w Kijowie (od 1928 do 1929 r.), a w latach 1932–1939 kierował referatem „Wschód” Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego Wojska Polskiego. Po wojnie zdecydował się pozostać za granicą (w Wielkiej Brytanii, Francji, Stanach Zjednoczonych), gdzie zajmował się analizą spraw sowieckich, publikując pod pseudonimem Ryszard Wraga. Pod koniec życia Niezbrzycki zaczął spisywać w języku angielskim wspomnienia ze swojego życia. Fragment jego niedokończonych pamiętników, znajdujących się obecnie w nowojorskim Instytucie Józefa Piłsudskiego w Ameryce, autor zdecydował się opublikować w niniejszym artykule. Nie były one wcześniej szeroko znane ani badane. Wspomnienia te dostarczają ciekawego i niepowtarzalnego wglądu w działalność polskiego wywiadu przeciwsowieckiego działającego w okresie międzywojennym. Wspomnienia Niezbrzyckiego sugerują również, że nawet po niesławnej katastrofie, jaką była dla państw „kapitalistycznych” operacja „Trust” w 1927 r., najbardziej doświadczeni zagraniczni agenci wywiadu, tacy jak Niezbrzycki, byli nadal metodycznie wprowadzani w błąd przez skomplikowaną sowiecką działalność dezinformacyjną, co widać szczególnie we fragmencie wspomnień Niezbrzyckiego dotyczącym wydarzeń rozgrywających się wokół zabójstwa Siergieja Kirowa w grudniu 1934 r.

Słowa kluczowe: Jerzy Niezbrzycki (Ryszard Wraga), wywiad, dezinformacja, Polska, Związek Sowiecki, Łotwa

SUMMARY

Hiroaki Kuromiya, Jerzy Niezbrzycki (Ryszard Wraga) and the Polish Intelligence in the Soviet Union in the 1930s

Jerzy Niezbrzycki (born 1901/2 – died 1968) was a key figure in Polish intelligence circles during the Second Polish Republic. Initially serving in Kyiv (Kijów) from 1928 to 1929, he went on to lead the “East” section of the Second Department (*Dwójka*) of the Polish Army General Staff until 1939, which dealt with the Soviet Union. After WWII, he chose to stay abroad (in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States), where he continued to analyze Soviet affairs, publishing under the pen name of Ryszard Wraga. Later, Niezbrzycki began writing recollections of his life in English. His unfinished memoirs, now housed in New York’s Józef Piłsudski Institute of America, are reproduced partially in this essay. They have not been widely circulated or examined. The memoirs afford an interesting and unique insight into the anti-Soviet Polish Intelligence operatives who worked under tremendous constraints during the interwar period. Niezbrzycki’s memoirs also suggest that even after the infamous debacle of Operation “Trust” in 1927, some of

the most experienced foreign intelligence operatives like Niezbrzycki were further misled by elaborate Soviet disinformation, as seen in the events leading up to the assassination of Sergei Kirov in December 1934 in Leningrad.

Keywords: Jerzy Niezbrzycki (Ryszard Wraga), intelligence, disinformation, Poland, the Soviet Union, Latvia

АННОТАЦИЯ

Хироаки Куромия, Ежи Незбжицкий (Рышард Врага) и польская разведка в отношении Советского Союза в 30-е годы XX века

Ежи Незбжицкий (род. в феврале 1901, умер в 1968 г.) был ключевой фигурой в польской разведке во время Второй Речи Посполитой. Первоначально он служил в Киеве (с 1928 по 1929 год), а в 1932–1939 годах возглавлял отдел “Восток” Второго управления Генерального штаба Войска Польского. После войны он решил остаться за границей (в Великобритании, Франции, США), где занимался анализом советских дел, издавался под псевдонимом Рышард Врага. Ближе к концу жизни Незбжицкий начал записывать свои мемуары на английском языке. В данной статье автор решил опубликовать отрывок из его незаконченных дневников, находящихся в настоящее время в Институте Юзефа Пилсудского в Нью-Йорке. Они не были ранее ни широко известны, ни исследованы. Эти воспоминания дают любопытное и уникальное представление о деятельности польской антисоветской разведки, действовавшей в межвоенный период. Мемуары Незбжицкого также намекают на то, что даже после печально известной катастрофы, какой стала для „капиталистических” государств операция „Trust” в 1927 году, наиболее опытные агенты внешней разведки, такие как Незбжицкий, по-прежнему систематически вводились в заблуждение сложной советской дезинформационной деятельностью, что особенно заметно во фрагменте воспоминаний, касающихся событий вокруг убийства Сергея Кирова в декабре 1934 года.

Ключевые слова: Ежи Незбжицкий (Рышард Врага), разведка, дезинформация, Польша, Советский Союз, Латвия