The role and place of secret collaborators in the informational activity of the gpu-nkvd in the 1920s and 1930s

(on the basis of materials of the Donbass region)

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VOLODYMYR SEMYSTIAHA

THE ROLE AND PLACE
OF SECRET COLLABORATORS
IN THE INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITY
OF THE GPU-NKVD
IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

(on the basis of materials of the Donbass region)

A system of secret informers serves, without exception, as the eyes and ears of any secret police in any state. Different secret police share many common features. At the same time, certain traits are distinct and germane to a particular state. They depend on the particular characteristics of the secret police itself, on the environment in which it works, on its methods of secret surveillance, on the surrounding political institutions and on the authorities whose orders are being carried out. The organs of the Ukrainian GPU-NKVD are no exception to this general rule. The most characteristic feature of the activity of secret informers was, first and foremost, devotion to the principles of the Bolshevik Party.

The topic of secret informers is not only a novel one, but also a topic with a moral and ethical dimension. In keeping with resolution 206, passed by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on April 1, 1994, the documents of the GPU-NKVD are currently preserved in the State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (*Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy* – SBU). In contrast to the former Soviet Baltic republics, in Ukraine information on “operative-investigative activities” of the state security organs, as well as on individuals who are collaborating or have collaborated with these organs in the past, has been legislatively designated as a state secret. This is the main reason why the topic has not been adequately studied in Ukrainian historiography. In addition, the study of this data represents certain difficulties for the researcher. On the one hand, there is a rather limited base of

source materials. On the other hand, there has been extensive study of this topic by experts within the state security organs, but these remain classified and designated exclusively for internal bureaucratic use within the security services themselves.

Nevertheless, after the proclamation of Ukrainian independence, memoirs and scholarly studies have appeared in Ukraine, which examine the activity of secret agents and the broader surveillance work of the GPU-NKVD during the 1920s and 1930s.¹ The memoirs of the jurist L. O. Okynshevych describe the methods used by the GPU-NKVD for the recruitment of the secret service and the possible repercussions of refusing to be a secret informer.² In examining the formation and functioning of the administrative-information system, Serhii Bilokin quite plausibly argued that the great majority of Chekists during the 1920s and 1930s began their careers as secret informers when they were youths between the ages of 15 and 17, and that such collaboration had a thoroughly negative influence on these individuals.³ Nevertheless, on the whole, this problem has not received adequate attention. This is especially true of the Donbass region. Published memoirs provide a few rare glimpses of secret informer activity. For instance, V. Halytsky, who suffered political repression in the Donbass in the late 1930s, recounted the forms and methods of secret informers in the NKVD prison torture chambers in Kamianets-Podilsky, Luhanske, and Artemivske.⁴ The research proposed here, however, is the first of its kind. It is based on documents of the All-Ukrainian ChK-GPU-NKVD, the militia, the procuracy, and the Communist Party that are preserved in the state and party archives of Donetsk and Luhanske *oblasti*.

From the first days of its existence, the Cheka began to put in place a network of secret informers, which gradually came to encompass all strata of society without exception. In the Donbass region, owing to its occupation by the Austro-Germans

1. Volodymyr Prystaiko and Iurii Shapoval, *Spilka vyzvolennia Ukrainy: nevidomi dokumenty i fakty* (Kyiv, 1995); Volodymyr Prystaiko and Iurii Shapoval, *Mykhailo Hrushevsky i GPU-NKVD. Trahichne desiatylittia: 1924-1934* (Kyiv, 1996); Iurii Shapoval, Volodymyr Prystaiko, and Vadym Zolotarov, *Cheka-GPU-NKVD v Ukraini: osoby, fakty, dokumenty* (Kyiv, 1997); Volodymyr Prystaiko and Iurii Shapoval, *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: sprava "UNTs" i ostanni roky (1931-1934)* (Kyiv, 1999); I. V. Verba, "Kost Shtepa," *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 4 (1999): 98-114; R. Iu. Podkur, *Dokumenty radianskykh spetssluzhb iak dzherelo do vyvchennia politychnykh, sotsialno-ekonomichnykh, kulturnykh protsesiv v Ukraini, 20-30-ts rr. XX st.* (kandidskaia dissertatsiia, Kyiv, 1998); R. Iu. Podkur, "Informatsiino-analitychna robota iak odyin z napriamkiv diialnosti spetssluzhb v 20-30-rr.," *Z arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*, 1-2 (1998): 342-356; R. Iu. Podkur, "Povstanskyi rukh ta opozyttsiini politychni uhrupovannia v informatsiinykh dokumentakh ChK-GPU (pochatok 20-kh rr.)," *Z arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*, 2-4 (2000): 390-397; R. Iu. Podkur, *Za povidomlenniam radianskykh spetssluzhb* (Kyiv, 2000); V. V. Chentsov, *Dokumenty organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti kak istochnik po sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii Ukrainy v 1921-1925 godakh (na materialakh Ekaterinoslavskoi gubernii)* (kandidskaia dissertatsiia, Dnipropetrovsk, 1992); V. V. Chentsov, *Politychni represii v Radianskii Ukraini v 20-ti rr.* (Kyiv, 2000).

2. L. O. Okynshevych, *Moia akademichna pratsia v Ukraini* (Lviv, 1995): 50-52.

3. S. I. Bilokin, *Masovyi teror iak zasib derzhavnoho upravlinnia v SRSR (1917-1941 rr.)* (Kyiv, 1999): 109.

4. V. Halytsky, "Za gratomy NKVD," *Nove zhyttia* [Voroshylivhrad], (November 22, 1942): 2; (November 29, 1942): 2. See also, *Rytsari dolga: Vospominaniia chekistov* (Donetsk, 1986); *Edinozhdy priniav prisiagu...: rasskazy o chekistakh* (Donetsk, 1990).

and later the White armies, this work was temporarily interrupted. It was resumed only after the retreat of Denikin's armies in 1919 and the creation of Donetsk *guberniia* with its center in Luhanske, which was later transferred to Bakhmut (now Artemivske). Archival documents demonstrate that information about the political and economic situation throughout the entire Donbass territory, including the mood among the various strata of the population, was gathered and elaborated in great detail in each *okrug* department of the GPU. This information was then transmitted to the *guberniia* center and finally on to the registrational-informational administration of the central Ukrainian GPU in Kharkiv. Only from there did it land on the desks of the higher state-political leadership. From the first days of the creation of these GPU information departments, local party organs actively assisted in the gathering and transmission of information to the organs of the GPU-NKVD. For example, on October 30, 1923, the Donetsk *guberniia* party committee issued a circular stating that without the "support of party organizations, it will not be possible to establish the informational work of the GPU on their efforts alone." The circular demanded that all local party organizations issue appropriate directives obliging "responsible party workers to provide the organs of the GPU, through the *okrug* party secretaries, with information concerning questions of interest to the organs of the GPU on the emergence of various counter-revolutionary groups, the conduct of anti-Soviet individuals, changes in mood among the masses of workers and peasants, which are revealed by party centers during the process of their work."⁵ Incidentally, in a number of circulars issued in 1923, the *guberniia* party committee enjoined party members not to interpret such collaboration with the GPU as "gendarmes' work."⁶

This necessity of party help to the GPU can be explained by the poor financial situation of the GPU, particularly after the introduction of the New Economic Policy. In 1923, central financing was almost entirely cut off and the local GPU survived exclusively thanks to financing by the local authorities. Until September 1, 1923, the salary of GPU workers was three to four times lower than that of people working in other government institutions.⁷ Food rations and material help were given out irregularly and below the established norms, and therefore could not compensate for the inadequate salaries.⁸ It is certain that in such conditions the small GPU apparatus could not independently conduct informational work at an adequate level. By the end of 1923, there were 30,000 party members in Donetsk *guberniia*. They were most often "up to date on all matters" that were within the scope of their activity. In addition, they possessed a widespread network of party informants.

5. Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Luhanskoi Oblasti (hereafter DALO), 34/1/2, 20.

6. DALO, 34/1/1, 134.

7. Tsentralnyi Derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchych orhaniv vlady Ukrainy, 2/2/742, 36.

8. V. Okipniuk, "Pravovi zasady finansuvannia orhaniv GPU USRR u 20-ti rr.," *Z arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*, 1-2 (1999): 359.

It should be stressed that such collaboration in the informational sphere among party organs and organs of the GPU-NKVD is very characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the fact that at times informational materials of party informants were subjective, unconfirmed, and occasionally used for settling personal scores, they were welcomed by the GPU-NKVD. Thus, on March 25, 1929, the Luhanske party committee transmitted to the district department of the GPU information from a party informant named Rudnytsky about the suspected espionage activities of six teachers and lecturers in the Donbass and Kharkiv.⁹ Although in reality these individuals were merely members of a local group studying economic questions, they all ended up under GPU-NKVD surveillance and were repressed as a group in both 1933 and 1938.

The GPU's use of secret informers was particularly successful in the struggle against banditism in the Donbass after the Civil War. Such work involved not only a careful selection of informants and a broad expansion of their informational network, but also constant education and detailed instructions to each secret informer. To this end, in 1923 the *okrug* department of the GPU formulated special instructions for senior informers in their struggle against banditism, that obliged them to keep their role secret and that provided a detailed elaboration of their tasks.¹⁰ By the end of 1923, 158 secret informers worked in the Transport Department of the Debaltsevo OGPU, which served ten railway stations in the Donetsk *okrug*. In November 1923 alone, through the senior member of the group attached to the information apparatus and the district representatives of the Roads Department of the OGPU, they transmitted sixty valuable analytical reports and received twenty new assignments. As a result, the locations and personal ties of the "Ponomarenko," "Rozorenyi," "Hushcha," and other armed gangs who were terrorizing the local population were discovered.¹¹ The data obtained was analyzed and shortly afterwards the gangs were liquidated.

As a result of long-term secret informer surveillance, the Luhanske *okrug* and Donetsk *guberniia* departments of the GPU determined that in 1924 the majority of armed robberies of trains on the territory of Donetsk *guberniia* and the railways of Ukraine and the adjacent RSFSR was carried out by an armed gang led by Fomenko. The painstaking work of secret collaborators gathering information about the bandits enabled the authorities on September 25, 1924, to detain Fomenko and fifteen of his accomplices.¹² In 1925, in Luhanske *okrug* alone, there were 484 secret informers investigating banditism in a joint secret informer network of the organs of the GPU and the militia. All of them were classified by separate categories – "A," "B," and "C." Sixty-four of them belonged to the category of special informers.¹³ By 1926, the Luhanske *okrug* department

9. DALO, 34/1/665, 135.

10. DALO, 766/2/2, 247.

11. DALO, 373/1/483, 76-78.

12. DALO, 636/2/13, 370.

13. DALO, 636/1/27, 195.

considered that banditism had been reduced to levels that could be managed by the regular militia and so gave up this role. On January 5, 1927, the head of the Ukrainian GPU, V. A. Balytsky, extended this policy to the rest of the Donbass region.¹⁴

For the most part, the organs of the GPU-NKVD in Ukraine duplicated the structure of the central political police apparatus. Naturally, the structure of the secret service-informational apparatus of the Ukrainian special services, the forms and methods of the collection of information also duplicated the all-union ones. Therefore, the main categories of secret informers also comprised informers (*osvedomiteli*), who provided so-called first-hand information, and agents (*agenty*), who took part in the surveillance of individual suspects. These informers served as the starting point of the formation of dossiers (*dela-formuliary*) by the different operative departments, if the acquired information was considered important and if it was verified as accurate. In order to understand this process, one must understand the many informational departments of the political police in the 1920s and 1930s, since it was in these departments that informers' declarations were registered, accumulated, and analyzed. For this a special network of plenipotentiaries (*upolnomochennye*) and their assistants, agents, and informers was created in various spheres of the economy, in various organizations and institutes, as well as in apartment houses. The plenipotentiaries and their assistants each had a network of agents and informers, from whom they received information for their reports on local events. Over the years, the size and form of this network varied greatly depending on the political situation, financing, and the abilities of the local "Chekists."

For instance, after the division of the Donbass into the Voroshilovhrad and Stalinsk *oblasti* in 1938, two NKVD *oblast'* administrations were likewise created. Their new secret informer networks were initially very small and far from effective. There were only 12 new informers in the Manhushiv district department of the Stalinsk NKVD administration a full six months after its creation. Altogether there were only 27 active informers in the entire districts and none at all in the two village soviets of Melekin and Bilosarai. As a result, out of 30 dossiers initiated by the district department, only 13 were supplied with secret informer surveillance.¹⁵ The same situation was said to exist in the districts of Avdiivka and Selydove.¹⁶

The secret informer network of the Makiivka city department of the NKVD was also small. For 32 mines, there were a total of 45 informers specializing in so-called "anti-sabotage informational work." The same situation existed in the Horlivka city department, whose informational network included 27 individuals. Incidentally, there was no informing at all done at large mines, such as Kocheharka, Kondratiivka, Oleksandr-Zakhid, and Radianskvuhillia.¹⁷ Also, in violation of

14. DALO, 1176/2/30, 47.

15. Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Donetskoi Oblasti (hereafter DADO), 326/5/37, 12-13.

16. *Ibid.*, 14.

17. *Ibid.*, 15.

instructions issued by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the All-Union NKVD, the Makiivka city department allowed the recruitment of the secretaries of party and *Komsomol* organizations, as well as the heads of trade union mining committees. The city department was also reprimanded because all seventeen documents that it produced within a six-month period concerning serious flaws in the work of the coal-mining sector did not include any materials acquired through the secret informer network.¹⁸

The Red Army district department, whose work was considered satisfactory by the Stalinsk *oblast'* NKVD administration, had 124 active secret informers; 59 of them were engaged in collecting information at enterprises in the coal-mining sector. Of the 61 active dossiers in January 1939, 43 of them (75%) were being worked on by secret informers developed as secret service dossiers, while in mid-1938 this was the case for only 16 out of 45 (35%).¹⁹ Nevertheless, the state of the secret informer network was still judged inadequate. An anti-sabotage network had not been established in the coal-mining industry; informants were recruited unsystematically and not in accordance with previously worked-out and confirmed plans. There were not enough residents and even qualified residents and their assistants governed no more than 14 active informers. Owing to the lack of safe houses, operative workers met some of their secret informers either in their own apartments or on the open street, which did not permit them to issue assignments, accept information, instruct or teach in any effective fashion.²⁰ These examples are not exceptional in the history of the territorial and transport organs of the GPU-NKVD of the Ukrainian Donbass region.

An investigation of the Transport Department of the NKVD of the Southern Donetsk Railway, for example, showed that between January and April 1939 the secret informer network for political investigations almost broke down completely, while operative work was organized in a thoroughly primitive fashion. For this reason, order no. 21 concerning the Transport Department of the Southern Donetsk Railway contained assignments that were aimed first and foremost at creating a clear-cut system of secret informers, including their further instruction and allocation to the secret informer network as railway station guards, cashiers, hall porters, porters, waiters, baggage check attendants, attendants at newspaper kiosks, postal, and baggage departments, hairdressing salons, conductors of suburban trains, and controllers. They were obliged to gather and transmit information not only about passengers and transport workers but also about the residents of settlements adjacent to railway stations.²¹

18. *Ibid.*, 15.

19. *Ibid.*, 20.

20. *Ibid.*, 21.

21. Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Upravlinnia Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy v Donetskii Oblasti (hereafter DA USBU DO). A collection of documents of the Transport Division of the NKVD of the Southern Donetsk Railway. File no. 494, case 15, fols. 19-20.

The study of the organization and use of the GPU's secret informer network during collectivization is of particular interest. In order to acquire indispensable information, the GPU created an extensive network of secret informers. In one single case, pertaining to the surveillance of the "Sybiriak" group from 1929 to 1931, more than 30 secret informers of the Luhanske *okrug* department, and later also the Luhanske city department of the GPU, actively monitored almost 200 peasants of the Luhanske, Novosvitlivka, and Uspenske districts. Who were these secret informers? What were their place and role in the surveillance carried out by local GPU organs? How valuable and objective was the information that they were acquiring?

Documents show that for the most part these were native-born, relatively young farmers; 80% of them were between 28 and 30 years of age; 17% were under 30 to 45 years old, and 3% were over 45. None of them belonged to the Communist Party. Like the majority of the rural population at the time, they had little education, although they carried some authority in the peasant milieu and among former Red partisans, because they were good agriculturalists. In the past they had taken part in various armed formations against the Austro-German and Denikin occupations of Ukraine. They collaborated with the organs of the GPU for several years. Since they were to acquire information within the national Ukrainian milieu, they were Ukrainians by nationality and almost all of them were local residents. Seven percent of them also worked as informers within the cells of the local GPU prison, reporting on what detained or arrested individuals were saying. These informers, in contrast to the others, had a higher or comparatively higher education, sometimes they were a member of the clergy, or in the past had supported the Bolsheviks and even served in the armies of the All-Union Cheka and had settled in the Donbass after the end of the Civil War.²²

Some of them had rather colorful biographies. Thus, A. D. Chaika, who was born in the Uspenske district, worked as a hired laborer until he was 18 years old. In the years of the first Russian democratic revolution he leaned toward the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party. In 1905, he took an active part in the armed demonstration of Donbass workers in the city of Horlivka. Concealing his participation in the armed revolt against the tsarist government, he was conscripted into the army where he served as secretary of a military unit in the city of Bakhmut. He was arrested in 1907 for taking part in a May Day meeting. Released shortly thereafter, he secretly provided fellow soldiers who were evading arrest with documents from the army administration. When he was discovered, he deserted. With the help of falsified documents, he hid in Germany, Austria, and Poland, where he was arrested several times. After being deported from Russia, he was arrested in 1910, deprived of his rights, and imprisoned in St. Nicholas's Fortress in St. Petersburg. Upon his return to Ukraine, he was arrested for distributing leaflets appealing to workers of the Donbass to protest against the arbitrariness of the

22. Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Upravlinnia Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy v Luhanskii Oblasti (hereafter DA USBU LO), case 19262r, vol. 1, fol. 120; tom. 3, fol. 82.

Austro-German occupiers and the regime of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky. Evading arrest, he joined a partisan squadron. After the defeat of Denikin's armies and the creation of Donetsk *guberniia*, he served in the Luhanske party committee and later in a special-task county battalion attached to the local Cheka. After demobilization, he collaborated secretly with the GPU department of Luhanske *okrug*. At the beginning of collectivization, Chaika, who was convinced that the Soviet leadership was conducting an erroneous policy in the villages, personally transmitted his proposals and view of the situation to the head of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, I. M. Kalinin, the head of the All-Ukrainian Executive Committee, H. I. Petrovsky, and the organs of the all-union and republican procurator's offices. Many times he challenged the arbitrariness of the local authorities who, in turn, persecuted him.²³ He was an unusual person and undoubtedly had undeniable authority and many connections in a number of districts in the Donbass. He was very well informed and was justifiably considered one of the most valuable secret informers of the GPU's Donetsk operative sector number 2.

In general, the GPU secret informers involved in the monitoring of the "Sybiriak" group were well-informed and their information about the local situation was objective and, for the most part, realistic. The secret informers displayed initiative in acquiring information. For example, D. I. Savchenko and P. M. Kolisnychenko transmitted exhaustive information about the political moods of various strata of the population, the milieu of former Red partisans and participants in the Civil War, officials of the district administration, and the most active low-level members in the villages. They purportedly prevented several terrorist acts from being carried out.²⁴ On the other hand, the means by which they obtained information often involved provocations and bordered on legal violations. Often their information was presented in a subservient and dogmatic form, marked by ideological clichés, as the local GPU required.

Thus, Savchenko, endeavoring to acquire information about the existence of anti-Soviet manifestations among former Red partisans in Luhanske district, held meetings in his own building. During these encounters he offered strong alcoholic beverages to those present, encouraging the tipsy and drunken citizens to launch into political discussions of forbidden topics. Meanwhile, the representatives of local power, who had hidden themselves in the building ahead of time, were listening and noting down everything that was taking place. As a rule, the local militia would disband the meeting and information acquired in this manner would be accumulated in GPU dossiers as material compromising individual persons.²⁵ The information provided to the GPU about a rebel kulak group armed with sawed-off shotguns, Nagan revolvers, and Brownings in the village of Novo-Annivtsi also

23. DA USBU LO, case 19262r, vol. 1, fols. 61, 120-121, 123-123ob, 134.

24. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fol. 132; vol. 2, fols. 82, 90.

25. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fols. 135-136.

had no basis in reality.²⁶ As investigative materials eventually showed, the 120 “rebels” in three rural districts and in the industrial city of Luhanske were “armed” only with four hunting rifles and a Nagan revolver.²⁷

The secret informer, A. D. Chaika, also acted in a provocational manner. While mingling with arrested and detained villagers in the cells of the Novosvitlivka militia and the Luhanske city department of the GPU, Chaika disseminated newspaper materials about the trial of members of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (SVU) then taking place in Kharkiv. Calling the leaders of this organization the defenders and liberators of the peasantry, he proposed that his cellmates join a local SVU branch that he headed. At the same time he explained that many members of the SVU were still at liberty and continuing their national-patriotic activity. Chaika called for open opposition to the current Soviet regime and the policy of collectivization and dekulakization that was destroying innocent people.²⁸

Completing the surveillance action, the local Chekists proclaimed that some of the secret informers had been leaders of an anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary organization that was preparing to topple Soviet rule and restore a capitalist system of agricultural management. In order to lend verisimilitude to these falsifications, they also revealed a connection between the rebels’ committee and an organization of specialist saboteurs uncovered earlier. These were agronomists and land surveyors of the former Luhanske *okrug* land division, as well as a rebel kulak organization that allegedly existed in the north, whose members were kulaks that had been deported there earlier from the Donbass.²⁹ Confirming these fabrications during interrogations, the secret informers D. I. Savchenko, P. M. Kolisnychenko, A. D. Chaika, and others, after “repenting” of their supposed acts, named everyone who allegedly took part in rebel activity.³⁰ This led to the arrest and punishment of several dozen men.³¹ In the absence of evidence against them, 62.7% of them were instead punished “for failing to inform the organs of the GPU about the existence of anti-Soviet rebel aspirations.”³²

As might be expected, the secret informers A. D. Chaika, P. M. Kolisnychenko, A. Ia. Shcheglov, D. S. Shulha, and a number of others were released, and the cases against them dropped.³³ The only one to suffer was D. I. Savchenko, who was not considered of any particular value. He was dismissed from the secret service-

26. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fols. 152-154.

27. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, fol. 182.

28. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fols. 30, 31, 33, 60, 91, 163; vol. 2, fol. 96.

29. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fol. 132; vol. 2, fols. 32, 33, 35, 36, 59, 62, 68, 80, 83; vol. 4, fol. 181.

30. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, fols. 58, 59, 60-6, 89-91, 97-98, 126, 152, 154, 163; vol. 2, fol. 96; vol. 4, fols. 185, 186, 189.

31. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, fols. 183-204.

32. *Ibid.* Calculated by the author.

33. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, fol. 206ob.

informational network and deported for three years to Siberia.³⁴ With this the leadership of the local GPU did not complete the monitoring of the “Sybiriak” group but transformed it into another dossier, in connection with which some of the cases against those villagers who had not been tried were set apart for further secret informer surveillance.³⁵ Later, many of the secret informers, including A. D. Chaika and M. F. Ierokhin, were actively exploited by the Voroshylovhrad NKVD city department.³⁶

The number of secret informers in the Donbass in the latter half of the 1930s began to be taken to an absurd degree. They were present in practically all civic organizations, institutions, and branches of industry, transport, and agriculture. They were far more numerous than those engaged in political investigations in the entire Russian empire at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the secret informer network also encompassed practically all civic organizations and political parties in the country.³⁷

As one characteristic instance, out of 20 staff members of High School no. 3 in the city of Voroshylovhrad, 13 (that is, 65%) were secret informers of the local NKVD department: “Luhansky,” “Kolidchenko,” “Chervonyi” (Red), “Oko” (Eye), “Stepanovsky,” “Sotyi” (One Hundredth), and so forth. Over a period of years they investigated one of their colleagues, H. A. Borshch, who was the finest mathematics teacher in the city. Periodically, the city NKVD department also brought the secret informers “Bohaienko,” “Melnykov,” “Fedchenko,” and others into this investigation. These individuals were his fellow classmates from the university that they had attended, directors and administrators of the teaching staff sections of a number of other municipal schools, leading workers of the local department of national education, and so forth. Their total number even surpassed the teaching staff of the school in which the subject of the investigation worked.³⁸ Each day they noted down every step, glance, and word that was uttered by Borshch: his conversations at home, on public transport, among his colleagues at work, with his children working on their school assignments. They uncovered spelling mistakes in the protocols of trade union meetings of the school teaching staff, which he had written and signed. There were even attempts to “read” his mind when he was alone. Particular industriousness was demonstrated by the secret informer of the local NKVD department named “Oko,” the only woman in the secret informer network, who wove her own network around the subject under investigation.³⁹ From their collected reports the workers of the local NKVD

34. *Ibid.*, fol. 206.

35. *Ibid.*, fol. 183.

36. DA USBU LO, case 14236r, fols. 5-6.

37. S. A. Stepanov, *Problema dvoynykh agentov v sisteme politicheskogo rozyska nachala XX veka. Istoricheskie chteniia na Lubianke* (1998); *Rossiiskie spetssluzhby na perelome epokh: konets XIX veka – 1922 god* (Moscow-Velikii Novgorod, 1999): 63.

38. DA USBU LO, case 5469r, fols. 55, 63, 67, 69.

39. *Ibid.*, fol. 55.

department selected and classified only that information which would incriminate the subject under article 54 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR. During the interrogations of H. A. Borshch, who was arrested in 1937, illiterate NKVD investigators cynically lectured him, declaring that as a specialist with three higher degrees he was of no value to socialism since he had not discovered Pythagoras's second theorem.⁴⁰ In the end the subject was sentenced by a panel of three Ukrainian NKVD judges of the former Donetsk *oblast'* on the basis of "anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary Ukrainian nationalist agitation" and disappeared in the concentration camps of the Gulag system.⁴¹

The higher educational establishments of the Donbass were particularly well penetrated by secret informers of the GPU-NKVD. In his memoirs, the well-known Ukrainian scholar H. O. Kostiuk describes an incident that took place at the Donetsk Institute of Education. The director of the institute told Kostiuk that the general situation in this educational establishment was favorable to creative work and that no one was spying on him. If he were to come under surveillance, he, the director, would warn him of such a danger. With no warning, Kostiuk was abruptly dismissed from his job for nationalistic manifestations and distorting the teaching program.⁴² Kostiuk did not suspect that "Virnyi," a secret collaborator of the Luhanske city NKVD department, and the director, were one and the same person. During one year alone at his post, 41 students and seven "professors-class enemies," not including Kostiuk, were expelled from the institute on direct orders from the NKVD.⁴³

True, this same "Virnyi," who was relying on his former collaboration with the organs of the All-Union Cheka in the Civil War years and after the war with the central apparatus of the Ukrainian GPU-NKVD, tried to exert his influence somehow on the general situation in his higher educational establishment and to protect some of the students and lecturers from the lawlessness of the local Chekists. He, too, suffered as a result of this: he was dismissed from his post, expelled from the ranks of the party, and repressed.⁴⁴ However, for his active collaboration with the GPU-NKVD he was soon released from the *Sevvostlag* (Northeastern Camp) of the NKVD and reinstated at his former place of work where, during the next ten years, he headed the Faculty of Marxism-Leninism. He remained a secret informer of the NKVD and MGB until he was transferred to a higher educational establishment in the Transcarpathian region.

The fate of other secret informers in this university was not as fortunate as "Virnyi's." A secret informer of the same Luhanske city NKVD department named "Lavriv" accidentally revealed his identity to "Virnyi."⁴⁵ For this, on December 7,

40. *Ibid.*, fol. 22.

41. *Ibid.*, fols. 98-100.

42. H. O. Kostiuk, *Zustrichi i proshchannia. Spohady* (Edmonton, 1987), Book 1: 461.

43. DA USBU LO, case 5258, vol. 1, fols. 69, 90 verso, 118-125, 393.

44. *Ibid.*, fol. 4 verso.

45. DA USBU LO, case 682 r., fols. 114, 116, 138; case 5258, vol. 1, fols. 124, 126.

1937, a panel of three NKVD judges of the former Donetsk *oblast'* sentenced him to 10 year's imprisonment in a corrective hard-labor camp. After completing his full term in Irkutsk *oblast'*, on January 11, 1950, he was re-sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, which he served in Magadan.⁴⁶

Even harsher punishments were meted out to those who, under the conditions of a totalitarian society, had the courage not only to warn subjects figuring in investigations that they were being spied on by the NKVD, but also offered advice on how to save themselves from the persecution. Thus, in the indictments of crimes committed under articles 54-10 and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR, Ia. Ie. Oleksiiv, the head of the teaching department of Luhanske Pedagogical Institute, admitted that as a secret informer of the NKVD "he committed a treacherous act, having warned the subject under investigation that he had a directive to spy on him."⁴⁷ On April 19, 1938, by a decision of a trio of judges of the NKVD administration of the former Donetsk *oblast'*, he was sentenced to death and executed by firing squad.⁴⁸

Documents indicate that in the 1930s secret double agents were not only dismissed from the secret agent-informer network of the GPU-NKVD, but were also the cause of the destruction of a large number of innocent people. Thus, a secret informer of the territorial organs of the All-Union Cheka-GPU-NKVD in the Dnipropetrovsk region, Zaporizzhia, and the Donbass, known as "Populiarnyi" (Popular), enjoyed great authority among the participants of the Makhno movement in his capacity as the former head of the Revolutionary Council attached to Nestor Makhno and as one of the publishers of the newspaper *Nabat* (*The Tocsin*). Despite his active collaboration with the organs of the All-Union Cheka-GPU-NKVD, he retained a high opinion of the organizational talents of Makhno as the distinguished leader of a popular movement.⁴⁹ Although the information that he transmitted to the organs of the All-Union Cheka-GPU-NKVD was of great value, owing to his opinions, he was considered a double agent. For this reason, several times he was deprived of his voter's rights, dismissed from his post with or without cause, arrested, and dismissed from the secret informer network. Finally, he was arrested by the 4th Directorate of the Ukrainian NKVD for the former Donetsk *oblast'* and executed. Using his name and connections, the NKVD fabricated a case in 1938 about the existence of a large Makhnoist insurgent underground in Ukraine. On April 1, 1938, 13 "rebel squadrons" were uncovered. Sixty-two men were arrested, including 23 who were former members of the command staff of Makhno's military units.⁵⁰ Naturally, they experienced the same fate as "Populiarnyi."

46. DA USBU LO, case 682 r., fols. 164, 179, 188.

47. DA USBU LO, case 6934r, fols. 16-17.

48. *Ibid.*, fol. 19.

49. DA USBU LO, case 2119 f. p., fol. 213.

50. *Ibid.*, fol. 249

A comparative analysis of GPU-NKVD documents in the 1920s and 1930s attests to the fact that the punishment meted out to secret informers of the GPU-NKVD for disclosing their identity in the 1920s was milder, and cases did not always reach court. For example, on September 19, 1926, the NKVD department of Luhanske *okrug* restricted itself only to initiating a case against S. Romanov under article 117 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR for disclosing his identity as a *seksot* (*sekretnyi sotrudnik* – secret collaborator).⁵¹

Those secret informers who served the existing regime in good faith established their careers very quickly. They obtained promotions and were encouraged both materially and morally. Thus, for more than 30 years a secret informer named “Kvitko” was active as a secret informer of the organs of the GPU-NKVD-MGB-KGB in the Kyiv region, Zaporizzhia, and the Donbass. He was born in the Kyiv region and from the age of 20 took an active part in the Ukrainian national liberation movement in the Pereiaslav region. While studying at the Kyiv Institute of Economics, he was first arrested by the GPU organs in 1925 and received a suspended sentence of up to five years. After completing his law studies at the Institute, he worked as a correspondent for the newspapers *Bilshovyk* (*Bolshevik*), *Visti* (*News*), and *Student revoliutsii* (*Student of the Revolution*). In his articles and creative sketches he exposed “Ukrainian nationalism.” From 1927 to 1929 he worked as an investigator. After obtaining a teaching degree, he switched over entirely to pedagogical work in 1929. In 1927 alone, he provided the GPU with valuable information about 27 individuals. Despite the fact that almost all of his and his wife’s close and distant relatives had been repressed by the NKVD, on the basis of materials provided by him the Voroshylovhrad *oblast*’ department of the NKVD administration monitored and engineered the “Nizhyntsi” case (1936), the “Plisniava” case (1937-1939), the “Pokydky” case (1940-1941), and cases against individual representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the Donbass, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Zaporizzhia regions. Left in place by the organs of the NKVD on the territory of Ukraine occupied by the Nazi Germans, he exposed the underground operations of the OUN (b) (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Bandera faction) in Voroshylovhrad, Kyiv, and Kamianets-Podilsky *oblasti* – the so-called “Prosvitiany” and “Heolohy” groups. As a reward for his services to the GPU-NKVD, he was allowed to occupy the combined positions of head and dean of the Faculty of Literature at one of the largest pedagogical establishments of higher education in Ukraine. Transferred to Western Ukraine, he occupied leading positions there and remained an active secret informer for the organs of the MGB-KGB.⁵²

There were other incentives for secret informers. As attested by order no. 32 of the Transport Department of the Main Administration of State Security (GUGB) of the Southern Donetsk Railway of December 19, 1937, “Concerning the rewarding

51. DALO, 636/1/53, 58.

52. DA USBU LO, Kolektsiia dokumentiv UMGB Voroshylovhradskoi oblasti 1943-1945 rr., fol. 1949.

of collaborators of the Transport Department of the GUGB and the United Transport Department of the GUGB of the Southern Donetsk Railway for active work against counter-revolution,” in addition to 41 of the finest Chekists, the secret informers of the NKVD “Lehkyi” (Light), “Semenov,” and “Skromnyi” (Modest) received rewards. Besides expressions of gratitude, each of them received a payment of 200-300 rubles.⁵³

Frequently, the incentives awarded to secret informers were criminal in nature. This happened in cases when, at the request or under pressure from the organs of the GPU-NKVD, the courts and the procurator’s office were compelled to suspend criminal cases against secret collaborators, who then evaded punishment completely. For example, on August 9, 1926, the GPU department of Luhanske *okrug* requested the head of the *okrug* court and the *okrug* procurator to take under personal consideration during the court’s examination of the criminal case the fact that the accused, I. P. Kashuba, “has been a secret informer of the GPU since January 30, 1925, and is a very valuable worker.” Judging by the resolution contained in the letter, this request was satisfied.

This was fairly typical during the 1930s. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that relations between the GPU-NKVD, procuratorial supervision, and the courts were governed by special resolutions of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee (VUTsVK) and later the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR. These resolutions were frequently supplemented by sub-legal acts and secret instructions. For example, the October 10, 1928, resolution of the VUTsVK about the relations between law-enforcement organs was supplemented by a joint special secret instruction of the VUTsVK and the Council of Peoples’ Commissars permitting secret informers of the GPU to be subpoenaed as witnesses only by agreement of the political police.⁵⁴ In fabricating numerous cases against various counter-revolutionary organizations, the GPU organs utilized this instruction in their own interests. They launched court cases or examinations by extra-judicial organs against their own secret informers. In this way, they would rid their secret informer network of passive secret informers who showed little initiative, while encouraging the rest actively to seek out and provide indispensable information and to attribute significance to elaborated and fabricated cases. The materials pertaining to the secret informer investigation of the “Sybiriak” affair that we have examined here confirm this observation.

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53. DA USBU DO, Kolektsiia dokumentiv TO [Transportnogo otdela] NKVD Pivdenno-Donetskoi zaliznytsi. File no. 494, case 13, fol. 28.

54. *Visti* (October 25, 1928).