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Soviet Defectors in Western Germany at the End of the 1940s and the Beginning of the 1950s and Mensheviks-Emigres

Alexey V. Antoshin 

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

✉ alex_antoshin@mail.ru

Abstract: The article is devoted to the phenomenon of *defectors* from the Soviet Union in the first years after the end of the Great Patriotic War. The author focuses on the attitude of the old Russian Social Democrats, who were in exile in the United States, toward the *defectors*. The article draws on documents from the Hoover Institution's War, Revolution, and Peace Archives (Stanford, USA), the Bakhmetev Archives of Russian and East European Culture at Columbia University (New York, USA), the Archives of the Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (Germany), and others. The author shows that a group of Soviet *defectors* who were in Displaced Persons camps in Germany came into contact with representatives of the Menshevik émigré center in the late 1940s. On the basis of this group, the German Department of the League of Struggle for People's Freedom was created, which claimed to act as a key Russian émigré organization with a democratic orientation. The article shows that the *defectors* received funding from the USA, various foundations and non-governmental organizations through the mediation of the old Mensheviks. The result of this action was the exposure of the leader of the group of *defectors* Major Vasily Denisov as an agent of the Soviet secret services. The article proves that this case was not an isolated phenomenon: a number of *defectors* broke with anti-communist émigré organizations and decided to return to the Soviet Union. The author comes to the conclusion that the reason for this was the disappointment of many *defectors* in the values of Western democracy, their critical attitude to the spiritual atmosphere within Western societies and the political elite of the USA.

Keywords: Russian emigrants, Soviet refugees, Russian diaspora, repatriation, post-war USSR, Russian anti-communists, Boris Nicolaevsky

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Советские «перебежчики» в Западной Германии в конце 1940-х – начале 1950-х гг. и меньшевистская эмиграция

Алексей Валерьевич Антошин 

Уральский федеральный университет имени первого Президента России Б. Н. Ельцина,
Екатеринбург, Россия
✉ alex_antoshin@mail.ru

Аннотация: Статья посвящена феномену «перебежчиков» из Советского Союза в первые годы после окончания Великой Отечественной войны. Автор уделяет особое внимание отношению к «перебежчикам» старых русских социал-демократов, находившихся в эмиграции в США. Статья опирается на документы из Архива войны, революции и мира Института Гувера (Стэнфорд, США), Бахметевского архива русской и восточноевропейской культуры Колумбийского университета (Нью-Йорк, США), Архива Центра восточноевропейских исследований Бременского университета (Германия) и др. Автор показывает, что группа советских «перебежчиков», находившихся в лагерях для перемещенных лиц в Германии, в конце 1940-х гг. вошла в контакт с представителями меньшевистского эмигрантского центра. На базе этой группы был создан Германский отдел Лиги борьбы за народную свободу, который претендовал на роль ключевой русской эмигрантской организации демократической направленности. В статье показано, что «перебежчики» получали финансирование из США, от различных фондов и неправительственных организаций при посредничестве старых меньшевиков. Результатом этой акции стало разоблачение лидера группы «перебежчиков» майора Василия Денисова как агента советских спецслужб. В статье доказывается, что этот случай не был единичным явлением: ряд «перебежчиков» порвали с антикоммунистическими эмигрантскими организациями и решили вернуться в Советский Союз. Автор приходит к выводу, что причиной этого стало разочарование многих «перебежчиков» в ценностях западной демократии, их критическое отношение к духовной атмосфере внутри западных обществ и к политической элите США.

Ключевые слова: русские эмигранты, советские беженцы, русская диаспора, репатриация, поствоенный СССР, российские антикоммунисты, Б.И. Николаевский

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Introduction

Relevance. Many scholars have written thousands of pages trying to analyze and comprehend the problems of the Cold War; however, there are some unknown aspects that deserve thorough investigation, particularly the fate of Russian socialism. The main organization of the old Russian Social Democrats (Mensheviks) was the *Zagranichnaia delegatsiia* (ZD) of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, which published the journal *Socialistichesky vestnik*¹. The leaders of the ZD were well-known Russian Social Democrats, including Boris Nicolaevsky and Rafail Abramovich.

¹ *The Mensheviks: From the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); *Mensheviks* [The Mensheviks] (Benson, Vermont: Izdatel'stvo Chalidze Publ., 1988); M. Nazarov, *Missiia Russkoi emigtatsii* [The Mission of Russian Emigrés] (Stavropol: Kavkazskii kraj Publ.,

The old Mensheviks preserved their political identity in emigration even in the 1950s, when their former opponents in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia (the liberals and social revolutionaries) had become merely a page in Russian political history. There were no new members in the Menshevik Party or new sympathizers in its entourage. The young generation of “white” émigrés and new refugees from the Soviet Union looked askance at Menshevism. People who had grown up in a Soviet atmosphere very often did not want to hear about socialism in any of its versions.

It is this situation that makes the history of a group of former Soviet military officers in Western Germany at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s so fascinating. Suddenly, the new refugees proclaimed social democratic sentiments and began to cooperate with the old Mensheviks. They formed a political group in Western Germany headed by Major Vasily Denisov and Captain Pavlovsky. However, in the mid-1950s, Denisov was arrested as a Soviet spy. This article tries to show that the history of the “new Social Democrats” in Western Germany is much more complex than a story about Soviet espionage during the Cold War. It is possible to characterize it as a story of the honest disappointment of the *defectors* (who were alone in the Russian diaspora) in Western democracy and in their new friends, the old Mensheviks.

Elaboration of the problem. The history of Russian Social Democratic emigration in the Cold War has already attracted the attention of scholars. Note, for example, the very important studies by Andre Liebich devoted to the ideological attitudes of old Mensheviks and their perception of the Cold War². In 2010, Liebich and Albert Nenarokov published two volumes containing documents from the Foreign Delegation of Russian Social Democracy (including the period from the mid-1940s to 1952)³. However, some interesting aspects of the history of Menshevism abroad require further study.

It is necessary to note studies on the political attitudes of new Soviet refugees after World War II. For example, we can highlight the PhD dissertation by Laura J. Hilton⁴. This work brings to the surface the struggles of Displaced Persons (DPs)⁵ in temporary camps as they sought to rebuild their sense of community, identity and nationality. She demonstrates that, through their actions, those DPs who refused repatriation challenged ideas of citizenship and nationality, thus provoking international debates over repatriation and playing a key role in defining international responses to the humanitarian, economic and cultural needs of stateless and persecuted peoples.

Another important study was penned by Anna Marta Holian⁶. This book examines how Displaced Persons in post-war Germany created political “communities of interest” to

1992); P. Bazanov, *Izdatelskaia Deiatelnost Politicheskikh Organizatsii Russkoi Emigratii (1917–1988)* [The Publishing Activity of the Political Organizations of the Russian Diaspora] (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi institut kul'tury Publ., 2008); *From the Archives of L.O. Dan* (Amsterdam: Stichting International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, 1987).

² A. Liebich, “Mensheviks Wage the Cold War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949503000203>; *Russian Social-Democracy after 1921* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

³ A. Liebich, Al. Nenarokov, eds. *Men'sheviki v emigratsii. Protokoly Zagranichnoi Delegatsii RSDRP 1922–1951 gg.* [The Mensheviks in Emigration. Protocols of the Delegation of the RSDRP Abroad, 1922–1951] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2010).

⁴ L.J. Hilton, “Prisoners of Peace: Rebuilding Community, Identity and Nationality in Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, 1945–1952,” PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2001.

⁵ L. Dinnerstein, “America and the Survivors of the Holocaust: The Evolution of a United States Displaced Persons Policy, 1945–1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); O. Buriánek, *From Liberator to Guardian: The U.S. Army and Displaced Persons in Munich, 1945*,” PhD diss., Emory University, 1992; H. Genizi, *America's Fair Share: The Admission and Resettlement of Displaced Persons, 1945–1952* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

⁶ A.M. Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

represent what they understood as their collective experiences and aspirations. While opposition to repatriation was the starting point for all these groups, they diverged widely in how they interpreted the war years and envisioned the future.

The troubled futures of Soviet officers and soldiers have been discussed by Mark Edede in his book⁷. He analyses the motivations of Soviet deserters and their anti-communist actions.

The source base. The article draws on documents from the Hoover Institution's War, Revolution, and Peace Archives (Stanford, USA), the Bakhmetev Archives of Russian and East European Culture at Columbia University (New York, USA), the Archives of the Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (Germany), and others. These documents contain valuable information on the history of cooperation between defectors and the leaders of Russian émigré social democracy.

Anti-communist military officers and old Mensheviks: from “love” to disappointment

The Foreign Delegation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was formed at the beginning of the 1920s, preserving its connections with European comrades⁸. Representatives of the ZD took part in the activity of the Labor and Socialist International and were well-known in the West as experts on “Russian affairs.” As proponents of democratic socialism, they were negatively inclined towards the existing political regime in the USSR, which they characterized as a “Stalinist dictatorship.” In the conflict between the USSR and the West, the old Mensheviks were in the “camp of international democracy.”⁹

Russian socialists had good relations with some American non-governmental organizations. In the early 1950s, they advocated that George Kennan head anti-communist activities¹⁰. However, these politicians were quickly disappointed when it became clear that the Ford Foundation, a leading sponsor, did not have much desire to fund this work. They played an active role in liaising with the American Committee for the Liberation from Bolshevism in the early 1950s, a group which stood behind US policy towards the various peoples of the USSR during the Cold War.

Very often, American and European institutions overestimated the real power of the ZD. It was a small group of old Russian socialists and was not very influential among other émigrés, the majority of whom shared conservative ideas. Although the members of the ZD preserved their political identity as they became older, they soon had to deal with what was to happen to their group in the future. Consequently, it was very important to find new, younger comrades.

Given this, the old Russian socialists who lived in the US attentively watched the appearance of phenomenon of *defectors*. Their main journal, *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, wrote about the first political activities of the newcomers. The Mensheviks tried to prove that deep democratic attitudes existed among the new refugees. As early as 1949, their journal noted the formation of a “democratic organization” in Hamburg oriented to the

⁷ M. Edede, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁸ A. Liebich, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social-Democracy after 1921* (Cambridge-London, 1997).

⁹ A. Liebich, A.I. Nenarokov, eds. *Men'sheviki v emigratsii. Protokoly Zagranichnoi Delegatsii RSDRP 1922–1951 gg.* [The Mensheviks in Emigration. Protocols of the Delegation of the RSDRP Abroad, 1922–1951] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2010), 369.

¹⁰ Bakhmeteff Archive Research at Columbia University (thereafter – BAR), Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams collection, box 2, folder “Melgunov S,” Ariadna Tyrkova to Serge Melgunov, 19.05.1951; J.L. Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York; London: Penguin Press, 2011).

ideology of *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*¹¹. This was the group headed by Major Vasily Denisov. It consisted of others former Soviet military officers. Did they really have a social democratic ideology? It is necessary to take into account the Soviet background of the new refugees. For people who had grown up in Soviet society, democratic socialism was a more comfortable system than the free market economy. This was the precisely the presumption of the old Russian Social Democrats. In their opinion, the Soviet man was “a socialist in the way socialism is understood in Western European countries. He thirsts for political freedom but at the same time he is in favor of a planned economy which is considerably socialized. He is in favor of wide social guarantees, the right to work, insurance against unemployment, free education...”¹². In other words, the ZD held that Soviet citizens wanted the authentic realization of all the principles formally maintained by the Stalinist constitution. Did this belief correspond with reality? On the contrary: the political regime in the USSR often caused people to reject all versions of socialism. The old Mensheviks were divorced from the realities of the Soviet Union. By the end of the 1930s, practically all correspondence with their friends and relatives who had remained in the Soviet Union had ceased (even before this, such letters had been regulated by the Soviet secret police). So, while Nicolaevsky and other old social democrat David Dallin had some individual meetings with DPs¹³, the Mensheviks did not have alternative sources of information about the situation in the USSR.

It is probable that the old Mensheviks received information about the new political group headed by Denisov from N. Irgizov (Irgizsky), one of the new émigrés from the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1940s, he began to publish articles in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*. It was easier for him than for old Mensheviks to make connections with former Soviet military officers. It is very important to stress one tendency. At the end of 1940s, Irgizsky characterized the organization formed in Hamburg and Hannover as “a group of DPs”:¹⁴ he did not write that they were representatives of the newest stream of emigration from the USSR, who came from Soviet military units in Europe. For old Mensheviks, it was probably very important to show that DPs (who were considered victims of World War II and the Nazi regime) supported socialist ideas. European and American public opinion towards ex-Soviet military officers was not the homogenous: many were very cautious in their relations with those who had fled Soviet units. No less than this, DPs were representative of a mass phenomenon which gained the attention of international society for a few years: in contrast, the *defectors* were individuals whose flights from the USSR did not represent a large-scale movement. It was far more advantageous for the old Russian socialists to associate with DPs than with *defectors*.

One of the first émigrés who made connections with the *defectors* was Liliia (Lola) Estrin. She was a former participant in Trotskyist groups abroad in 1930s and a close friend of Natalya Sedova (the wife of Leon Trotsky). Later, Lola married the Menshevik David Dallin and began to cooperate with Russian Social Democrats. Lola knew the political sentiments of the Soviet people better than the old Mensheviks, who had lived abroad since 1920–1922. Therefore it was no coincidence that former Soviet military officers had close connections with David Dallin and his friend Boris Nicolaevsky.

¹¹ “Democracy v Hamburge [Democrats in Hamburg],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 5 (1949): 94.

¹² A. Liebich, Al. Nenarokov, eds. *Men'sheviki v emigratsii. Protokoly Zagranichnoi Delegatsii RSDRP 1922–1951 gg.* [The Mensheviks in Emigration. Protocols of the Delegation of the RSDRP Abroad, 1922–1951] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2010), 376.

¹³ HIA. Boris Nicolaevsky collection, series 248, box 475, folder 1, Boris Nicolaevsky to A. Bourgina, 14.08.1947.

¹⁴ N. Irgizsky, “Sobranie v Hannovere [The Meeting in Hannover],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 5 (1949): 95.

In February 1951, Lola Dallin reported to Nicolaevsky that she had made connections with some Soviet officers (Pavlosky, Grigoriev and others). Dallin stressed that their living conditions in Germany were “terrible”: therefore, she proposed helping them using financial resources from different American organizations¹⁵.

It was crucial for the old Mensheviks to have connections with new émigrés who had only just left the USSR. Vasily Denisov began to receive financial support from New York. The Soviet Major regularly received letters from Nicolaevsky between 1951 and 1954. A group of Soviet military officers in Western Germany was declared as a branch of the anticommunist League for the Struggle for the People’s Freedom (LSPF, established in New York by Nicolaevsky, David Dallin and some other old émigrés with the assistance of Americans).

The members of this group began to publish articles in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*. In 1952–1953, many materials in this journal were written by former Soviet military men. Usually, these materials were memoirs about their service in the army: they also described the Soviet policy in Germany and the situation in German agriculture and industry¹⁶. The author of some of these materials was “M. Ershov.” He showed that the Soviet army had not in fact demobilized, since large contingents remained in German territory¹⁷. His military service was also the subject of his articles¹⁸, while others were devoted to Soviet society and economy, anti-Semitism and the arduous living conditions in the USSR¹⁹.

Ershov – Miroshnikov was not the only such author at *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*. Many military officers wrote for this journal in 1952–1953: Colonel Matveev, Captain Ruslanov, Lieutenant Vasiliev, etc., detailing the propaganda of the Soviet army’s political wing, the structure of the Soviet military command and several other issues²⁰. Were these writers really soldiers? The content of the articles proves that the materials were indeed written by former Soviet troops: they knew very well the details of the Soviet policy in Germany: nonetheless, one cannot doubt that the surnames were pseudonyms, several of which were probably used by one person.

Some *defectors* published their articles in other left-oriented émigré journals (for example, in *Narodnaia pravda*²¹, which tried to revive the old Narodnik ideology). Equally, the old Mensheviks organized some new publishing projects for the *defectors*. Consider, for example, *Na rubezhe*, a journal published in Paris. Its editor-in-chief was Boris Nicolaevsky, while old socialists like Nicolay Valentinov, Pavel Berlin and others were among the authors: some pieces were also penned by former Soviet military officers. The

¹⁵ HIA. Boris Nicolaevsky collection, series 248, box 477, folder 3, L. Dallin to B. Nicolaevsky, 25.02.1951.

¹⁶ “Boevoe zadanie [A Military Task],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 6–7 (1952): 116–117.

¹⁷ M. Ershov, “Demobilizatsia sovetskoi armii [Demobilization of the Soviet Army],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 1 (1952): 4.

¹⁸ “O snabzhenii sovetskoi armii produktami pitania [On the Supply of the Soviet Army with Food Products],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 5 (1953): 96–98.

¹⁹ “Presledovania evreev v SSSR [Discrimination against the Jews in the USSR],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 5 (1952): 89–93; “Narodnoe pitanie i Zhivotnovodstvo v SSSR [National Food and Animal Husbandry in the USSR],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 8 (1952): 132.

²⁰ I. Matveev, “V krivom zerkale [In a Crooked Mirror],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 5 (1953): 98–100; “Zametki sovetskogo polkovnika [The Notes of a Soviet Colonel],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 6 (1953): 115; A. Ge, “Smert’ Stalina i perspektivy russkoi svobody [Stalin’s Death and Prospects for Russian Freedom],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 4 (1953): 60–61; N. Ruslanov, “Voskhozhenie Malenkova [The Height of Malenkova],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 7–8 (1953): 127–131; B. Vasiliev, “Demontazh mysli [The Dismantling of Thought],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 10–11 (1953): 204–206.

²¹ V. Kondrashev, “Kak ia sluzhil v Soiuзnom Kontrolnom Sovete [How I Served on the Joint Control Council],” *Narodnaia pravda*, no. 1 (1952): 115–123.

content of these works was similar to those in *Sotsialistichesky vestnik*: most were memoirs and analyses of the Soviet army in the 1940s²².

However, this project was headed by old socialists, while *Kolokol* was the main publishing project of former Soviet soldiers: this journal was the official publication of the Union of Post-War Refugees from the USSR in Hamburg. The journal was released in 1952, at which point some leaders of the Hamburg group had already left Germany for the USA (for example, Miroshnikov). Nevertheless, they continued to support their comrades in Germany.

The content of articles in *Kolokol* shows us the ideological attitudes of this group in 1952–1953, a key turning point in Soviet history: Stalin had just died, ushering in a new era. The former officers writing for the journal tried to prove the existence of contradictory tendencies in the new leadership's policies, remarking on how elements of freedom coexisted with repression. The *defectors* sought to demonstrate that the new Soviet leaders did not want to begin real destalinization²³.

Cooperation between the old Mensheviks and new refugees from the USSR lasted for some years. Major Denisov offered his partners many assurances, forwarding large-scale plans for the political unification of new emigres in Western Germany. He also promised Nicolaevsky to write some articles about NKVD repressions and life in the Soviet Union. His main project was an article about the structure and activity of the Communist Party in the Soviet army. This subject greatly interested the American friends of the Soviet émigrés: Denisov even received a grant from the Bakhmeteff Fund²⁴.

However, relations between the veterans and the old Mensheviks gradually became more arduous. Denisov received honoraria from Nicolaevsky but worked very slowly on his articles. The Major explained that the reason for this was the lack of a printing machine, resulting in Nicolaevsky being compelled to purchase such a device²⁵. Of course, other, more serious, factors were ultimately responsible for the quarrels. Overweening ambition was one issue, but Denisov also stressed that there was a moral aspect to this problem: Nicolaevsky visited Germany but did not want to meet with the former military officers. Nicolaevsky's indifference shocked Denisov and his friends, leading the former to threaten the dissolution of his group in December 1951²⁶.

The ambitions of Vasily Denisov and his comrades were too grandiose. In 1953–1954, they actively claimed an independent status for their group. In their words, they had 68 members, leading many *defectors* to join them²⁷. Denisov proclaimed that his group was preserving its social democratic identity, but his relationship with Nicolaevsky was highly problematic. In January 1954, the Major demanded 1,000 German marks from the League for the Struggle for the People's Freedom²⁸, but only two months later he informed Nicolaevsky that it was impossible for his group be a mere department of the LSPF²⁹.

In 1953–1954, the *defectors* began to enjoy better living conditions: for example, Denisov already had a car. This surprised the Russian diaspora, with some émigrés asking

²² G. Markov, "Poslevoennyi mif o voennoi industrii [A Post-War Myth about Military Industry]," *Na rubezhe*, no. 5 (1952): 7–9; A. Markov, "Ofitser i soldat v sovetskoj armii [Officer and Soldier in the Soviet Army]," *Na rubezhe*, no. 4 (1952).

²³ *Kolokol*, no. 1–2, 2–3 (1952).

²⁴ HIA. Boris Nicolaevsky collection, series 248, box 477, folder 25, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 05.02.1952.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 05.03.1952.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 29.12.1951.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 17.07.1953.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 04.01.1954.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 30.03.1954.

about the roots of this sudden prosperity³⁰. The grand political ambitions of the former military officers led to the end of their cooperation with the old Mensheviks. There was only one article by a *defector* in *Sotsialisticheskyy vestnik* in 1954³¹. Thus, the attempt to forge a long-term union between the old Mensheviks and a new generation of émigrés was unsuccessful.

Denisov's group and American foreign policy

The *defectors* claimed that they arrived in the West in order to struggle against Soviet totalitarianism. But they also openly criticized some aspects of American propaganda. In September 1951, they pointed out that “numerous” articles and public speeches in America against “Russia” and “Russians” helped Stalinist anti-Western propaganda. Soviet authorities also used racial discrimination in America to prove the anti-democratic character of its regime. The new refugees from the Soviet Union stressed that America and its allies could ultimately have no correct policy towards the USSR. In their opinion, only full independence and the territorial unity of post-communist Russia could be a safe basis for “true” cooperation between Russian anti-communists and the Western block³².

The sentiments of the new refugees were rather contradictory and determined by their social context. For some, emigration was an emotional step. Initially they idealized Western societies, but then found that they had to struggle for their place under the sun. Documents from the First Conference of Post-War Political Refugees show their disappointment. The participants of this meeting spoke about the lack of jobs, the impossibility of leaving Europe for America and so on. As early as September 1951, veterans blamed Western societies for indifference to their fates³³.

This is a very important point: Denisov and his comrades openly criticized Western policy toward “Russia” and Soviet émigrés. If they were Soviet agents, advertising their differences with the Western block was a rather unusual tactic. In 1953, “Captain Petin” disagreed with an article by Isaac Don Levine, a well-known American specialist on Russian and Soviet studies, in the magazine *Life*. Don Levine tried to prove that Soviet citizens were “more materialists than idealists”: they needed “better living conditions, not freedom and democracy.” The former officer could not support these arguments. He stressed that Soviet émigrés had left their Motherland for the West in search of freedom. They lived in “terrible conditions” in DP camps, but hoped to participate in the struggle against Stalinist totalitarianism. Some of them refused jobs at Western radio stations because they did not see a “clear program of struggle against Bolshevism for the liberation of the peoples of the USSR.”³⁴

Later, in 1954, the former military men continued to criticize American foreign policy in the Cold War and the moral atmosphere of American society. They condemned Americans for their indifference towards former Displaced Persons³⁵, feeling as if they had been forgotten by the West. In their opinion, Americans perceived refugees as a tool in the

³⁰ Archive of Museum of Russian Culture (AMRC), 5929–3–4.

³¹ “Rasskaz Petukhova [A Story by Petuhov],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 12 (1954): 240–242.

³² “Pervaia konferentsiia poslevoennykh politicheskikh bezhentshev [The First Conference of Post-War Political Refugees],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 9–10 (1951): 182.

³³ Noveishy, “Vo imia svobody i demokratii [For Freedom and Democracy],” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, no. 9–10 (1951): 181.

³⁴ Captain Petin, “Recept mistera I. Don Levina [The Recipe of I. Don Levin],” *Kolokol*, no. 1–2 (1953): 11.

³⁵ HIA. Boris Nicolaevsky collection, series 248, box 477, folder 25, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 30.03.1954.

Cold War. It is necessary to take into account these dimensions when we try to investigate the atmosphere within Denisov's group in 1953–1954.

Certainly, they realized that America and her allies were the enemy of their enemy – communism. Only America could provide them with the money and support they needed. But Vasily Denisov began to stress that the American political elite had chosen the wrong path in the fight against communism. In his opinion, complete disavowal of Soviet reality was not a constructive approach. In July 1954, he wrote to Boris Nicolaevsky that the Soviet people could not believe in the propaganda picture created by Americans³⁶. In a personal letter, he could be honest: the former Major thought that the methods chosen by Americans were not effective, making it practically impossible for them to receive the support of the Soviet people.

Conclusion

This story ended very suddenly: in 1955, Major Vasily Denisov was arrested in Western Germany as a Soviet spy. This was a shock for his partners, the old Mensheviks, who believed that social democratic ideas were popular in the Soviet Union. Had Denisov been a Soviet agent in 1951, when he began to cooperate with Mensheviks? Or was this event connected with how the honest dreams of political émigrés from the Soviet Union had gone sour?

Old Mensheviks believed the latter.³⁷ Denisov was arrested when he returned from Eastern to Western Germany with a bag containing a large amount of money, something quite unusual for a Soviet agent. Usually, the Soviet secret services were much more discrete. Nicolaevsky knew that Denisov had been disappointed with Western policy towards the USSR. Indeed, he was not the only one. Earlier, the Soviet pilot and *defector* Anatoly Barsov had already returned to the Soviet Union when he became fed up with American society. For people from the Eastern bloc, the escape to the West was full of unexpected problems and difficult discoveries.

The historical sources show that American strategy in the Cold War provoked cutting comments from new Soviet refugees. In their opinion, American governmental and non-governmental organizations did not understand the mentality of the Soviet people. As a result, American propaganda was not particularly effective. Former Soviet military officers stressed that ordinary people in the USSR had strong patriotic sentiments, meaning that they looked negatively on the aggressive claims of some American newspapers and magazines. Denisov and his comrades thought that such bombastic propaganda could lead to the development of anti-American sentiments among the Soviet people.

Participation in the political life of the Russian diaspora also led to disillusionment. They continued to be alone in the diaspora, since they did not establish connections with any professional or social group. The atmosphere in which they lived was quite toxic, a morass of personal political ambitions and persistent squabbling.

The collapse of the relationship between the old Mensheviks and Denisov's group characterizes a certain trend in émigré politics. Boris Nicolaevsky and David Dallin, the leaders of the ZD, strove to gain the support of the “new” and “newest” émigrés from the USSR: at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, they repeatedly initiated cooperation with those who had just arrived from the Soviet Union. Thanks to the energy of the Old Mensheviks (often they were the first émigré politicians to enter into contact

³⁶ HIA. Boris Nicolaevsky collection, series 248, box 477, folder 25, V. Denisov to B. Nicolaevsky, 02.07.1954.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, box 471, folder 2, “К делу мажора Денисова.”

with the latest émigrés), the new arrivals became interested in them and showed some initial political sympathies. However, after living for a while in the West and becoming acquainted with the propaganda of other émigré associations, *defectors* all the more frequently turned away from social democratic ideas, preferring to establish contact with more right-wing organizations. In general, Soviet émigrés were closer to right-wing political culture and its values than the democratic ideals professed by the old Mensheviks.

It seemed to Denisov and his comrades that Americans like Boris Nicolaevsky were using them for their own political ends. This moral crisis led to the end of the Hamburg group of *defectors*. But archives of the Soviet secret services will give future historians the opportunity to paint a fuller picture of this story.

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Информация об авторе / Information about the author

Alexey Valerievich Antoshin, Dr. Habil. Hist., Professor of the Department of Oriental Studies, Department of International Relations, Ural Federal University; 19, Prospekt Mira Av., Yekaterinburg, 620083, Russia; alex_antoshin@mail.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6093-2219>; SPIN-code: 6285-4494.

Алексей Валерьевич Антошин, доктор исторических наук, профессор кафедры востоковедения департамента международных отношений, Уральский федеральный университет имени первого Президента России Б.Н. Ельцина; Россия, 620003, Екатеринбург, пр. Мира, 19; alex_antoshin@mail.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6093-2219>; SPIN-код: 6285-4494.