

THE GOUZENKO AFFAIR REVISITED: THE SOVIET PERSPECTIVE*

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When an obscure cipher clerk named Igor Gouzenko defected from the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa on September 5, 1945, he took a step that was to have momentous consequences for the post-war world. Atomic bombs had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki just a month before, giving rise to heated debates in scientific and political circles about the future of atomic research in the West. And the western allies, Britain, the United States and Canada, were becoming increasingly concerned about the intentions of their wartime partner, the Soviet Union. But it was not until after Gouzenko defected that the Soviet Union would be openly acknowledged as a threat to the West. Gouzenko's claims about Soviet atomic espionage, supported by documents he stole from the Soviet Embassy, convinced governments in North America and Britain that their former wartime ally was an enemy. Indeed the Gouzenko affair has justifiably been called the spark that ignited the Cold War.

Thanks to archival documentation on the Gouzenko defection that has become available in Canada and the United States over the years, we have a reasonably clear (although by no means complete) picture of its repercussions in the West. But until recently little has been known about the reaction in the Soviet Union. The Soviet press printed only the official Kremlin line, and the discussions of the Gouzenko affair in Soviet government circles were shrouded in secrecy. Now, however, some Soviet archival materials have emerged, and former Soviet intelligence officers have passed on their recollections about the affair.

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These sources shed light on some key questions about the Gouzenko case from the Soviet side: What exactly did the Soviets know about the defection from the beginning and what course of action did they decide upon? Was the defection perceived of as a terrible blow for the Soviets in terms of their foreign policy goals? Could the Kremlin foresee the extent to which the defection would affect its international image? And, finally, what were the short and long-term effects on the Soviet intelligence and security apparatus itself? What changes took place as a result of the Gouzenko affair?

BACKGROUND TO THE DEFECTION

Gouzenko was part of a group at the Soviet Embassy that worked for military intelligence, the GRU. In 1943, as the Soviets began in earnest to launch an atomic bomb project, they sought to find out more about western efforts to build a bomb.¹ Moscow decided to strengthen the forces of the GRU in Canada, sending a new team to Ottawa in June: Nikolai Zabotin, Soviet military attaché and head of the GRU *rezidentura*, his assistant, Major Romanov and Lt. Igor Gouzenko, as cipher clerk. Sometime later Col. Pavel Motinov, Major Viktor Rogov, Captain Iurii Gorshkov and Lt. Pavel Angelov joined the group.²

Moscow was well aware that Canada was taking part in research on the atomic bomb, and the main task of the GRU officers there was to find out as much as they possibly could about this research. They were ordered, among other things, to penetrate the

Canadian National Research Council and the research branch of the Department of National Defense.³ Apparently, however, these young officers did not take their mission as seriously as their bosses in Moscow would have liked. Free from the shackles of the repressive Stalinist regime back home, they enjoyed themselves in Ottawa.

Gouzenko's boss, Zabolin, a strikingly attractive man, with a broad smile and a magnetic personality, soon gained a reputation in Ottawa's diplomatic circles as a *bon vivant* and a womanizer. Canadian government officials found themselves plied with vodka when they attended his parties, and their wives reportedly were won over by Zabolin's charms.⁴ Another popular figure was the assistant military attaché Col. Motinov, described by one Canadian as "a very cheery chap." According to one source: "In wartime Ottawa, Soviet diplomats and officials were the toast of the town. They were sought after for their boisterous energy, the entertaining stories, their generosity with unrationed liquor, their mammoth parties."⁵ The Canadians gladly reciprocated. Zabolin and his colleagues, including Gouzenko, landed frequent social invitations from the locals.

At first Gouzenko was, in his words, "in heaven" in Ottawa. But then additional staff arrived (along with the wives of Zabolin and Gouzenko) and they all became more serious. The presence of colleagues from the NKVD doubtless contributed to a more rigorous work ethic, although things were far from perfect. The Foreign Department of the NKVD, represented in Ottawa by the *resident* Vitaliy Pavlov, was the GRU's counterpart for political intelligence. According to Pavlov, who is still alive, the NKVD in Canada operated on a smaller scale than the GRU. But atomic espionage became such a high priority for the Soviets that in 1942 NKVD Chief Lavrentiy Beria had tasked his organization with

atomic espionage as well. (Beria was placed in charge of the Soviets' atom bomb project after the war.)

With both the GRU and the NKVD recruiting agents for military espionage, it is not surprising that tension and rivalry arose between the two groups. The problem prompted the following message in June 1944 from NKVD intelligence chief Pavel Fitin in Moscow to overseas stations: "In practice there are cases when we and the military neighbours [GRU] are working on the recruitment of one and the same person. In view of this, and to avoid misunderstanding, check with one another on the spot persons of interest to you."⁶

The tension was aggravated by the fact that the NKVD was also responsible for counterintelligence at embassies and thus was constantly spying and reporting on the GRU officers. An atmosphere of obsessive secrecy, in-fighting and backbiting developed at the Soviet Embassy, where the ominous eyes of the NKVD officers were everywhere. Gouzenko began to find the situation oppressive: "Even as I would breathe the clean, free Canadian air through the steel bars of cipher room window, there would come from behind and around me the ugly sounds of bickering, arising from rotten little intrigues and episodes that dug into the thin morality crust of the hypocritical U.S.S.R. Embassy."⁷

Although the rules of the Embassy dictated that members of the GRU staff had to live in accommodations together (so they could keep an eye on one another), Zabotin allowed Gouzenko and his family to live separately in a rented apartment on Somerset Street. When this violation was brought to the attention of Zabotin by a visiting GRU official, Col. Mikhail Mil'shtein, in June 1944, Zabotin did nothing about it. It seems that Zabotin's wife, disturbed by the loud and frequent crying of the Gouzenkos' baby Andrei, persuaded her husband to keep the Gouzenkos apart from them and the rest of the GRU staff.⁸

Col. Mil'shtein, who wrote his memoirs shortly before his death in 1993, was on an inspection tour of the various Soviet embassies in North America on behalf of the GRU, traveling under the alias of "Milsky." He recalled that Zabotin spoke highly of Gouzenko and asked Mil'shtein to meet with him, even though Mil'shtein was not supposed to interview members of the technical staff, like Gouzenko, who had no diplomatic status. Mil'shtein claimed that he was suspicious of Gouzenko from the start, especially when he found out that Gouzenko had access to a safe in one of the cipher rooms that he was not authorized to have. He was also taken aback by a request from Gouzenko to participate in operational work, as an intelligence agent. After observing Gouzenko for several days, Mil'shtein recalled, he became convinced that Gouzenko was making plans to defect. Upon his return to Moscow at the end of July 1944 Mil'shtein reported his suspicions to his superiors (which saved him punishment after Gouzenko's defection), but they were not fully convinced. Although they sent a telegram to Zabotin in September, requesting that plans be made to send Gouzenko back, they were persuaded by Zabotin to postpone Gouzenko's departure. The final orders for Gouzenko's recall did not come until almost a year later, in August 1945.⁹

Gouzenko initially told the Canadian Royal Commission investigating his allegations that he had never been criticized for his work at the embassy and that he had no idea why Moscow wanted him back. But subsequently Gouzenko admitted, as he told RCMP Inspector John Leopold in an early debriefing, that a cleaning lady had once found scraps of secret documents that should have been destroyed lying on the floor in his cipher room. He also revealed that Zabotin had reprimanded him for arriving late for work on several occasions.¹⁰

Gouzenko might not have seen these transgressions as a big problem at the time, given that other staff members also made such mistakes and that he was on excellent terms with Zabotin. But when the first request came from Moscow in September 1944 to send him back, Gouzenko was terrified that he was in trouble, which under Stalin's regime could mean prison or a labor camp, or even worse. As he told the Royal Commission, he had expected to stay in Ottawa at least three years-the usual posting-but in a little over a year Moscow wanted him to return, with no explanation. Although Mil'shtein doubtless embellished the truth by claiming in his memoirs that he knew already in June 1944 that Gouzenko was planning to defect, it is certain that Gouzenko, fearful of what awaited him back in Moscow, decided on that course by September--a full year before he made his fateful move. As he wrote later in his autobiography: "I felt a great load lifted from me. The die had finally been cast. And, best of all, Anna agreed on the course. There was no use pointing out the dangers-she knew them full well. There was no necessity of stressing absolute secrecy. She knew certain death lay ahead if the least hint of my intended desertion got about."¹¹

Contrary to his initial statements that he brought all the documents (105 in total) from the embassy with him on the evening of his defection on September 5, 1945, Gouzenko admitted later (during trials of some of the accused Canadian spies) that he had been removing documents for several weeks and hiding them in his apartment. Yet no suspicions were raised at the embassy, either on the part of Zabotin or NKVD officer Pavlov. Clearly this was not the kind of oversight that would be taken lightly back in Moscow. Defections, after all, had occurred before in the GRU, and presumably intelligence officers were supposed to be constantly on the lookout for the possibility.

THE DEFECTION

Not surprisingly Pavlov and his colleagues were thrown into a panic when they first discovered that Gouzenko was missing on 6 September. In Pavlov's words: "In the morning our military attache Zabotin comes to me totally at a loss and he tells me, "Here we have documents disappeared, and our code clerk has also disappeared." And I say, 'How could they disappear? I'll call my code clerk immediately.'" Pavlov recalled that "It was stunning news, since although in intelligence betrayal and disappearance is always an option, it is still rather rare."¹²

Curiously, however, Pavlov did not take action right away, apparently because he was not sure what Gouzenko was up to. And the Soviets also had to be careful about causing a scandal in tranquil Ottawa. Gouzenko, accompanied by his wife and young son, spent the day wandering around the city in a futile effort to get Canadian authorities to give him asylum. Whether his embassy colleagues were following him is not known. Their first move was to send a driver from the Soviet Embassy, who showed up at the Gouzenkos' apartment not long after they returned home and pounded on the door for a while before going away. Then around 11:30 p.m.-by which time the Gouzenkos were hiding in a neighbor's apartment and the Ottawa police were on standby-Mr. Pavlov arrived with three others. Pavlov recalled that one of the men had a pistol and they were planning on forcing Gouzenko to come back to the embassy with them. They broke into the apartment (they later claimed they had a duplicate key) and began frantically ransacking it, until they were confronted by the Ottawa police and forced to leave.

The next day, by which time Gouzenko was in RCMP custody with his family, the Soviet Embassy sent a letter to the Department of External Affairs, claiming that Gouzenko had stolen money from the embassy and requesting that Canadian authorities "take urgent measures to seek and arrest I. Gouzenko and to hand him over for deportation as a capital criminal." The letter also complained about the "rude treatment" accorded by the police to the diplomats who had visited Gouzenko's apartment the evening before.¹³

The response four days later from the under-secretary for External Affairs, Norman Robertson, was disingenuous, to say the least. Writing to the Soviet Ambassador, Mr. Zarubin, Robertson said every effort would be made to find Gouzenko and his family and requested complete physical descriptions. He also apologized for the lack of courtesy by the Ottawa police in dealing with the men in Gouzenko's apartment.¹⁴

The Soviets persisted, sending another note on 14 September in which they stated: "The Embassy, upon instructions from the Government of the U.S.S.R., repeats its request to the Government of Canada to apprehend Gouzenko and his wife, and without trial, to hand them over to the Embassy for deportation to the Soviet Union." Six days later Robertson responded by saying that the question was being referred to the Department of Justice to obtain its views on the Embassy's request. Not surprisingly, the Department of Justice concluded that the Canadian government could not legally fulfill the Soviet Embassy's request to arrest Gouzenko.¹⁵

Meanwhile, RCMP Commissioner Wood had sent a letter to Robertson, dated 10 September, in which he claimed that Gouzenko had showed up at RCMP offices on the morning of the 7th in a highly disturbed state. According to Wood, "Mr. Gouzenko was in a

very excited condition and by reason of this fact was incoherent and exceedingly difficult to understand. He appeared to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown...It was thought in the best interests that if Mr. Gouzenko's wife was to be brought to exercise her influence over him, Mr. Gouzenko's condition of mind might be improved and that he would then leave the office of his own accord and return to his apartment." Wood went on to report that, after Mrs. Gouzenko came to RCMP headquarters, the Gouzenkos were driven in the direction of their apartment. Halfway there, Gouzenko and his wife had a heated discussion and then jumped out of the car and disappeared.¹⁶ Wood's account is very different from those of RCMP officers Charles Rivett-Carnac and John Leopold, who testified later to the Royal Commission that they had productive interviews with Gouzenko on 7 September and then arranged to have him and his family driven to a secret place outside Ottawa.¹⁷ Possibly Wood's story was some sort of a subterfuge, intended to keep the defection a secret at external affairs.

Did the Soviets actually believe the Canadians' assertion that they had no idea of Gouzenko's whereabouts? Apparently not. GRU Col. Mil'shtein, claimed that his headquarters heard about Gouzenko's defection before he fell into the hands of the Royal Mounted Police [R.C.M.P.].¹⁸ If true, this would mean that the GRU in Ottawa assumed Gouzenko had defected when he went missing on 6 September and immediately sent a telegram to Moscow.

But the Soviets went along with the story on an official level. Neither they nor the Canadians had an interest in having the defection publicized at that point. So they acted as if nothing had happened. This was difficult for Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who had become fond of the Soviet ambassador and other embassy officials. Just two days after

the defection King attended a garden party at the British High Commissioner's residence and ran into Soviet Ambassador Georgii Zarubin and his wife: AI spoke to both of them and talked in a very natural and free way. I thought he looked quite concerned. Indeed, he had a very anxious look on his face."¹⁹ On 10 September Zarubin apparently had another conversation with King (it is not clear where), which Zarubin recorded in *his* secret diary. King complained about Afatigue and over-work, because in addition to all foreign affairs, he was very busy with significant domestic problems, which the newly-convened parliament would be examining." The fact that the subject of Gouzenko was not mentioned made it clear to Zarubin that any Soviet hope for a behind-the-scenes deal to get him back was unrealistic.²⁰

NKVD *resident* Pavlov had even more reason to be worried than Zarubin. He, after all, was responsible for the security of all the personnel at the embassy. A defection had occurred right under his nose. And then there was the possibility that Gouzenko had somehow told the Canadians and their allies about NKVD operations. As a GRU employee, Gouzenko did not have access to NKVD communications but he nonetheless had general knowledge of how things worked and he might have heard some specifics from others at the embassy. Pavlov recalled that "right after the treason of the cipher clerk in the Ottawa *rezidentura* Gouzenko, in September 1945 I warned [Vasily] Zarubin (head of NKVD *rezidence* in New York) about possible unpleasant consequences for our intelligence operations in North America."²¹

The Soviets soon had absolute confirmation that Gouzenko was in the hands of Canada and its allies and was telling them a lot. They were tipped off by their mole in MI6, Kim Philby. On 17 September Pavel Fitin, head of the NKVD's foreign department in

Moscow sent the following message to the NKVD's London residency : "The chiefs gave their consent to the checking of the accuracy of your telegram concerning Stanley's [Philby's codename] data about the events in Canada in the >neighbors' [GRU] sphere of activity. Stanley's information does correspond to the facts."²²

As far as the GRU's network of agents in Canada were concerned, Fred Rose, the Canadian member of parliament who was implicated in spying for the Soviets, received word about the defection the day after it happened. Concerned about causing panic, he told his contacts: "Lie low. Don't talk. Nothing will happen."²³ Upon hearing from Rose about Gouzenko's disappearance, Gordon Lunan, another member of the GRU's agent group, was stunned: "When Fred Rose gave me the news in September that >one of the Russkies has flown the coop', I realized at once that life would never be the same again. I clearly saw prison bars in the future."²⁴

Rose told Lunan that he did not expect anything to come of the defection because Mackenzie King would be reluctant to trigger an international scandal. As time went on, with no reactions from Canadian authorities, Lunan began to feel more comfortable. He and Rose even went to the Soviet Embassy on 7 November to celebrate the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. There Lunan spotted his controller, Col. Rogov, who had cut off contact with him after the defection. Rogov was caught completely off-guard when he caught sight of Lunan: "Seeing me, if not cheerfully at least normally at large and taking part in a social event, must have puzzled his programmed mind and suggested God knows what horrible possibilities."²⁵

The fact that, after two months, there had been no arrests or even signs of an investigation on the part of the RCMP must have given the Soviets cause to wonder.

There is little doubt that all Canada's GRU employees, including Rogov, were aware that Gouzenko had not just disappeared but had defected to the West and was divulging the names of Soviet spies. Beyond passing on this information to representatives of their agent network they were staying away from their Canadian contacts and avoiding attempts at gathering intelligence. This made sense because the RCMP was probably watching their every move. Thus Zabolin and his subordinates were in the awkward position of feigning business as usual while awaiting instructions from headquarters, where their fate and the future course of GRU operations in Canada was being decided. A Damocles sword hung over all of them, especially Zabolin.

Because the Soviets did not want to let on that they had inside information about Gouzenko's defection and debriefing, they continued to wait and watch. The ball was in the court of their former wartime allies. The latter, on the other hand, were in the dark about Philby, and thus were not sure exactly how much the Soviets knew about Gouzenko and what he was saying.²⁶ During the autumn they debated their options, which they saw to be three: shoving the spy issue under the carpet in the interests of improving deteriorating relations with the Soviets; coming out in the open with Russian leaders and presenting them with the evidence that their country was spying on the West; doing nothing for the time being, while seeking further evidence against the suspected spies named by Gouzenko in all three countries. Prime Minister King was all for sending a message to Stalin via the Soviet Ambassador Zarubin on the revelations made by Gouzenko. He pressed for this option in early December, before a meeting with Zarubin, who was going off for a visit to Moscow. (As it turned out, Zarubin never returned to

Ottawa.) After the Americans weighed in with a preference for postponement, however, King was persuaded to keep quiet about Gouzenko.²⁷

Moscow ordered most of its Soviet GRU officers in Ottawa, along with the Soviet Ambassador Zarubin, back home at the end of the year. In addition, the Soviet vice-council in New York, GRU officer Pavel Mikhailov returned to Moscow, because of the Gouzenko defection. According to Gen. Pavlov, both Vasily Zarubin and Itzhak Akhmerov, two leading NKVD operatives in the United States, also left for Moscow at the end of 1945 because of concerns about reprisals by U.S. authorities. Apparently, however, it was not Gouzenko's defection, but rather that of Elizabeth Bentley, that gave rise to these concerns.

THE FALLOUT

After the story of Gouzenko's defection broke publicly on 3 February the situation of course changed dramatically. The RCMP took immediate steps toward arresting the suspected spies fingered by Gouzenko in Canada, which they did in the early morning of 15 February, and the British followed up later with the arrest of Allan Nun May. The time for a diplomatic face-to-face with the Soviets had arrived, although in this case it was an awkward get-together. Late in the afternoon of 15 February, Prime Minister King received the Soviet charge d'affairs, Mr. Belokhovostikov, along with Vitaliy Pavlov. King, who was afraid the Russians would break off diplomatic relations with his government, timidly read them a short statement that he was about to release to the press. The statement was vague, referring only to the disclosure of unauthorized information to foreign missions in

Ottawa, without mentioning the Soviets, and an ongoing Royal Commission investigation. As King recalled: "I said to them I had purposely refrained from making any statement as to the mission referred to but I thought they should know it was the U.S.S.R. Embassy." As the men stood up to go, King was apologetic: "I stopped them for a moment to say how sorry Robertson and I were that it was necessary to speak of these matters at all; that we were all close friends, and that nothing should destroy that relationship."²⁸

The Soviet response came on 21 February 1946 in the form of a statement delivered by Deputy Foreign Minister S.A. Lozovskiy to the Canadian charge d'affaires in Moscow. The Soviet government acknowledged that "certain members of the staff of the Soviet military attaché in Canada received from Canadian nationals with whom they were acquainted, certain information of a secret character." But the statement went on to say that the information was of no great interest to the Soviets because it could already be found in published sources. "It would therefore be ridiculous," the statement continued, "to affirm that delivery of insignificant secret data of this kind could create any threat to the security of Canada." While the Soviet government had recalled those members of the military staff involved in these acts, the statement noted, the "unbridled anti-Soviet campaign" in the press "was incompatible with normal relations between the two countries."²⁹

In the days that followed the Soviet press unleashed a torrent of scathing criticism of Prime Minister King, accusing him of being a pawn of the British government, which was trying to divert public attention from its failures at the United Nations. What distressed Prime Minister King was that he, who wanted so much to be liked by the Russians, was presented in the Soviet press as a villain. He noted bitterly in his diary on 22 February:

“The despatches [sic] from Russia make clear that my name is now anathema throughout the whole Russian empire, in the manner in which the government has disclosed matters through its controlled press.”³⁰

In March the interim report from the Canadian Royal Commission, specifically singling out the Soviets (both the GRU and the NKVD) in committing espionage, was delivered to the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa. It caused a public sensation in the West, with the press feeding on stories about Soviet espionage and efforts to steal the secrets of the atomic bomb. King, worried about the damage to Canadian-Soviet relations and anxious to improve his image in Kremlin circles, sent a fawning message to Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov through the President of Czechoslovakia, Eduard Benesh: “The measures taken against spies in Canada were not and are not directed against the Soviet Union and Generalissimo Stalin, as the hostile press has asserted to the Soviet Union. It is necessary to have recourse to the internal considerations of the Canadian government to understand these measures. I would be very obligated to you if you would explain this affair to Generalissimo Stalin, as my friend, who from personal ties knows my character and can confirm that I am very interested in maintaining cordiality and friendship with the Soviet Union. I am also certain that the spying operations were conducted without the authority of Ambassador Zarubin, towards whom I have the greatest respect.”³¹ One wonders what Stalin and his politburo colleagues thought of King’s bizarre effort to ingratiate himself with them. Did King really believe that these GRU officers were spying without the Kremlin’s knowledge?

Through diplomatic channels the Soviets let the Canadians know how unhappy they were with all the negative publicity. And, while they had been willing to acknowledge

that Zabotin and his GRU group had been gathering information illicitly, they were incensed with the references to Pavlov and his subordinates as spies. A note of protest from the Soviets in Ottawa, released to the press on 4 April, stated that "The Soviet Embassy deems it its duty to declare that the slanderous statements of the criminal [Gouzenko] as well as the reports in the Canadian newspapers based on these statements regarding the mentioned diplomatic members of the Soviet Embassy in Canada are completely fictitious and deserve no credit."³²

To reinforce its claim that Pavlov and his men were diplomats and not spies, the Soviet Embassy sent a bold note to the Canadian Department of External Affairs in late May 1946 notifying them that Pavlov had been promoted from second to first secretary of the embassy.³³ The Canadians remained unswayed and started to pressure for a recall of these men to Moscow. On the day the final report of the Canadian Royal Commission was released, 15 July 1946, the Soviet Embassy conceded defeat and informed the Canadian government that Pavlov and three colleagues would be leaving Canada in the next few days.³⁴

BACK IN MOSCOW

Moscow's highly unusual decision to publicly acknowledge that Zabotin and his GRU officers had been spying, while protecting Pavlov and his NKVD, might be explained by the simple fact that Gouzenko had worked for the GRU. He discussed the broad outlines

of NKVD espionage in testimony to Canadian authorities and even mentioned Pavlov and others by name. But the details and documents pertained mainly to the GRU's operations. So the GRU was caught red-handed. Nonetheless, if we consider what happened in Moscow after the defection, it becomes clear that there were other factors at play: rivalry between the two intelligence agencies and also the widespread practice in Stalinist ruling circles of scapegoating.

GRU Col. Mil'shtein tells in his memoirs that GRU headquarters in Moscow had a special, top-secret section called *Alsk* [reprisal], which carried out acts of revenge, presumably murder, against traitors. But any such acts required the permission of Stalin. After being informed of the Gouzenko defection, Stalin requested from GRU Chief Kuznetsov and NKVD chief Beria a detailed report and a plan for responding. But he forbid them to kill Gouzenko. As Stalin put it: "The war has ended successfully. Everyone is admiring the Soviet Union. What would they say about us if we did that. It is necessary to investigate everything and to designate a special authoritative committee, which Malenkov [deputy prime minister] should chair."³⁵

According to Mil'shtein, the commission included NKVD Chief Beria, military counterintelligence chief Viktor Abakumov, GRU chief Kuznetsov, and Beria's deputy Vsevolod Merkulov, with Beria's assistant Stephan Mamulov acting as secretary. Mil'shtein recalled that they met almost daily, from noon until late in the evening in Beria's office at the Lubyanka. Although Malenkov was the nominal head of the commission, Beria, with all his cronies on the committee, ran the show. Mil'shtein himself was called in for questioning repeatedly and grilled without being permitted to take a seat--about his 1944 trip to North America and his suspicions of Gouzenko. In the end, Mil'shtein escaped

punishment, presumably because he was on record as warning his superiors about Gouzenko. But Zabotin, who was rumored in the West to have been killed, was sent to a labor camp, along with his wife and young son. (It was common practice in Stalin's Russia family members to be punished for crimes along with the person convicted.)³⁶

Vitaliy Pavlov recalled that, as he returned by boat to Russia in the summer of 1946, he was certain that he would face some sort of punishment: "Responsibility for the security of the diplomatic mission, its employees and family members, lay on me like a heavy weight—the thought of the 'Gouzenko affair' continued to make me nervous. How would the center react to the whole story?"³⁷ Upon his return his boss at the NKVD told him that Beria had plans to arrest him. But nothing happened, and he continued his career as an intelligence officer for the next forty years. Pavlov reasoned that he escaped reprisals because he had close relations with Foreign Intelligence Chief Pavel Fitin and his assistant Vasily Zarubin, both of whom protected him. More likely is that Beria, as head of the NKVD, found it convenient to foist all the blame on the GRU, the traditional competitor of the NKVD. Another factor may have been concern about further defections. The punishment of intelligence officers upon their return to the Soviet Union gave an incentive to those abroad not to come back.

By Stalinist standards, even Zabotin got light treatment—ca few years in prison rather than death. This is surprising, given the conclusions reached by the Malenkov-Beria commission investigating the Gouzenko defection. In early April 1946, Beria, presumably as a result of what the commission concluded, sent out a lengthy message to NKVD residencies abroad, copies of which went to the GRU.³⁸ It was a scathing indictment of GRU residency in Ottawa. First, the report noted, work was organized so that each

operational employee had detailed knowledge of the operations of other staff members: personal dossiers on the agent network became common knowledge.” Another problem was that the agent network made extensive use of members of the Communist Party in Canada who were well known to Canadian authorities. And Guzenko, thanks to a decline in vigilance and a disregard for elementary principles of security, had access to information on this network and to state secrets of the highest importance.”

Gouzenko’s defection was a wakeup call to the Soviet intelligence services that they needed to institute reforms. It was also a tremendous blow. As Beria’s message observed “G’s defection has caused great damage to our country and has, in particular, very greatly complicated our work in the American countries.” Indeed, from the Soviet point of view, it could not have happened at a worse time. The western allies had been fully aware that the Soviets conducted espionage against them. Other defectors had said this earlier. But the Gouzenko case became so widely publicized that it mobilized western public opinion against the Soviet Union and enabled those in government circles, particularly in Washington, to gain significant ground in their arguments that the Soviet Union could not be trusted. It also dealt a deathblow to the liberal idea of sharing atomic research with the Soviets, and it gave ammunition to those who argued for more power and resources for intelligence agencies. In short, tensions between the Soviet Union and its wartime allies had been developing for a long time before Gouzenko defected, but his action did much to hasten the deterioration of relations that led to a full-fledged Cold War.

- ¹ For a general history of the Soviets and the bomb see David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956*, Yale 1994.
- ² "Atomnyi shpionazh," www.agentura.ru/dosie/gru/imperia/atomspy.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Personal communications from two former employees of Canada=s external affairs department.
- ⁵ Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream: Canadian Communists, The Spy Trials and The Cold War*, Montreal, 1994, p. 134.
- ⁶ Venona decryption, Moscow to Bogota (with copies to other stations) no. 79 (a), 22 June 1944; www.nsa.gov/gov/docs/gov/docs.
- ⁷ Igor Gouzenko, *This Was My Choice*
- ⁸ Mikhail Mil=shtein, APobeg Guzenko,@ *Sovershenno sekretno*, no. 3, 1995, p. 24.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ See the transcript of Gouzenko=s testimony before the Canadian Royal Commission, NAC, RG 33/62, Microfilm no. , pp. 370-371;393-394.
- ¹¹ Gouzenko, *This Was My Choice*, p. 252.
- ¹² Transcript of interviews with Lt. Gen. Vitaliy Pavlov, Moscow, Nov. 14 and 19, 1997; Sept. 29, 2001.
- ¹³ National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 25, vol. 2620, file 50242-40, vol. 1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ NAC, RG 13, A2, vol. 2119, file 149685.
- ¹⁶ NAC, RG 13, series A2, vol. 2119, file 149685.
- ¹⁷ NAC, RG 33/62, vol. 1, pp. 525-527.
- ¹⁸ Mil=shtein, APobeg Guzenko.@
- ¹⁹ NAC, MG26, ADiary of the Gouzenko Affair,@ p. 1093.
- ²⁰ I.A. Aggeeva, AKanada i nachalo kholodnoi voiny: Delo Guzenko v sovetsko-kanadskikh otnosheniakh, p. 8, citing Zarubin=s secret diary: Dnevnik Zarubina G.N. Sekretno, AVP RF, fond 99, Opis 17, papka 7.
- ²¹ Vitaliy Pavlov, *Operatsiia Asneg@ Polveka vo vneshnei razvedke KGB*, Moscow, 1996, p. 75.
- ²² Venona decrypt, no. 46[a], 17 September 1945, Moscow to London: www.nsa.gov/docs/venona.
- ²³ Weisborg, *The Strangest Dream*, p.141.
- ²⁴ Gordon Lunan, *The Making of a Spy*, Montreal, 1995, pp. 153-154.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 155.
- ²⁶ Of course, they must have realized that the Soviets knew Gouzenko was in their custody. Mackenzie King voiced this assumption in a conversation with British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin on October 10. Referring to the sudden change in the Russian attitude at the Council of Foreign Ministers on September 22, King mused: AI was wondering if it might have been because of the knowledge of what had taken place in Ottawa.@ Bevin rejected the idea. *Diary of the Gouzenko Affair*, p. 1127. Later in October, while on a visit to London, King had lunch with the Soviet ambassador to Britain Gusev. Norman Robertson had warned him that Gusev Ahad an inkling of what had taken place.@ King observed later in his dairy Aasort of silence after talking about the investigation of the scientists at Montreal. I felt sure he knew about Primrose [code name of British scientist Allan Nun May] and he must have known that I did too.@ *Ibid*, p. 1150-1151.
- ²⁷ NAC, RG25, vol. 2620, file, N-1.
- ²⁸ *Dairy of the Gouzenko Affair*, p. 132.
- ²⁹ NAC, MG26, J4, vol. 390, Microfilm reel H-1552, C274446-274447.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ³¹ AVP RF (Foreign Affairs Archives of the Russian Federation), Fond 012. Opis 7, delo no. 286. As cited in Aggeeva, AKanada i nachalo kholodnoi voiny,@ p. 32.
- ³² NAC, MG26, vol. 390, files 31-31, Reel H-1552, C274470.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, C274500.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, C274510.
- ³⁵ Mil=shtein, APobeg Gouzenko.@
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Pavlov, *Operatisia sneg*, p. 86.
- ³⁸ Venona decrypts, Moscow to Canberra, no. 76, 7 April 1946.