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Atomic Spies?: The Implosion of the Sudoplatov Charges

In what they mistakenly call an “oral history”, Jerrold L. and Leona P. Schecter have knowingly cooperated with a KGB spymaster, Pavel Sudoplatov, and his son, Anatoli Sudoplatov, in drafting and presenting charges of treason against Atomic Scientists Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard without any substantiation except the confused and contradictory word of the Sudoplatovs.

This *Public Interest Report* describes the muddle produced by Chapter 7, “Atomic Spies” in the Little-Brown publication *Special Tasks* by the four co-authors. An interview with the Schecters is included.

In a true oral history, one knows at least *who* is speaking. In this case, the Schecters admit that they exploited the fact that the son Anatoli had “his own memories” of anecdotes told over lunch and dinner by *other* participants. (Preface, p. xix)

And in a true oral history, one has some idea of *how*, and in what context, the persons said it. In contrast, this chapter is such a polished and dressed-up rendition, complete with dates of events 50 years old, that it is hard to see through. In effect, the Schecters have functioned as ghost-writers to put the Sudoplatov charges in the best possible light.

The Sudoplatovs may have misled the Schecters into thinking that Pavel Sudoplatov had more direct contact with intelligence than he did—telling them that he was in charge of atomic espionage in 1942 when it seems not to have been until '45, when the key spying was already over.

But the Schecters should have been more alert to this possibility of role inflation and invention concerning atomic spies. They knew that Anatoli's initial inquiry and book synopsis, given to them as literary agents, had not mentioned an atomic spies chapter at all. It was precisely the Schecters, by their own account, who told the Sudoplatovs that the book would not sell in the West unless it had more names known in the West.

True, the Sudoplatovs showed the Schecters that Pa-

vel's appeal for rehabilitation in 1982 had talked of his success in obtaining information from such sources as “the famous nuclear physicists R. Oppenheimer, E. Fermi, K. Fuchs, and others”.

But some sources are “unwitting” and, even after intense polishing, the chapter has so little that it should have given them pause and led them to show it to suitable experts on the U.S. atomic program—experts whose reactions later startled them.

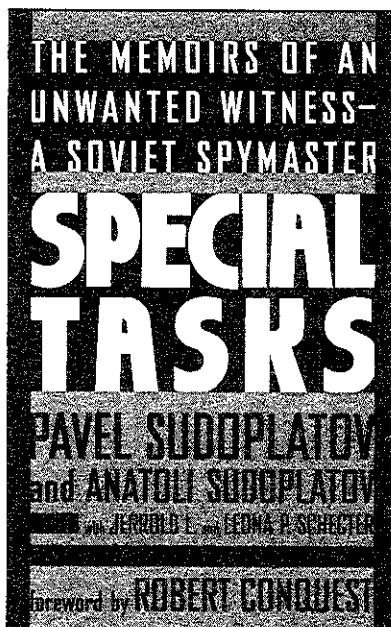
Six major American book reviews known to us have been sharply negative on this chapter and some scathing: *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street*

Journal, *New York Review of Books*, *New Republic*, and *Science Magazine*. (Only the *National Review*, which said there were “questionable claims sprinkled throughout the chapter” somehow reached the approving conclusion that it was “difficult to argue” that other key episodes in the book were “better documented than[Sudoplatov's] treatment of the physicists”. Indeed, now that other chapters are getting close scrutiny, they are also having problems, according to reviews in *The New York Times* and *New Republic*.)

A close examination by American experts shows that the “spies” chapter is riddled with

inconsistencies and a major, key, provably false anecdote: the Terletsky affair, wherein Bohr is alleged to have given secrets to a Russian scientist. Worst of all, its basic unsubstantiated charge of treason and espionage comes in two simple sentences without any elaboration.

The charge is that Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard “helped us plant moles in Tennessee, Los Alamos, and Chicago as assistants in those three labs” (pg. 190) and that these moles “copied vital documents to which they were allowed access by Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard, who were knowingly part of the scheme”. (pg. 192)



(continued from page 1)

The Schecters, after pointing to 20 hours of videotapes of Sudoplatov as backing up the book, have provided only a few minutes on this subject. (See pg. 5) And these three pages of videotape transcript suggest that Sudoplatov cannot tell the difference, at this remove, between committed communists—who wanted communism to have the bomb if capitalism were to have it—and, on the other hand, the American scientists who wanted international political cooperation on nuclear energy and the bomb.

This book not only lacks evidence, but imputes no plausible motive, for its unsubstantiated charge. Sudoplatov implies that American scientists cooperated because of fears of Germany, or to “prevent war”. But the accused American scientists never believed that war-ravaged Russia could beat Germany to the bomb. And the accused American scientists certainly did not want a nuclear arms race—an inevitable result if the Soviets got the bomb through espionage rather than political cooperation.

Bomb's Existence Guaranteed Soviet Progress

Even if the accused scientists had wanted a “balance” of terror among then allies, why would these carefully watched American scientists take risks to give the Soviets documents to that end? As scientists, they well knew that the Soviet Union would, in due course, get the bomb once its existence became known—probably by our use of it against Japan—with or without espionage. This is, precisely, why American scientists and other higher officials joined in urging political authorities to start thinking at once about post-war cooperation.

Sudoplatov was clearly wrong about Bohr's degree of cooperation, which did not involve classified information and constituted little more than providing the officially published Smyth report. (See pg. 8) Accordingly, Sudoplatov is still more in error in charging that Bohr had infected Oppenheimer and Fermi with the idea of cooperating with classified information.

Further, on grounds of character and political attitudes, everyone involved on the American side, including Teller, believes this memoir is wrong about Fermi who was anti-communist and apolitical. And the book's own appendices of actual, previously published Soviet documents show that the book is wrong in saying Soviet spies learned immediately of Fermi's success with the pile—key Russian experts were still anticipating such an achievement six months later.

Sudoplatov says they received “very important” information from Szilard in 1944 about his work at Los Alamos. But Szilard never worked at Los Alamos and never worked on bomb design. Oppenheimer, according to Sudoplatov's taped remarks, did not know that Fuchs was engaged in espionage. So why was it “knowing cooperation” for Oppenheimer to have cooperated

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with Fuchs, a colleague at the project? This is only the beginning of the internal and external contradictions with known facts.

Even *Time Magazine*, which initially excerpted the chapter without critical comment, has since admitted that the critics make a "troubling case" and said the chapter had been "assailed by critics right and left, scientists and historians, American and Russian".

And so when the new Soviet intelligence agency denounces the book as a "mosaic of truthful events, semi-truths and open inventions", says the role of participants are interpreted in a "free and often wrong way", says that Pavel Sudoplatov had "access to atomic problems during a relatively brief period of time, a mere 12 months from September 1945 to October 1946" and says that his department "had no direct contact with the agents' network", then the new KGB seems much more plausible than the old.

With so much dead wrong, and with the Sudoplatovs having been put on notice that they had much to gain by sensational revelations, the unsubstantiated charge that these three senior scientists helped plant moles, and shared documents with them, seems to have been invented. For a real assassin, character assassination is a trifle; many KGB graduates seem to enjoy pulling the chain of the Western press.

Charges Intended To Provoke, Not Enlighten

Even without inventions, there are six levels of possible hype in accounts of this kind: agent hype, headquarters bureaucratic hype, fading memory hype, ghost-writer hype, secondary source (old war story) hype and publishing hype (editing, book jackets and promotion). So such accounts need to be examined, as Sovietologist Adam Ulam has observed, with "extreme caution".

As far as this chapter is concerned, the Schecters seem to have become the latest, albeit willing, victims of Pavel Sudoplatov. When Sudoplatov refused to give them any substantiation of his charges, they should have refused to print them or put them forward with caveats, after having them examined by experts. And they should have gotten more about this on videotape and released it. Instead, Little-Brown has put this account forward, in its publicity and on its book jacket, as established fact and, indeed, as showing "how" the espionage was done!

Little-Brown seems shameless. One of its vice presidents, Roger Donald, when asked if the book had been shown to experts other than Robert Conquest, who wrote the introduction, replied "Why would we?"

For whatever reason, the Schecters are now functioning as spokesmen, with a stone wall defense, for a very dubious client whom they say they have come to believe was sincere but to whose anchoring videotapes they are not permitting prompt access. They may say it is "his

story" but they are defending it as if it were their own. As with true believers in conspiracy theories, we can now expect a steady stream of claims of supportive evidence.

The West needs a better system for assessing the flood of future documents, and the question of what is "responsible behavior" in dealing with this kind of material needs to be raised. Panels of experts including historians, biographers, and retired intelligence and counter-intelligence specialists should be made ready to be consulted on future such revelations.

There should be a certain peer pressure on Western co-authors and publishers, to use such expert advice, perhaps under conditions of confidentiality to protect the news value of the disclosures. One possible place to attach such a network would be the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, which already functions informally in this way.

After the sensational revelations are released, there should be a mechanism for assessing the charges and the extent to which the authors and publishing houses acted responsibly in handling them. Committees on individual freedom and responsibility of the American Bar Association (ABA), American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the American Association for Slavic Studies (AASS), or the Association of American Publishers (AAP) might be employed. This will have a salutary influence on the publishing houses.

A flood of KGB memoirs is on the way. The KGB itself is preparing its own history. According to experts, all such KGB stories have, thus far, contained "inventions". What America needs now are "social" inventions to deal with them.

—Jeremy J. Stone



PHOTO COURTESY LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

KGB's Pavel Sudoplatov (right) with son Anatoli

WATCHING THE SUDOPLATOV DEBATE

At first, it all seemed interesting. Pavel Sudoplatov, a deputy to Beria, seemed to have been in a position to know of what he spoke: that Oppenheimer, Fermi, Szilard and Bohr had “knowingly cooperated” with Soviet espionage to help a then-ally make progress on an atomic bomb. *Time Magazine* had excerpted much of the “Atomic Spies” chapter and MacNeill/Lehrer, on April 18, had put the Schecters on the “Newshour” to talk about it. William Safire, in *The New York Times* referred to it as a “damning book” and said “Assuming Sudoplatov’s second-hand, unsupported recollection is true, . . .”

But then it was all downhill. Those closest to the Manhattan Project were the first to see its absurdity and errors. In a joint letter, Hans A. Bethe, Robert R. Wilson and Victor Weisskopf wrote MacNeill/Lehrer on April 19, pointing out some errors and observing that “Newshour” had “helped a criminal, who has mounted a highly skilled effort to make himself rich, to slander some of the greatest scientists of this century.” Was it hype, dupe or a hoax?

A wire-service employee described the “media blitz” which, he said, is not uncommon nowadays. A press conference by Little-Brown on Monday had delivered the books to the press just as *Time Magazine* hit the stands with its excerpts and with no time for the media to get a second opinion. Since then everyone has been playing catch up.

Theme Of Book Revealed In Chance Meeting

After reading the book, I ran into Jerry Schecter on April 25 and seized the opportunity to ask whether, possibly, a certain key sentence had been inadvertently hyped:

“Oppenheimer, together with Fermi and Szilard, helped us place moles in Tennessee, Los Alamos, and Chicago, as assistants in those labs”. (pg. 190)

Perhaps, I volunteered helpfully to Schecter, translating from Russian or garbled in transcription, it meant that “information gleaned from” these persons had helped emplace the moles. [This would, certainly, be less offensive, albeit only subtly different in English. More, it would mesh with the chapter’s closing: “Although we managed to penetrate the project by planting scientists close to Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard and through Fuchs, we . . .”]

Jerry said, to the contrary, that it was the “theme” of the book that these famous American scientists had *knowingly* helped. On question, he said that the book had been written in “both English and Russian”, which left me confused.

The next day, Priscilla Johnson McMillan, a biographer of Oppenheimer, attacked the book on the op-ed page of *The Washington Post* saying that “The four—Niels Bohr, Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi and Leo Szilard—could not have committed the actions of which they are accused”.

Key charges were debunked: that Oppenheimer “suggested that Klaus Fuchs be included in the Los Alamos British Team”; that Bohr had helped Terletsky in the fash-

ion described in the book; that Fuchs had planted the idea that Fermi, Oppenheimer and Szilard opposed the hydrogen bomb; and more.

The same day (April 26), the American Physics Society noted that the man making these charges had characterized himself as a “master of deception and deceit”, denounced the charges and called for a full investigation. Norman Ramsey noted that the book’s preface had itself observed that “even the most secret documents of the Stalinist period often contain gross falsifications”.

20 hours of Taped “Reminiscences”

Jerry said that he had 20 hours of taped reminiscences and, if I wanted, he offered grandly, I could look at them. I said I did not understand Russian. He did not tell me that he had English transcripts of them or mention that, in fact, only a very few minutes of tape related to the atomic scientists chapter. Nor did he provide them, later, when we asked for them in writing. (And only later did I reflect that 20 hours is not much to base a book upon; it was probably designed to protect the American co-authors.)

The Schecters did give a copy of those few minutes of transcript to one of their critics and it was further disturbing. (See pg. 5)

In the first place, even in response to leading questions posed by Anatoli Sudoplatov, Pavel Sudoplatov flatly denies that Oppenheimer knew Fuchs was a spy: (“We’re not talking about his knowing there was a connection to Soviet espionage, Soviet espionage was never mentioned”). He is not sure, in fact, that Oppenheimer knew that Fuchs was sympathetic to the Soviet Union (“Maybe Oppenheimer knew about his feelings . . .”).

So then, what is the meaning of the now widely debunked charge in the book (p. 193) that “In 1943, under the influence of Kheifetz and Elizabeth Zarubina, [Oppenheimer] suggested that Klaus Fuchs be included in the Los Alamos British team”?

On May 1, Roald Sagdeev—well experienced with Soviet affairs as a scientist who has just completed his own memoir, *The Making of a Soviet Scientist* (Wiley)—reviewed the book for *The Washington Post*. He said this chapter was “full of easily detectable inconsistencies and factual errors”. He observed that Terletsky, who worked for the KGB, had published an account of his meeting with Bohr that did not hide his “disappointment, indeed annoyance with Bohr, for avoiding any scientific remarks that might have gone beyond that which had been written in open literature”. This flatly contradicted the book in one of the only incidents in the chapter that had enough color and substantiation to check. (See pg. 8)

Woodrow Wilson Center Confrontation

I urged the Woodrow Wilson Center to add critics to its panel of Jerrold and Leona Schecter and Anatoli Sudoplatov and, at the subsequent confrontation, on May 2,

(continued on page 12)

THE TAPE: SUDOPLATOV ORAL HISTORY

Editor's Note: The following is a portion of a taped interview with Pavel Sudoplatov concerning atomic spies which the Schecters made available to a critic of the chapter. It is reprinted here without alteration. Material in brackets are questions or prompts from the interviewer, Anatoli Sudoplatov.

ATOMIC ESPIONAGE -10:30 (Starts 1 minute into video)

The atomic problem began in 1944, in the second half of '44 when I was ordered to be in charge of spying for the atomic problem.

Beria was the organizer of this whole business. He called me and said to organize this division. He said: we'll call it "S" for Sudoplatov. We had major specialists in physics and of course an enormous amount of translators working on making use of the espionage materials on the atomic problem from the US and England. We had concentrated together the material collected by the chekists, the agents of the secret police, and the material collected by military intelligence.

[As is evident in these documents from that time, there were five most serious reports which helped and led to the establishment of work here on atomic weapons.] The first reports were from Grigoriy Markovich Kheifetz. There were Oppenheimer's plans for the atomic bomb, and the development of his work into industrial areas. [When was that?] This was approximately 1942 and '43. Again in '43, were the results of Fermi's experiments received from Pontecorvo. Here I would like to underline to you all the time that we are talking not about these comrades; comrades that's an old way of speaking. These scientists were not our agents, Lord save us. We're not talking about that. An agent is someone under your command. They were not under our command. Not one of these people.

[But they passed material to you?] We received material all the same. But it wasn't from agents that we received materials. We received materials from people who were fearful of the spread of the atomic plague, people who were worried about the future of our world. They didn't want the atomic problem to remain just in the hands of some, for it all to remain the monopoly of the US. They wanted others to have it too.

(Time code -01:03:50:00)

In 1944, we received from Szilard material about his work at Los Alamos. This was very important, and received with great approval and interest by our scientists: Kurchatov, Alikhanov, Kikoin. In 1945 we received from Fuchs an unpublished chapter of the report of the US atomic commission. These materials were passed by Oppenheimer and Fermi to Fuchs and then to our courier Fielding. From there it came to us. These were not spies or agents. They were scientists saving the world from war.

Don't forget one thing which I want to specify: not every scientist communicating with our workers overseas was

one of our agents. We didn't have to recruit anyone into a network of agents. We established kind, friendly relations with them, in the course of which we received a lot of interesting information, talking on all sorts of subjects. [But Oppenheimer and Fermi passed interesting documents.] Absolutely. [Do you remember the pseudonyms used in the telegrams that we looked at yesterday?] Charles is Fuchs, Star is Szilard. [And Miad, another source, is Pontecorvo?] I think so. Yes.

These weren't people who could be bought. [But they gave you information in written form.] Sometimes they gave us information in written form when we asked for it. They gave it in written form. These were people who liked the Soviet Union very much. They didn't want knowledge of the atomic bomb to be concentrated solely in certain hands. It was on these factors that the sympathies of Oppenheimer and many others were based. There was the fear that the US hadn't developed the project far enough yet. The US didn't have enough of its own physicists of international stature.

(Time code -01:06:35:00)

[What is known about the relationship between Oppenheimer and Fuchs?] Well, what is known is that they worked together first of all, and Oppenheimer valued Fuchs highly as a physicist, as a person who could play an essential positive role in solving the atomic problem. [Did Oppenheimer know about Fuchs' sympathies to the Soviet Union?] Maybe Oppenheimer knew about his feelings, and this may have made them closer to some degree. But of course we're not talking about his knowing there was a connection to Soviet espionage. Soviet espionage was never mentioned. This was all in terms of friendship and respect for the Soviet Union. It was a sincere desire to help a friend to not be defenseless in the face of this threatening enemy and threatening weaponry like the atomic bomb. [But nonetheless in 1945 after Germany had been defeated, according to this telegram, there was still top secret material coming out of the US about atomic weaponry. So were these scientists doing this knowingly?] Without a doubt, yes. Without a doubt it was done knowingly.

[The FBI followed closely Communist party members who were close to Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer cut off these ties with communists. Was he advised to do this by Liza Zarubina and Kheifetz?] We told them and others necessary to us with whom we were working to sever their ties and distance themselves from the local Communist parties. [That was a directive of Beria and yours?] Yes. [That's a professional intelligence operation.] Absolutely right, absolutely right.

[Semyonov recruited the Rosenbergs for espionage work, but what role did they play in obtaining information for the atomic problem?] Well I'll tell you, and I will underline once again that the Rosenbergs were not our agents. They were the source of information for a whole

(continued on next page)

line of other questions, and that's where it all began. It all began with other questions, and then we established very close and trusting relations with them. [So they were never paid?] My God, there was never any question of paying them. That would have been an insult. [So they voluntarily helped Soviet espionage?] Of course, of course, of course. They had the greatest respect for the Soviet Union.

(Time code -01:09:45:00)

Niels Bohr helped us by the way. [How did that happen?] Our people ran into a particular difficulty. Our specialists who were working in a certain direction ran into a dead end. What to do? Turn to Oppenheimer? We decided not to, but to turn to Bohr instead. [That was 1946?] Approximately, but it's been awhile you know. . . . Yes,

and we decided to turn to Bohr. We took a young worker from my division "S", which I told you about, a young theoretical physicist, and we sent him to Bohr. Denmark, at the time, had been recently liberated from the Germans by the Red Army, and attitudes in general to Soviet Russians were especially warm. Bohr received this young physicist, just starting out, and gave him all the information we wanted, but he didn't know that the fellow had been sent by Sudoplatov. And as a result we received the very important information necessary to find the exit from the dead end. [To launch the atomic reactor.] And Bohr told us how to do it.

□

FAS Interview with the Schecters — Self-described "Grand Jury"

"We think Sudoplatov may be wrong," Jerry Schecter says firmly, "but we definitely think he believes what he has said." (He and Leona nod enthusiastically.) They think the basic charge that Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard "planted moles" and let them copy papers is "plausible." "I don't think he had any reason to make it up," she says.

Q. What about the fact that this one charge is carrying the book in the West and that you, yourselves, sensitized the Sudoplatovs to the need for more information on the West?

A. It is being sold in other countries in the West for other revelations—gold in Spain, Sorge in Japan. Let's not overplay, the Schecters were duped' line, this man was the institutional memory of the KGB. There are records and we have broken the dam on all kinds of stories.

Q. The basic charge here is that there was 'knowing cooperation'; with whom is the 'knowing cooperation' taking place?



PHOTO COURTESY LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

American co-authors Jerrold (Jerry) and Leona Schecter

A. Well . . . they were told they were helping 'anti-fascist scientists'.

Q. Of what nationality?

A. I don't know. Sudoplatov has declined to discuss this.

Q. So it wasn't knowing cooperation with a Soviet espionage ring?

A. No. We asked him who the moles were, and he said 'You don't have to know this.'

Q. Doesn't everybody in the world who reads the book think 'knowing cooperation' means cooperation with Soviet espionage?

A. Well, Sudoplatov says they weren't agents but that 'absolutely, they knew'. He says they knew they were passing information to friendly anti-fascist sources. He says they admired us and wanted to help us.

A. We didn't create this; it is his testimony and not our version. [He refers to the text on pages 190, 193 and 194.] What we have presented is an oral history. Sudoplatov is a master of intelligence operations. The chapter is his account of his role in it and how it worked from an intelligence point of view. This was done in the spirit of the Khrushchev memoirs, i.e. let him tell his own story. Some of the things he has said about situations in America seemed to me off the wall but we let him tell it.

Q. But the book jacket says that the book tells "how" the espionage was done, as if it were established fact.

[Jerry picks up the book to review the book jacket as if this has just occurred to him.]

Q. Do you believe this guy?

A. Yes, on how he runs the intelligence operation. These operatives of his, such as Kheivesty and Vassilevsky and Zarubin came to his house after his release from prison and talked about it. Two of them worked with Oppenheimer. And Vassilevsky says Pontecorvo says Fermi agreed to cooperate. There was a secret

(continued on next page)

SUDOPLATOV'S MEMOIR IS SECOND HAND

The basic problem with the Sudoplatov book is that he (or rather his co-authors) claim that he was in charge of atomic espionage from 1941 throughout the war, when in fact he was not. Therefore, he cannot be considered a credible first-hand source for any of the accusations against Western scientists.

Mr. Sudoplatov's career is fairly easy to trace. Sudoplatov was indeed a deputy director (one of several deputies) of the NKVD foreign intelligence division from 1939 to early 1942. But this did not mean he sat at a desk sifting through intelligence reports gathered by agents in the West. No, Mr. Sudoplatov ran a special section of the foreign intelligence division that handled "wet affairs" — murders, terrorism, sabotage. He also oversaw the notorious poison laboratory in Moscow, where doctors experimented on prisoners by injecting them with poisons that were developed for Sudoplatov's "wet affairs."

In 1942 Mr. Sudoplatov moved from the foreign intelligence department to head the Fourth Directorate of the NKVD, which directed the partisan movement—guerilla

operations, including terrorism and sabotage, behind German lines. Thus, from 1942 to late 1944, Mr. Sudoplatov continued with his career specialty. He could not have had time to follow intelligence reports on the development of the atomic bomb. And he was not in a position to do so. Those reports often went directly to Beria, or to Leonid Kvasnikov, who directed atomic espionage in 1942-43.

Sudoplatov's claim that in 1942 Beria made him "director of intelligence" for the Special Committee on the Atom Bomb is completely false. The Special Committee was not even formed until August 1945. Mr. Sudoplatov's name does not appear in any of the documents that have been published from the Soviet archives relating to atomic espionage. It also does not appear in any of the memoirs of former intelligence officers who were engaged in atomic espionage.

—Amy Knight

Amy Knight, Senior Research Specialist at the Library of Congress, is the author of *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (1993).

file, called the "enormous file" which disappeared after Beria died. We will be in good shape if this emerges.

Q. But the Foreign Intelligence Service in Russia denounced the book.

A. They said there was no "direct" transfer. But we never alleged a "direct" transfer.

Q. It seems pretty direct if the American scientists helped plant the moles and then let them copy the documents—do they have to deliver it personally to Moscow to make it "direct"?

A. Well, Ames delivered documents personally in Latin America [said jokingly since this is not exactly on point]. And, anyway, a lot of the Beria file may no longer exist. So the Foreign Intelligence Service might not know.

Q. So, your position is that they are either trying a non-denial denial or they are wrongly informed. But is it not true that this allegedly helpful non-denial denial lambasted the book in many other ways and said much of it was half-truths and invention?

A. I'm a serious journalist. I consider this a grand jury report. The question is whether it should be "presented" for further consideration. As a professional journalist, I have a sense of what is oral history. We felt this should be recorded and presented as part of his history. He is an intelligence professional and did not want to discuss sources and methods—which explains why there are no details. This chapter was not his primary concern because he is mainly concerned with his rehabilitation at home.

Other Points

On various disputed details, the Schecters seem to concede only the fact that Szilard did not work at Los Alamos but only on the Manhattan project more generally. Leona is prepared to defend even the "Italian sailor" episode as a prepared code phrase in the project which the Russians might have used as well as Compton—which is absurd. That Kurchatov did not know the information said to be passed to the Russians in the related time period is dismissed by them as "maybe the date on the document is wrong". Leona says "We can't guarantee that some documents don't have the right date. The main reason for providing the documents is to show the relationship."

On the important issue of whether Sudoplatov was, in fact, in charge of atomic espionage in 1942, which has been denied by the case officer for McLean and also by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, they suggest that perhaps he was, in effect, in that role even if not officially in it until later.

They still believe the Bohr story despite Aage Bohr's deposition and the fact that he was witness to the event. They maintain that Vassilevsky was in the car waiting outside and that Terletsky gave him a different story when he got to the car.

They seem to accept Soviet agent reports to a Soviet agent bureaucracy as fact, while questioning reports of someone as credible as Aage Bohr, a Nobel prize winner like his father. The Schecters have hopes of getting support. Leona says that people involved in this may start coming forward.

—J.J.S.

BOHR: NOT PROVIDING CLASSIFIED DATA

Editor's Note: The following is a key, as yet unpublished, document by Alexei Kojevnikov of the Institute for History of Science in Moscow. Kojevnikov interviewed Terletsky about the Bohr incident and then compared his results with the Sudoplatov book. Errors of spelling and syntax that appear in the transcript have been preserved here. "PS" (for Pavel Sudoplatov) reflects paragraphs from the chapter "Atomic Spies," while "AK" gives the author's summary of Terletsky's version of events.

Terletsky At Odds With Sudoplatov

AK: In winter 1992-1993, I together with Andrei Andreev, my colleague at the Institute for History of Science and Technology, interviewed Terletsky within the framework of an oral history project on the history of Soviet physics. At the end of the interview Terletsky released a tape with at that time completely unknown story of his Copenhagen mission. The recording was subsequently transcribed, edited and signed by the author before he died in late 1993. The complete document with comments will be published in June in the Russian journal in the history of science "Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniya i tehniki", # 2 of 1994. Major part of the text consists of Terletsky's diary notes taken during or shortly after his trip to Copenhagen.

In the following, I shall use Terletsky and other sources for commenting on paragraphs from Sudoplatov's memoirs. This can help to draw a line between confirmed statements and allegations.

PS: "A pivotal moment in the Soviet nuclear project occurred in April or May 1946. The first Soviet nuclear reactor had been built, but all attempts to put it into operation ended in failure, and there had been an accident with plutonium. How to solve the problem? One idea, which proved unrealistic, was to send a scientific delegation to the U.S. to meet secretly with Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard. Another suggestion to solve the problem of the balky reactor was to send (someone) to see Niels Bohr in Denmark."

Copenhagen Mission Misconstrued

AK: The date is not correct, like some other dates in Sudoplatov's book. Terletsky met Bohr on 14 and 16 November 1945. Neither then, nor even in spring 1946, could there be any problem with initiating a nuclear reactor, to say nothing about an accident with plutonium. Soviet work was at a much earlier stage: only small quantities of uranium and graphite were available for physical measurements. The house for the future reactor was finished only in June 1946 (See: I.F. Zhezherun. *Stroitel'stvo i pusk pervogo v Sovetskom Soyuze atomnogo reaktora*. Moscow, 1978, pp. 98-106). Thus, what Sudoplatov wrote about the scientific side and the purpose of the Copenhagen mission, is a fantasy. Terletsky first heard of the planned operation on 20 October 1945. The decision could be triggered by, perhaps, Bohr's lecture on 3 October at the

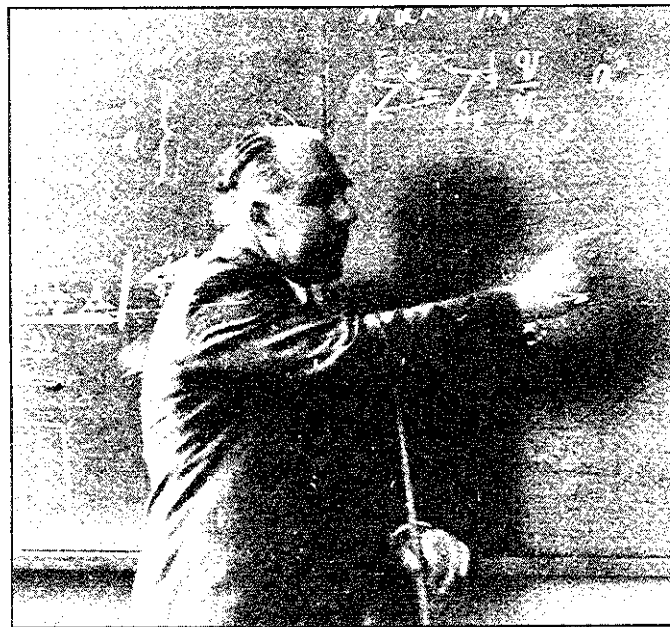


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Niels Bohr in 1947

Danish Engineering Society, which was described in press as a release of secret information, or by Bohr's letter to Piotr Kapitza of 21 October, the sending of which he probably had discussed in advance with Soviet diplomats.

PS: "We decided to send one of our officers, Yakov Terletsky, a physicist who had processed and edited all the scientific information that was gathered by our intelligence networks, should be sent to see Niels Bohr in the guise of a young Soviet scientist working on a project. With the exception of Kurchatov, he was the most knowledgeable and would be able to hold his own with Bohr and to seek his advice. Terletsky could not be sent alone on such a critical assignment, so he was accompanied by Lev Vassilevsky. He would lead the conversation with Bohr while Terletsky would handle the technical details."

AK: Terletsky, physicist from Moscow University, was hired in September 1945 by KBG (called NKVD at the time) to supervise translations of American classified reports on uranium project from English into Russian. He was a very able theoretical physicist with, however, no experience in nuclear topics. He had only started acquainting himself with intelligence reports, and had no real knowledge of what was going on in the Soviet project, thus Beria was not afraid of sending him abroad. Four top atomic physicists instructed Terletsky in one-hour-and-a-half lecture and compiled a questionnaire, which he had to learn by heart before meeting with Bohr. Moreover, neither Terletsky nor Vassilevsky could converse in English well enough, and they had to be accompanied by an interpreter. Overestimating Terletsky's knowledgeability, Sudoplatov strives to present what actually was a quickly and untidily prepared operation as a very well planned one.

(continued on page 12)

FERMI: ANTI-COMMUNIST AND APOLITICAL

The best possible character witness, in this case, for Fermi is Edward Teller. Teller, who was a key witness against Oppenheimer in the proceeding that stripped Oppenheimer of a clearance, was later ostracized by the American scientific community for his testimony.

In a May 11, 1994 article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Teller said:

"I had the privilege of being a close friend of Fermi's from 1932 until he died in 1954. I consider it my duty to contradict the claims of the Sudoplatovs. . . .

"I have no reason to doubt that the NKVD (the predecessor of the KGB) had a few moles placed in Los Alamos. That Fermi helped to place these moles in Los Alamos or Oak Ridge, Tenn., or that he left documents lying around so the moles could see and transmit them to the Soviet Union, is not supported by evidence and, I believe clearly wrong. . . .

"I never detected—not even in revealing side remarks—any tendency in Fermi to be anything but critical of communism and the Soviet Union. Fermi was apolitical. But he simply and clearly opposed the Stalinist nightmare even more than he opposed Mussolini.

"I knew Klaus Fuchs quite well, and when the news of his spying arrived in 1949, I had an instant reaction that at last there was an explanation of his peculiar reserve and of his occasional remarkable silences. But, in Fermi, there was nothing unexplained, except the fact of his unparalleled genius."

Richard Garwin, A Student of Fermi Agrees

Garwin, FAS Fund Chairman, writes: I met Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago in 1947 and worked with him to receive my Ph.D. in physics there in 1949. We continued to interact as members of the physics faculty, but especially at Los Alamos beginning in 1950 when I began the first of many summers of consulting on nuclear and thermonuclear weapons and weapons tests. Fermi was an extremely cautious person in dealing with the bureaucracy; he advised me specifically that I should not imagine using even one laboratory envelope for a personal letter. Whatever his political sympathies, he would never have knowingly allowed a secret document to be copied to be sent outside the Manhattan Project security system.

But in fact Fermi did not have any strong political views; indeed he had a strong apolitical view. His friend and colleague from Italy and New York, Mario G. Salvadori, recently recounted that Fermi told him right after the war, "I was put on Earth to make certain discoveries, and what the political leaders do with them is not my business." Though apolitical, Fermi had no sympathy for communism.

Garwin notes that the transcript of the raw interview with Sudoplatov on the MacNeil/Lehrer program appears contradictory.

SUDOPLATOV: In 1945 we received from Fuchs an unpublished chapter of the report of the US atomic com-



PHOTO COURTESY AJP EMILIO SEGRE VISUAL ARCHIVES

Edward Teller (left) and Enrico Fermi in 1951

mission. These materials were passed by Oppenheimer and Fermi to Fuchs and then to our courier Fielding. From there it came to us. These were not spies or agents. They were scientists saving the world from war.

"Fuchs and Pontecorvo were spying for the Soviet Union," Garwin reminds. "As a member of the British delegation at Los Alamos, Fuchs had the same access to all secret technical information as any other staff member, in the interest of building the atomic bomb in the shortest possible time. Fuchs had no need to be 'passed' information from Oppenheimer or Fermi; it came to him legitimately." □

Reactions to Other Chapters in the Book

Walter Laqueur writes in the *New Republic*: "How reliable a witness is Sudoplatov? To judge by the non-nuclear part of the book (twelve chapters out of thirteen) his record is dubious. . . . What the author says about pre-war Yugoslavia, about Iraq in the 1950s, about German Communists in the 1930s, about Russian emigres, about the purge of the Soviet generals in 1937 and a great many other subjects is wrong, at least in part."

Adam Ulam writes in *The New York Times*: "The most demonstrable distortion of historical facts in the book is its treatment of Edvard Benes. . . . branded outright a Soviet agent by Mr. Sudoplatov. The story is not only a slander but also nonsensical. There was no reason for Benes to flee through a 'clandestine' route as Mr. Sudoplatov puts it. . . . The Serbian officers' coup. . . . came in 1941, not 1938, and had nothing to do with Benes." ■

SZILARD: NOT AT LOS ALAMOS IN 1946, NOT A BOMB DESIGNER

Genius in the Shadows, my biography of Leo Szilard, was going into production in 1992 when Jerrold Schecter called to ask what I knew about Szilard's role as a Soviet spy during the Manhattan Project. At first bemused, I became disturbed when it was clear that he was not joking. Nothing in my 9 years of research, I told him, and none of the more than 200 persons I had interviewed, had yielded even a trace of evidence to support Schecter's line of inquiry. I urged him to share at once any evidence he found, so I could change my book before the presses rolled.

He had no evidence then, and has none today, although Schecter, his wife Leona, and the Sudoplatovs have since repeated this slanderous charge in *Special Tasks*, in a *Time Magazine* book excerpt, and on television and radio.

Their "checkbook history" defames four of our century's greatest scientists—Bohr, Fermi, Oppenheimer, and Szilard—with no evidence and a compost of factual errors. It also poisons the intellectual discourse now underway to fathom and explain the causes and consequences of the nuclear age and the Cold War.

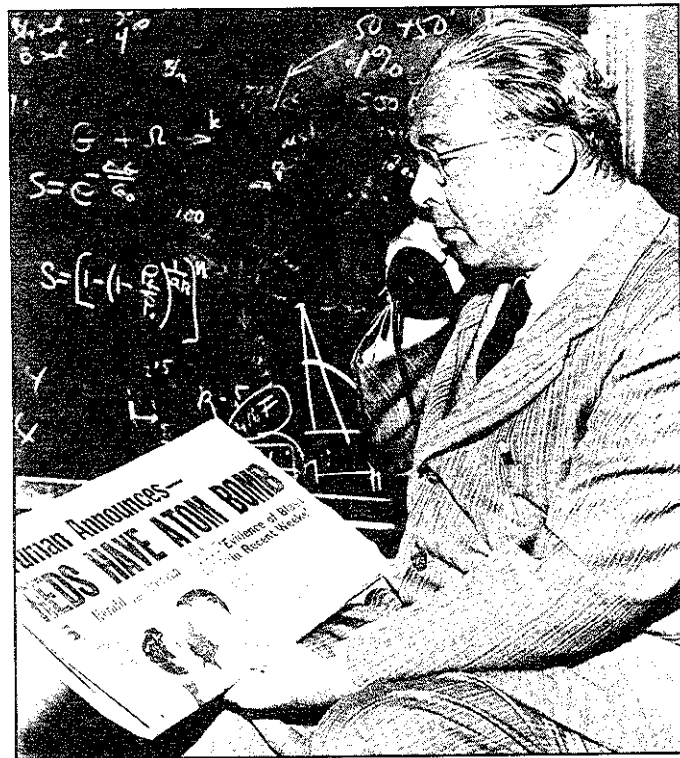
Further undermining Schecter's credibility, these interviews show the old man being led by his co-authors to state unfamiliar conclusions and vague charges. Had the Schecters checked with published sources, archival and private documents, researchers, biographers, and living witnesses to the Manhattan Project they would have discovered how gravely false were their allegations against the four scientists.

Six Mistakes Easily Proved

1) "The most vital information for developing the first Soviet atomic bomb," the book claims, "came from scientists designing the American atomic bomb at Los Alamos, New Mexico—Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, and Leo Szilard." These three and "Szilard's secretary" are often cited as intelligence sources. [page 172] But Szilard never went to Los Alamos until 1956, a decade after the Manhattan Project had ended, and he never worked on bomb design, only on the early development of nuclear reactors. What's more, Szilard never had a secretary of his own, but used the stenographer pool at the Manhattan Project's Metallurgical Laboratory (Met Lab) at the University of Chicago from 1942 to 1946.

2) The book credits Elizabeth Zarubin, the wife of a Soviet spy in Washington, with "recruiting one of Szilard's secretaries, who provided technical data." [189] Again the co-authors provide no evidence: no secretary's name, no dates, no technical data.

3) The book states that "Oppenheimer, together with Fermi and Szilard, helped us place moles in Tennessee, Los Alamos, and Chicago as assistants in those three labs." [190] Throughout the chapter Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Szilard are described as a conspiratorial trio. Yet the three never worked together: Oppenheimer worked with Fermi at Los Alamos, Fermi with Szilard at Chicago. Ironically,



Leo Szilard learns of Soviet bomb test in 1949

the only documented wartime meeting between Oppenheimer and Szilard occurred in May 1945, in the Pentagon office of the Manhattan Project's director, Gen. Leslie Groves.

4) The book claims that "These unidentified young moles . . . were junior scientists or administrators who copied vital documents to which they were allowed access by Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Szilard, who were knowingly part of the scheme." [192] FBI and Army intelligence agents monitored Szilard's actions constantly, on orders from Groves who disliked his impertinent style. A breach of security would have been promptly detected.

5) The book claims that in 1946 Soviet secret police chief Lavrenti Beria said "we should think how to use Oppenheimer, Fermi, and Szilard, and others around them in the peace campaign against nuclear armament." [207-8] But by the fall of 1945, the three were already outspoken public advocates for the atom's international control.

6) The book claims that through Soviet spy Klaus Fuchs "we planted the idea that Fermi, Oppenheimer, and Szilard oppose the hydrogen bomb." [208] But Fuchs left the United States in 1946, and the H-bomb's development was not debated within the government by Oppenheimer and Fermi until 1948-49. Szilard had no security clearance after 1946, and only opposed the H-bomb when it was publicly announced by President Truman in 1950. —William Lanouette □

OPPENHEIMER: ENIGMATIC AND CLOSELY WATCHED

Who was Robert Oppenheimer? Was he, as the Schecters and Sudoplatovs say, capable of transmitting atomic secrets to Moscow during World War II?

Because Oppenheimer was given to Delphic utterances, because he had well known left-wing associations during the 1930s and because the U.S. government in 1954 revoked his security clearance after secret hearings in which the charges were never made clear, questions hover over Oppenheimer and, despite the U.S. government's restoring his honor by giving him the Fermi Award in 1963, they probably always will. In death, even more than in life, Oppenheimer remains enigmatic.

After 40 Years Comes Charge of Treason

With publication of the Sudoplatov book, Oppenheimer is charged once again, and this time the charges are devastating. He is accused in 1994, as he was not in 1954, of treason. And his present-day accuser is not the U.S. government but an 87-year-old, ex-KGB general who spent a lifetime liquidating people at the behest of Stalin and Beria.

True, a partial transcript of the "oral history" interview underlying the book shows the old gentleman eating his words by adding that "these scientists were not our agents" and "of course, we're not talking about [Oppenheimer's] knowing there was any connection to Soviet espionage." But the charges are there and require an answer.

The accusations about Fuchs are easily disposed of since it is well documented that Fuchs came to Los Alamos as part of the British mission and neither Oppenheimer nor General Leslie Groves, director of the Manhattan Project, had any voice in the make-up of the delegation. As for Fuchs' being given access to material he had no right to look at, Fuchs was a cleared colleague. And, as for Fuchs' influencing Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard to oppose the hydrogen bomb, Fuchs left the United States for England in 1946, a time when Fermi and Oppenheimer advocated research into the weapon. They continued to favor research but opposed a "crash program" of development when the question became acute after the first Soviet A-bomb test in 1949. (Szilard lacked clearance and had no part in the H-bomb debate.)

The scientific director was closely watched—his mail censored, his telephone tapped and a driver in the front seat of his car to eavesdrop on his conversations. All offices were swept at night by a lab official and four determined WACs and, while it is true that office safes were on rare occasions cracked, it took a Richard Feynman to do it. Beyond this, every important espionage leak known to have come from Los Alamos can be accounted for as having come from Klaus Fuchs.

Moreover, no motive has been given for Oppenheimer to spy. Russia was bound to get the bomb eventually, and no secret given to them would produce a bomb before the war with Germany was over. Oppenheimer wanted post-

war political control, no post-war arms races born of espionage.

Oppenheimer could have been describing himself and was surely describing what he believed in when he wrote of Fermi that "He is a man of the very highest personal integrity and honor. He would not accept residence in this country, and above all he would not accept collaboration with a project of such vast potential consequence, without regarding these as a personal commitment to be honored under all circumstances. I believe it is this that guarantees Fermi's absolute loyalty."

I.I. Rabi made a stab at describing the Sphinx-like quality of his friend, linking it to his virtues. "In Oppenheimer," Rabi said, "the element of earthiness was feeble. It was this spiritual quality, this refinement as expressed in speech and manner, that was the basis of his charisma. He never expressed himself completely. He always left a feeling that there were depths of sensibility and insight not yet revealed. These may be the qualities of the born leader who seems to have reserves of uncommitted strength."

In June of 1954, after the U.S. government branded Oppenheimer a security risk, Rabi lamented that his friend had been "persecuted, when he should have been knighted." It is a bitter thing indeed that forty years later, in this book out of Russia, Robert Oppenheimer should once again be the victim of character assassination.

—Priscilla Johnson McMillan

□

Priscilla McMillan, a fellow at Harvard's Russian Research Center, is working on a book about Robert Oppenheimer and the development of the hydrogen bomb.



PHOTO COURTESY LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY

Robert Oppenheimer in 1945

(continued from page 8)

PS: "I met with Terletsky in 1993, just before he died. He recalled that at first Bohr was nervous and his hands trembled, but he soon controlled his emotions. Bohr understood, perhaps for the first time, that the decision that he, Fermi, Oppenheimer and Szilard had made to allow their trusted scientific proteges to share atomic secrets had led them to meet agents of the Soviet government. Bohr had sent official confirmation to the Soviet embassy that he would meet with a delegation, and now he realized that the delegation contained both a scientist and an intelligence officer. Thus, after this first contact with Vassilevsky, Bohr preferred to speak only to Terletsky, his scientific counterpart. There was no choice but to let Terletsky meet Bohr alone with our translator."

Vassilevsky Not At Bohr Meeting

AK: According to Terletsky, the meeting was organized with the help of Danish Resistance. He did not know details, but mentioned delay and some problems. It is quite probable, that Bohr did not want to meet with Vassilevsky, and apparently there was no direct "first contact" between them. Only Terletsky and interpreter came to visit Bohr at his institute.

Terletsky mentioned no nervousity on Bohr's part, he wrote about trembling hands without any dramatism, in connection with Bohr's age. The idea about Bohr's and other's decision etc. is entirely Sudoplatov's. Terletsky was informed about Bohr's previous contacts with the British intelligence during the time of the German occupation, but he makes no hint on any possibility of Bohr's either former or later conscious or unconscious help to Soviet intelligence, other than the meeting described.

PS: "Terletsky thanked Bohr in the name of scientists in Russia known to him, for the support from and consultations with their western colleagues. Bohr readily explained to Terletsky the problems Fermi had at the University of Chicago putting the first nuclear reactor into operation, and he made valuable suggestions that enable us to overcome our failures. Bohr pointed to a place on a drawing Terletsky showed to him and said, "That's the trouble spot." This meeting was essential to starting the Soviet reactor, and we accomplished that feat in December 1946."

AK: Terletsky brought a letter from Piotr Kapitza, which contained a general note on atomic policy problems and recommended Terletsky as an able young physicist without specifying the purpose of his visit to Copenhagen. Terletsky asked his questions in the name of Kapitza. The mentioning of previous support or consultations from Bohr and other western colleagues is, again, entirely Sudoplatov's addition.

In his account, Terletsky avoids specifying the content of the questions he asked, but only makes a general judgement. No drawing is mentioned. Bohr gave answers of a very general nature, always referring to his unawareness of technical details of the American project and stressing,

that such qualified physicists like Kapitza and Landau would certainly be able to solve the problem. Terletsky understood, that one of the questions was not correctly formulated. Bohr also gave him a copy of the recently declassified Smyth report, which was apparently new for Soviets, but shortly thereafter received in another copy directly from the U.S. In the Soviet embassy in Copenhagen, Terletsky and the interpreter wrote down what they had remembered from Bohr's answers, and returned back to Moscow.

Soon, having read the Smyth report and other documents and having got more informed about the status of Soviet work, Terletsky came to the conclusion, that Bohr's answers did not contain anything particularly new for Soviet physicists. The purpose of the whole operation remained obscure for him.

In general, Terletsky's reminiscences appear a much more reliable source than that of Sudoplatov. They contain fine authentic details, carry the style and the mood of immediate post-war time, display a sort of disinterestedness, at least in admitting that the operation was a failure. If now, on the basis of this episode, we try to judge the valuability of Sudoplatov's recollections, a conclusion can be like this: Sudoplatov is quite reliable when he writes about his own unit, subordinates and, probably, agents directly connected to it and their assignments. When he comes to describing the agent's contacts with their sources, he goes well onto fantasies. And he should not be trusted when he speaks on scientific and technical topics and judges the valueability of particular information for actual work on the Soviet bomb.

—Alexei Kojevnikov

□

(continued from page 4)

learned that Jerry had not circulated the book to scholars in advance. His defense was that the KGB would have been able to stop the book if they had learned of it. It seemed more likely that the decision not to circulate the book was made to prevent the "scoop" from leaking.

At the Center, the Schecters confronted Amy Knight (an expert on Beria) and Stanley Goldberg (an expert on Los Alamos and Groves).

Ms. Knight showed that Sudoplatov had not, in fact, been "Director of Intelligence" to a Special Committee on Atomic Energy set up and headed by Beria in 1942—as the book asserts on page 179. On the contrary, the committee was not established until 1945. It appears that Sudoplatov was not directly involved in atomic espionage during the key years of its success but was, instead, running guerrilla operations behind German lines. (See pg. 7)

Goldberg presented a table of 18 claims made in the Sudoplatov book, compared them with known evidence, and then provided his conclusion. From this, it was evident that the chapter was wrong about Bohr and hence that the chapter was wrong in stating that his views had infected other scientists and "helped strengthen their own inclina-

tions to share nuclear secrets with the world academic community". (p. 172)

Indeed, the false notion that Bohr wanted to share "secrets" is repeated five times in the chapter; in one case, it is even falsely attributed, by specific footnote, to *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* by Richard Rhodes.

The Schecters Respond

That same day, the Schecters responded in *The Washington Post*. They said (twice) that documents proving their case "eventually will emerge" and referred to Fuchs' case officer, Feklisov, having written a memoir in which it was said that Oppenheimer had asked for Fuchs to be on the British team.

Meanwhile, the *Post* reported that KGB officials had signed a book contract with American and other publishers and were "planning their own book on atomic spying, at which time archival records will be produced". So more of this debate may be expected.

The very next day, the *Post* printed a further response by McMillan who asked "Why credit the unsupported assertion by Alexander Feklisov?" in the face of so much evidence in the West to the contrary.

On May 3, *The New York Times* printed the critical articles by Amy Knight and Richard Rhodes. Rhodes listed a number of fundamental errors and, in particular, showed how Bohr's desire to prevent an arms race through post-war atomic cooperation had been twisted in the memoir into a desire to "share atomic secrets".

There was wild uncertainty in the community about how the book had been written. Stanley Goldberg wrote the *Times*, saying "A more truthful title page might read, 'by Jerrold and Leona Schecter, with hints as to subjects from Pavel Sudoplatov as prodded and directed by Anatoli Sudoplatov'". (FAS was unsuccessful in inviting the

Schecters to write for this PIR and explain the process by which the chapter had been prepared.)

The few pages of the Sudoplatov transcript show him saying of Fuchs, Szilard and Pontecorvo:

"These were people who liked the Soviet Union very much. They didn't want knowledge of the atomic bomb to be concentrated solely in certain hands. It was on these factors that the sympathies of Oppenheimer and many others were based."

And in the book, on page 195, he says in talking about the post-war world: "Since Oppenheimer, Bohr, and Fermi were fierce opponents of violence, they would seek to prevent a nuclear war, creating a balance of power through sharing the secrets of atomic energy."

No doubt this was the view of Fuchs and Pontecorvo—committed communists worrying that the capitalists would have the bomb and the communists would not. But Sudoplatov seems to blandly assume that non-communist American scientists, who feared an arms race and war, would also assume that their best course was to "share secrets".

As noted in our editorial in this issue, these are not plausible motives for those accused. And when Sudoplatov says, in his videotaped transcript, "There was the fear that the U.S. hadn't developed the project far enough yet. The U.S. didn't have enough of its own physicists of international stature," it sounds as if he had not the slightest idea what American scientists were thinking.

But above all, if as Sudoplatov says, "we're not talking about his [Oppenheimer's] knowing there was a connection to Soviet espionage. Soviet espionage was never mentioned."—then how do we get a sentence like:

"Oppenheimer, together with Fermi and Szilard, helped us place moles in Tennessee, Los Alamos, and Chicago as assistants in those three labs." (pg. 190)

How can you help place moles without being involved in espionage? In sum, Sudoplatov's own testimony is thoroughly contradictory. Did they "knowingly cooperate" with Soviet espionage or not?

Post Editorial Denounces "KGB Memoir"

On May 4, *The Washington Post* editorial said: "It is difficult to imagine someone who deserves less to be taken at his unverified word" than Sudoplatov.

The next day, Reuters quoted both Oppenheimer's son, Peter, and Niels Bohr's son, Aage, wondering if there had been any "fact-checking" on the book.

On the same May 5, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service denounced the book:

"Allegations that Soviet intelligence received information on the atomic bomb directly from such noted scientists as Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard, Robert Oppenheimer and others do not correspond to reality."

It said the book was a "mosaic of truthful events, semi-truth and open inventions" and "The very events and the role of many participants are interpreted in a free and often the wrong way".

According to the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, "Pavel Sudoplatov had access to atomic problems during a

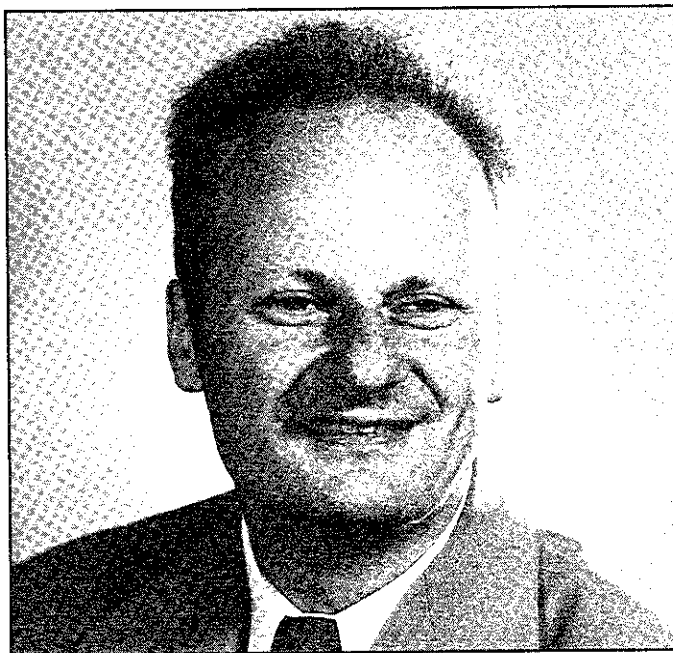


PHOTO COURTESY LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY

Hans Bethe denounced chapter.

relatively brief period of time, a mere 12 months, from September 1945 to October 1946, when he was in charge of special department 'S'. Department 'S' had no direct contact with the agents' network". This agreed with Amy Knight.

Jerry Schecter's seemingly disingenuous response, in the May 6 *New York Times*, was that this seemed an "indirect confirmation" of his charges, since Sudoplatov "had never claimed that Oppenheimer, Fermi, Szilard and Bohr had directly handed over material but he affirmed they knowingly cooperated".

Planting moles in installations and then letting them copy material would certainly seem to be "directly" handing over material. Still, Jerry got MacNeil/Lehrer to carry it as his response. The same *New York Times* letter said a *Red Star* article had confirmed that Sudoplatov headed the second intelligence bureau. But Amy Knight's article had never denied this—only said it started much later than 1942.

In this same letter, Schecter said that Bohr's help to the Soviet Union was "verified in a Discovery Channel videotaped interview" of Terletsky before he died. A spokesman for the Channel denied it, and we learned that *The Boston Globe* had been told on May 7 that "The Schecters are making claims about our documentary even though they have not seen it. We do not appreciate this and are taking steps to request they stop citing us".

Jerry also referred to a *Red Star* article, one "confirming the place" of Oppenheimer, Bohr and Fermi in Sudoplatov's story. But this article turned out to be based entirely on the Sudoplatov book and interview by the publication with Sudoplatov himself! (Not an independent confirmation, this same distortion was repeated in *The Washington Post* over the signature of Roger Donald, Vice President of Little-Brown, who later confessed to FAS that he had

never seen the *Red Star* article, or a translation. Evidently, Little-Brown vice presidents were not fact-checking the letters they signed, much less the books they sold.)

The Schecter letter says his critics are historians and journalists whose "work is undermined" by the Sudoplatov charges and that people who dismiss this are "naive at best and dishonest at worst".

A letter was also printed in *The New York Times* by Robert Conquest who had provided the Sudoplatov book with the Foreward. Conquest is a major historian of the Stalin period. His letter seemed to distance himself from the "Atomic Spies" chapter by saying "I was not primarily interested, and claim no special expertise in atomic spy rings . . .". Up to this point, no non-participant in this book seems to have defended this chapter.

Even Edward Teller Questions The Book

On May 11, Edward Teller, in *The Wall Street Journal*, defended Fermi against the "scandalous accusations against numerous well-known scientists who have passed away" and said he had a hard time understanding why the media had given such attention to a chapter that is "certainly wrong in some essential parts". He said "Fermi was apolitical. But he simply and clearly opposed the Stalinist nightmare even more than he opposed Mussolini". (See pg. 9)

Robert Gates Urges Caution

In assessing KGB memoirs, former CIA director Robert Gates told FAS that we could expect "scams to make money, selective disclosure, inaccurate documents including forgeries or plants and that, as a result, the chances of falsely defaming a person would be enormous". He felt that such disclosures should be treated "very cautiously".

The Interview With The Schecters

Provided on pg. 6 and 7 is an interview with the Schecters. They do not feel embarrassed at having helped level such serious charges without substantiation. More surprising, they are openly uncertain themselves what the charge of "knowingly cooperated" leveled against Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard really meant. At the core of the book's sensation is astonishingly little.

Adam Ulam, younger brother of the real father of the H-bomb, Stanislaw Ulam, and a distinguished Sovietologist at Harvard, summarized the book review he was doing for *The New York Times*. He felt this chapter was based on "hearsay", was "very muddled" with "no proofs" and many incorrect names and dates. He said that all such books of KGB disclosures had "inventions" mixed with truth. He was also critical of other chapters but called the book "useful".

MacNeil/Lehrer Transcripts Arrived

It turned out that in the first "Newshour" report, Charles Krause, the interviewer had said, inaccurately, that Sudoplatov was in charge of "running the spy rings" that provided the information. But later Krause observed astutely that Sudoplatov "provides few details of espionage activity from late

A Review in The Economist

"Can Sudoplatov be trusted? Yes, say Mr. and Mrs. Schecter in their Introduction, for 'what concerned Sudoplatov most was accuracy in the details.' Curious. The whole book is replete with so many inaccurate "details"—from wrong dates and spellings to outright distortions—that one is tempted to put down the volume even before reaching that fateful chapter, 'Atomic Spies.' Edvard Benes, the late president of Czechoslovakia, was certainly not, as Sudoplatov claims, a Soviet agent, nor did he flee his country with the assistance of the NKVD, nor did he suggest to Stalin that the Soviet Union organize a coup against the Yugoslav king and his pro-German regime. The British did not, in the late 1930s, seek an agreement with Hitler to support him in a war against the Soviet Union . . .

"If much of the book is a mixed bag, 'Atomic Spies' is a disaster. It reads like one of the transcripts of the Moscow Trials in the 1930s, with reports on conversations that never took place and people who never existed . . ."

1943 to 1945 despite his direct control over Soviet spy rings during that period". Krause says the book was the result of a "two-year clandestine" collaboration.

Schechter had said the book was done "according to journalistic and historical standards"—but it had not, clearly, been checked out with the community of historians. And the "clandestine" nature of the collaboration had precluded the normal checking. (FAS learned that one expert, "witting" about the project, had been cautioned not to discuss it with others.)

Jerry persists in saying, on the basic charge, "Now whether that's treason or not depends on how you look at it". He feels it was "against the law" to discuss it but that the scientists involved "felt that it was so big that it should be shared". Both Sudoplatov and Schechter seem to feel the need to soften the charges from treason to higher loyalty.

David Holloway of Stanford University

Later, we received an article from Holloway, soon to appear in *Science Magazine*, that says that the book's documents showed Kurchatov (Oppenheimer's Soviet counterpart) knew too little and too late to have been helped by Fermi, or anyone with access to Fermi's work in Chicago. So, not only was the Terletsky affair a fantasy but Fermi was pretty well cleared by the book itself! David Holloway, who seemed to have the best grasp of anyone in the country on the details of all this, said Sudoplatov might have wanted to "make money or to cause mischief" but that "his American co-authors are very much to blame for not making the effort to check out his serious, but unsubstantiated, charges."

The Wall Street Journal reviewer, William M. Carley, said "Old Soviet spies never die, they just write books with sensational allegations in hopes of making lots of money."

On May 14, we got the advance text of Thomas Powers' piece for the *New York Review of Books*. After disposing of a number of errors in the chapter, he said:

"These genuine documents [in the Appendix] refer almost entirely to materials obtained from Fuchs, and make no reference to the sort of high-level intelligence which ought to have been available from Oppenheimer, Fermi and Szilard. The account of atomic espionage printed in *Special Tasks* is an unrelieved mess—contradictory, often incoherent, riddled with error, and unsupported in its major claims that the leading scientists who are named committed espionage. Before historians and biographers attempt the laborious task of deciding whether any of these things really happened, they should first address the more basic question whether Sudoplatov actually *said* they happened."

Powers complained that the book had "more authors than a Hollywood movie with script trouble" and had been "hurried secretly into print in the manner now reserved by publishers for sensational revelations." *Time Magazine* and the MacNeil/Lehrer "Newshour" had "abandoned all accepted journalistic practice by treating what amounted to unsupported charges as proven". This had resulted in "widespread public acceptance" that "no amount of debunking" in reviews could erase.

Terletsky Interview Surfaces

Meanwhile, on May 13, FAS had received an article from Alexei Kojevnikov of the Institute for History of Science in Moscow who had interviewed Terletsky in 1992-93. He compared the Sudoplatov interview with the book and found devastating differences (See pg. 8). He said it showed Sudoplatov going well into "fantasies" when he discussed agents and their contacts with third parties.

Since an *Izvestia* article had said that the main Sudoplatov charges in this chapter were false but that the Terletsky episode was true, it may be that Beria told Stalin that the (Beria-initiated) mission was a success even though Terletsky said it was a failure. On the weekend of May 14, Jerry Schechter told me that they were searching, in Moscow, for a KGB interview that would support the Sudoplatov version.

Time Semi-Apologizes

On Monday morning, May 16, *Time Magazine* reviewed the controversy. It quoted Anatoli Sudoplatov as saying that the report was "based on oral witnesses . . . reconstructed from memory" of what his father had learned from spies he worked with. *Time* said these 50-year-old memories "seem to have led" to "some serious errors and inconsistencies" and precisely specified five major ones. It called the case against the book "troubling".

Among other things, *Time* confirmed Holloway's charge, noting that a memo in the appendix dated July 3, 1943, shows Kurchatov musing that the Americans might conduct a successful self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction "in the near future" when, in fact, it had already been done on December 2, 1942! This is inconsistent with the book's statement that the Russians had received a "full report" on the Chicago pile by January 1943. (p. 182) And it is inconsistent with the notion that Fermi was spied upon at the time, or that he "was prepared to provide information", as the book asserts, early in 1943.

Another Absurd Oppenheimer Charge

The book says Fuchs reported that Oppenheimer had refused to sign the Smyth report because it had "disinformation" in it. I called Hans Bethe, Richard Garwin and Bob Bacher [the last a key lieutenant of Oppenheimer's]. Each of them denied there had been any "misinformation" in the report then, or found since. They said Smyth would never have agreed to put any misinformation in the report.

Finally, as Richard Garwin pointed out, Oppenheimer could not have been asked to "sign" the Smyth report because he was only a lab director. Instead, the report states on its cover "written at the request of Major General L. R. Groves" with a foreword by Groves and a preface by Smyth.

At this stage, FAS asked the Schecters to send whatever supportive material they had. There was astonishingly little: a deliberately misleading editorial from the *Washington Times*, an article from *Le Monde* we could not translate by press time and a column by Norman Macrae published in the London *Sunday Times*. Macrae said he had, while writing a biography of John von Neumann, "glimpsed grounds" for suspecting three of the four accused. Not one word in the

column was devoted to what these "glimpses" were.

On May 19, we received Walter Laqueur's harsh review for the June 8 *New Republic* entitled "Red Herrings". He said "let the buyer beware" should be printed on the cover of this book and wrote:

"How reliable a witness is Sudoplatov? To judge by the non-nuclear part of the book (12 chapters out of thirteen), his record is dubious. . . . Soviet intelligence did, of course, have its successes and not everything in this book seems to be wrong. But it would take a committee of experts to disentangle fact from fiction. . . ."

FAS called "Book of the Month Club" and "History Book Club", both of which had bought the book. We asked Communications Director Colleen Murphy to describe how the book had been chosen. She said they did not "endorse" books. The clubs put out *Special Tasks* as a "high profile and controversial" selection which members would be interested in. Important in their decision was that Conquest, whom she called a "revered figure" in Soviet history studies, had written the Foreward saying Sudoplatov "emerges as one of the most valuable of all possible sources" for the Stalin period. No experts had reviewed it.

On May 20, as we were going to press, Jerry called to suggest we look at *The Wall Street Journal*. Robert Conquest had published 1200 words in the letters column. Conquest again distanced himself from the chapter saying he was not "primarily interested" in the atomic spy-rings which was only "one chapter, out of 13". He said the penetration of the atomic project was well-established and "the detail is of minor historical interest"! He said he had no "*partis pris* in the matter and hoped that some allegations can be disproved, or extenuated."

He went on to write, however, as if the charges were established: "One true starting point is surely that all concerned were acting on ethical principle. Some thought that there were higher things than obedience to their govern-

ment. . . ." He airily dismissed Teller's defense of Fermi (whom Teller remembered as anti-communist and apolitical) as a belief that "genius is a guarantee of good behavior". He continued for several paragraphs on the assumption that it was just the scientific community defending its own.

Conquest said the two versions of the story of how Fuchs got on the British team "do not seem incompatible" but did not explain why and called it "a trivial point". He said it "seems impossible" that Kurchatov did not know about Fermi's achievement in good time. He said, also without explanation, that "these [documents] can be interpreted differently" but, in any case, even if accepted would "only show that Mr. Sudoplatov dated some events incorrectly".

Noting that the Khrushchev memoirs and the Penkovsky papers had been called fake, he said Sudoplatov's testimony ought not be "shrugged off or shouted down". He urged more disclosures and said that our first resource "seems obvious"—"unpublished material from deciphered intercepts and other sources in U.S. files." — J.J.S.

□

Sudoplatov Silent; Editors Embarrassed

In a May 27 *Washington Post* "Outlook" article David Streitfeld reported that Sudoplatov is out of the Moscow hospital and at home, but not giving any interviews. Little, Brown's Roger Donald admitted to Streitfeld that the book was a closely guarded project omitted from its Spring catalogue because they feared "the controversy would have instantly begun". *TIME Magazine* Managing Editor Gaines expressed regrets that "We couldn't exercise our normal fact-checking procedures or call the usual suspects, because it would be violating the confidentiality agreement." He said they should have made it clear that *TIME*'s usual standards of accuracy did not apply. ■

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