

Soviet forgery cited in Israel's 'Ivan' trial

by Mark Burdman

On Nov. 9, there was a dramatic turn in the Jerusalem trial of Ukrainian-born Cleveland autoworker John Demjanjuk, who is accused of being the notorious guard "Ivan the Terrible," at the Treblinka Nazi concentration camp. Testifying for the defense, British chemist and forensic scientist Dr. Julius Grant told the court that he found it "unlikely" that a signature on a Nazi-SS identity card was identical to authenticated samples of Demjanjuk's signature. "I think that common authorship is unlikely," he proclaimed.

Grant was the expert who had earlier exposed purported "diaries" of Mussolini and Hitler as frauds. The "Hitler Diaries" had been concocted with aid of West Germany's pro-Soviet *Stern* magazine, with the aim of sensationalizing the crimes of the Nazi era to the advantage of Soviet propaganda interests against the West.

The Demjanjuk case resumed after a two-month break on Oct. 26, only two weeks before Grant's testimony. In those two weeks, the issue that came to the fore was the same as in the *Stern* Hitler Diaries case: the manipulation of the Western system by the Soviets and their collaborators. The alleged identity card was loaned to Israel by the Russians, through the efforts of multibillionaire Soviet asset Armand Hammer.

This raises the uncomfortable question of who in Israel believe themselves to be benefitting from such a Soviet-Hammer connection. But not only in Israel: The role and methods of the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, in targeting innocent individuals on behalf of the Soviets, is again up for scrutiny.

'We won't allow a trial against Hammer'

On Nov. 3, Count Nikolai Tolstoy, of the Association for a Free Russia, testified for the defense. Tolstoy raised doubts about the "provenance" of the card. "Broadly speaking, every document emanating from the Soviet Union calls for the greatest suspicion," he said. "*Prima facie*, the card looks authentic; the advantage lies with the purported forgers, and the KGB certainly had access to original blank forms. . . . Where there is political motivation, they are fully capable of expert forgery."

When defense counsel Yoram Sheftel reported that the card had been supplied to Israel by Hammer, presiding court Judge Dov Levin proclaimed: "We won't allow a trial against Hammer or any other person. That is not acceptable in any

court. We only deal with the case against the accused."

With that, the court may have preserved the case, in a technical sense, but the case itself became a political-judicial mockery.

Tolstoy stressed, "If the source is suspect, a shadow falls on the document itself." The particular "source" in this case, it was then stressed, was the late Soviet state prosecutor Rudienko, famous for the Stalin purge trials in the 1930s, during which he prepared "evidence" against Stalin's enemies. The very same Rudienko, before his death in 1981, met in 1980 with then-OSI director Allan Ryan, to discuss the purported "Ivan" identity card.

Sheftel asked Tolstoy, "What does it mean to you that the arch-forgery Rudienko supplied the card?" Tolstoy answered: "I'd regard it with considerable suspicion. It is well established that Rudienko had long experience in forging legal documents. There is no one in this century or the last with greater experience."

The Russian embassy in Washington released the document only briefly, and then asked for it back: "They were greatly reluctant to release it to other courts and for further checks—and six years later it reaches Israel!"

Tolstoy also charged that the Israeli court was biased against himself and other defense witnesses, and that methods were being used that would not be tolerated in any Western European court. This touched off a furo, but the fact is, the prosecution never challenged the substance of what he had to say.

'All a KGB provocation'

From Oct. 26-28, the defense had called Soviet emigré Avraham Shifrin, an expert on the Soviet KGB. While the court ruled then that testimony on KGB forgeries would be admissible, Judge Levin defined the "relevance" of such testimony by stating: "Remember, it's not the Soviet system or the KGB that is on trial."

Nonetheless, Shifrin stated that KGB forgery of documents "is probably the activity it is best known for in the West." They forge "everything they find necessary." He noted that the KGB has a special department for producing passports, and that the KGB had counterfeited thousands of documents linking former Russians and Ukrainians to the Nazis during the war. "Most of the KGB's work is based on forgeries," he stressed.

He also pointed out that during the Second World War, in 1941, an independent Ukrainian state was proclaimed. "After the war, Stalin took revenge for this disloyalty and caused a man-made famine in the Ukraine."

He also noted current efforts toward Jewish-Ukrainian rapprochement, after years of ill-feeling due to developments during the World War II. "The KGB doesn't like this. It is possible that all this is a KGB provocation." If Demjanjuk were convicted, he warned, a campaign would be started to "blame the Jews" for his conviction.