

The Assassination of Pyotr Stolypin

Fond 2. Opus' 227

Fond 183. Opus' 5

Fond 189. Opus' 1

Fond 864. Opus' 10

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The State Archive of the Kiev Oblast (GAKO) contain materials pertaining to investigations into the assassination of Stolypin.

Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin was one of the prominent and controversial political figures in the early 20th-century Russia. Some hailed him as the savior and mainstay of Russia, while others condemned him as the chief hangman and one of the Black Hundreds. Stolypin (1862-1911) was born into an old noble family known as early as the 16th century. Graduating from St. Petersburg University in 1884, he joined the Ministry of the Interior. He was governor of the provinces of Grodno (1902) and Saratov (1903-1906). In April 1906 he was appointed Minister of the Interior and in July 1906 he was named chairman of the Council of Ministers (i.e., prime minister) in which capacity he served until his assassination.

As head of the Russian government amid massive protests of workers and peasants against the autocracy, Stolypin not only was firm in suppressing the protests but he also began reforming the government system and economy and, first and foremost, the country's farming community. The reform he launched in the countryside aimed at creating a numerous class of prosperous farmers, the mainstay of existing system. Addressing members of the State Duma he once said: "You are after great upheavals, we are after a great Russia." This was believably his battle cry.

Stolypin's policies irritated not only revolutionaries but many people in positions of power. There was an attempt on his life on 12 August 1906 where 27 persons died and 32 wounded, including two of his children. Stolypin escaped unhurt but his words "They will kill me, and those will be members of the Okhranka [secret political police]" proved largely prophetic. Another terrorist act against the prime minister was staged in Kiev five years later the circumstances of which still remain largely unclear.

The mysterious killing committed by an Okhranka agent who also was a revolutionary with uncertain political connections, Dmitrii Grigor'evich Bogrov a.k.a. Mordko Gershkovich Bogrov, in Kiev on 11 September 1911 drew a wide response in and outside Russia. For nearly one month, all newspapers in Russia and abroad were writing about details of the assassination of the

Russian head of government in the city theater of Kiev (now, opera and ballet theater) and covered events surrounding it.

Much has been written about the killing of Stolypin. Most authors based their stories on all sorts of reminiscences and contemporary press accounts and only a few researchers used archive sources. Deposited in the GAKO are many documents pertaining to the assassination, the course of investigation that lasted for more than one year, and the sentencing of the man who killed the Russian head of government. These documents are little known not only to broad public, but to scholars.

Report No. 47 of the Kiev district circuit court prosecutor of 7 September 1911 says: "There was a gala performance at Kiev City Theater attended by His Majesty the Emperor in the evening of 1 September. His Majesty and his most august children were in the governor's box. Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Secretary of State Stolypin had his seat in the front row of the orchestra seats, six steps from the royal box. During the second intermission begun at 10:40 p.m., when His Majesty the Emperor was exiting the box, most of the audience in the orchestra seats left their places and more than half the seats in the parquet were vacant. Secretary of State Stolypin, in conversation with Imperial Court Minister, Baron Frederix, was standing facing the auditorium near the bar separating the auditorium from the orchestra pit. They were joined by Count Potocki who stepped in between them. In the meantime, a gentleman wearing a dress suit walked casually along the free aisle. He halted two and a half steps away from Secretary of State Stolypin and snatching a big-size Browning revolver from his trouser pocket fired two shots at Secretary of State Stolypin. Then he turned and began, as casually, to walk away. This caused momentary consternation among the audiences but then there were "hold him" shouts and the culprit was seized six steps away from the exit having taken 14 steps. The crowd overpowered and began beating him and the interfering police officers had hard time of snatching him from the extremely agitated crowd.

"Secretary of State Stolypin was wounded by two bullets. One went through his right hand and the other hit him in the right part of his chest. The first bullet lightly wounded one of the musicians in the orchestra pit named Bergler.

"The wounded Secretary of State Stolypin remained standing for a few seconds before he began losing strength and, helped by those who rushed to his rescue, he slumped in a seat. They promptly called an ambulance and

Secretary of State Stolypin was carried out of the theater and rushed to the hospital where he was given first aid.

“The arrested culprit was assistant to a barrister of the Kiev circuit court of appeals, a Jew named Dmitrii Grigor’ev Bogrov 24 years of age. Taken away from him was a Browning revolver loaded with six bullets, one of which was in the barrel and the rest, in the cartridge clip. He was searched right upon the arrest. They found on him and took away a pocketbook with a ticket for the gala performance, row 18, seat 406 in the orchestra seats. Bogrov was driven under heavy guard to the Kosoi Kaponir guard house at the Kiev Fortress, because it was a place of imprisonment best equipped to rule out escapes of those under arrest.

“At 10 in the night on 5 September of this year, Secretary of State Stolypin died. The autopsy done by St. Vladimir University Professor of the Forensic Medicine Department Obolonskii and dissector Tufanov of the same University revealed that the bullet hitting the right side of the chest went down and a bit inside from the nipple, between the 6th and 7th ribs, pierced the liver and lodged in the muscle to the right of the spine causing damages that were absolutely mortal.

“Bogrov was charged during the investigation with belonging to a revolutionary organization and committing, as its member, an attempt to kill Secretary of State Stolypin and, after Stolypin’s death, with killing him.” (Fond 183, opis’ 5, delo 2, pages 8-11)

Investigations into Stolypin’s assassination went on for more than a year. Neither at that time nor now are there clear answers to many questions, however. Many researchers think that the assassination of Secretary of State Stolypin is the handiwork of the secret police. Bogrov, who was born in Kiev to a wealthy Jewish family, joined a circle of anarchist communists late in 1906 as a law student of Kiev University. Still member of the anarchist organization in 1907, he became an agent of the secret police department of the Police Department of Russia’s Ministry of the Interior. Bogrov enjoyed complete trust of the Kiev secret police department Lieutenant Colonel N.N. Kuliabko from whom he received the ticket to the theater where he committed the assassination attempt on 1 September 1911.

Stolypin died on 5 September; on 9 September the Kiev military circuit court sentenced Bogrov to death by hanging. At 3:20 on 12 September the

sentence was carried out at Lysa Hora, the site of the old Kiev Fortress. Why such a haste?

According to one theory, Bogrov committed the act of terrorism to rid Russia of the “hangman minister.” The official theory is that he was a solo terrorist. But was he?

Yet another theory says that Bogrov had given away to the Okhranka the names of some 150 revolutionaries of different parties. He had lost at cards all his party’s money, was exposed and instead of accepting the promised vengeance from his fellow revolutionaries, he decided to die on the gallows as Stolypin’s assassin.

Documents in the archives contain a lot of information conveying the atmosphere of those times and what was happening in Kiev at the end of the summer and the beginning of autumn 1911.

The documents are unique in that most of them are originals. There is correspondence of V.I. Fenenko, investigator of the Kiev circuit court, concerning Bogrov and the arrested revolutionaries implicated in the Stolypin assassination Petr Liatkovskii, Reful Chernyi, Aleksandr Murav’ev, Viacheslav Vinogradov (Fond 183, opis’ 5, delo 1). The report to the prosecutor of the Kiev circuit court about the assassination attempt, the sentence meted out to Bogrov by the Kiev military circuit court, the report on the site and time of his execution (Fond 183, opis’ 5, delo 2). The report to the governor of Kiev on the execution of Bogrov, the searching at Kuliabko’s apartment, the originals of newspaper clippings, reports of Stolypin’s condition, information about arrangements for his funeral (he was buried at Pecherskaia Lavra in Kiev), the collection of donations for monuments to Stolypin (Fond 2, opis’ 227, delo 319). Photographs of Bogrov and Liatkovskii, information about Chernyi, Vinogradov and Liatkovskii; a list of exhibits; the report about the carrying of the sentence; a record of Bogrov’s questioning; evidence provided by witnesses and Lt. Col. Kuliabko; the report on the examination and autopsy of Stolypin’s body (Fond 864, opis’ 10, delo 23).

Conscientious study of the archive documents and their new interpretation will help historians establish the truth and eliminate yet another hiatus in history. Many researchers think that it was Stolypin’s death that led to the complete failure of his policy of reforms and caused the overthrow of Russian czarism in the final analysis.

All the documents are in Russian.

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