

*"Persons wanted or watched  
by the Political Police"*

## The Foreigner: Hitler's Spy in the White House

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### Abstract

As a young man, he experienced the Russian Revolution, imprisonment, and coercion by Soviet counterintelligence. He moved to Switzerland and then London, the city in which he spent years working as a professional journalist, befriending and interviewing people ranging from military trainees to ministers, playwrights to publishers, gathering information on everything from garden parties to labor unions to foreign policy. He wrote four books and hundreds of articles, was watched by intelligence agencies in multiple countries, and eventually was deported by Britain as a spy who wrote secret reports read by Adolf Hitler.

No one remembers him, but now his story is being uncovered. It raises tantalizing questions about known and unknown historical events, and poses opportunities for further research.

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## The Foreigner: Hitler's Spy in the White House

### Introduction

In geometry we are taught that every straight line is a curve; likewise, we learn that life's voyage knows no truly straight lines. Readers, writers, prisoners, spies — we are travelers all, no matter our role. Our courses diverge from those charted, and our destinations rarely are where we intended, or where we hoped. Each life's arc in the universe may be long or short but it bends, then bends again, toward what we know not.

One forgotten life has surprising turns — stolen and mistaken identities, inter-war espionage and intrigue in London, secret reports written for Nazi Germany, a compromising personal life, a pivotal British counterintelligence meeting, a mysterious yet helpful existence in Rome, and even hints of an unnoticed series of assassinations by Soviet counterintelligence.

Sometimes a book provides answers, and sometimes the book itself provides the question. A recently-discovered copy of George Popoff's *The City of the Red Plague* (1932), about the Red Army's brief 1919 occupation of Latvia's capital Riga, has a small cataloging label from, of all places, the White House Library. Other than to insert that label, the book was never opened (the imperfectly trimmed deckle-edged pages had to be cut open), and the present-day utter obscurity of its author begs the question — who *is* this man who sat unnoticed in the White House within arm's length of presidents? <sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s he was well-known as a reporter, and over the course of fifty-odd years he wrote four books and hundreds of newspaper articles, usually on international affairs. His social and political connections made him both a desirable asset and a dubious liability. Soviet, Estonian, Swiss, German and later American police and intelligence officials all wondered who he was. Soviet counterintelligence tried to recruit him, Estonian state security put him on a watch list, and Swiss police banned him. German intelligence hired him, British counterintelligence uncovered and deported him, and the Americans may have overlooked him.

The search for the pieces of his puzzle winds through libraries and antiquarian bookdealers, intelligence agencies and phonebooks, military and diplomatic archives, newspapers and maps, churches and graveyards, ships' manifests and immigration records, and other international, national, regional, and local sources. Countries in the search include Armenia, Austria, Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, the former Soviet Union, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the former Yugoslavia and its republics.

### **Three escapes from the Soviets**

Born in 1895, Popoff spent much of his life as an outsider, an immigrant, an arriver, a foreigner. The son of Riga's leading bookseller and a Russian civil servant, he spent pivotal early years in the Estonian coastal town of Pernau (modern Pärnu), where he made a lifelong friend and colleague—Ewald Ammende, son of an immensely wealthy Baltic-German merchant family. While serving as district chief, Popoff's father met the local riots of the failed 1905 Russian revolution with a moderate and ultimately calming response, but organizations seek scapegoats, lower-ranking people to blame for larger institutional problems, and so he lost his job.<sup>2</sup>

By the time the 1917 Russian revolution began, George was in military school in Petrograd. When revolutionaries in the city of Syzran briefly imprisoned his father, posted there as police chief, George traveled nearly nine hundred miles to help his family escape to Riga, which the Red Army soon invaded. His younger brother died of Spanish flu in Finland, then George's identical twin Nikolai was killed in a far northern Soviet prison camp.<sup>3</sup>

By 1920 his family fled yet again, this time to Dresden, where his parents and sister remained. George Popoff stayed in Riga or returned there in 1921 when he was offered a job by his childhood friend Ewald Ammende, who owned a Riga newspaper. After a unfortunate beginning (he was kicked out of Poland), Popoff spend most of 1922 reporting from the new Soviet Union with numerous articles about governance, economics, human conditions, interviews with luminaries and, most of all, rural famine—silent villages, mass graves, cannibalism. The articles formed the basis for his 1924 book *Under the Soviet Star* (for the numerous editions of Popoff's books, see the Appendix).<sup>4</sup>

He gained a knack for self-promotion—after an airplane crash, he wired that he, “one of the best known newspaper men in Europe” had died, a second dispatch clarified his survival. He also learned deception: he convinced Artuzov that he would inform, he blustered his way out of Russia by intimidating border guards, and for years he traveled on a stolen Armenian passport.<sup>5</sup>

His writing became blunt. He described the “morbid distrust of the Soviet authorities, which is directed equally at foreigners as at natives, and, as one can see, is not kept in check by legal guarantees”. Maxim Litvinov of the Soviet foreign affairs ministry soon responded with a public letter that journalists should have “no concerns” about visiting Moscow. Unpersuaded, Popoff cranked out more than two dozen critical articles: Lenin’s declining health, the misery of housing and food shortages, multitudes of beggars and orphans, the decay of villages and palaces alike, and the deadly nature of Soviet labor camps. His provocative topics and dramatic opinions made him a regular correspondent in European newspapers. His style was typical for the time — sometimes objective, frequently opinionated.<sup>6</sup>

1925’s *The Tcheka* (eventually published in ten languages) recounted his arrest by the Soviet secret police. It explored prison conditions and the police state’s impact on society. He was freed after acquiescing to the demands of Soviet counterintelligence chief Artur Artuzov and his assistant Karl Roller to work as a Soviet informant in Estonia. He did not do so, and in fact spent much of his life writing as a fierce anti-communist. Roller, a former Austro-Hungarian officer, later worked as Soviet intelligence *rezident* in Rome; when he and his wife were shot in 1937 a German edition of Popoff’s book was confiscated from their apartment.<sup>7</sup>

1928’s *Moskovaistulva* (Finnish, published in 1932 as *The City of the Red Plague*) described the Red Army’s 1919 occupation of Riga. His journalistic approach and penchant for melodrama made for a vivid analysis of the new Soviet system’s aims, emerging administrative structure, and brutal methods. To survive the occupation, Popoff’s family surrendered their apartment and he enrolled as a “Red” university student to receive a ration card.<sup>8</sup>

Popoff had spent several “wonderful” years in Geneva writing his books as well as a string of front-page stories about the new League of Nations and the Soviet Union. On Lenin’s death, he argued that the real Soviet ruler was not little-known Stalin with his “mysterious power”, but the Soviet security apparatus, generally understood as the Cheka. Popoff described accurately it as a

secondary shadow government, the era of Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka's chief. Dzerzhinsky soon died (likely poisoned), and the Cheka's extensive portfolio kept growing. The 1930s purges gave Stalin stronger control of state security, but did little to moderate its influence in every aspect of Soviet life. Indeed, Soviet state security survived the demise of the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup>

By the mid-1920s, Popoff still had no papers other than his outdated stolen passport. He obtained a so-called Nansen pass for stateless people, then he prevailed in a years-long bureaucratic struggle for citizenship in the land of his birth, Estonia, where the Ministry of Internal Affairs denied his application no less than five times, first because he was “undesirable” (they mistakenly thought he was pro-Soviet) and later with the excuse of residency requirements. Popoff's citizenship file from Estonia's Interior Ministry Affairs hints that he was disliked by minister Einbund (himself a journalist). Popoff was persistent and by 1925 the ambassador in Berlin was on his side; Popoff was grudgingly granted citizenship and a passport, but Einbund's political police put him on a watch-list.<sup>10</sup>

In 1927, he moved to London and settled at a remarkable and bold address — 15 West Halkin Street, in the exclusive Belgravia district, amidst mansions and embassies, close to Buckingham Palace, and only several hundred feet from the Russian embassy, base for Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence agents. Today Belgravia remains popular with Russian oligarchs, and contains the most expensive real estate on the planet.

He became a familiar face in London's social, diplomatic, and political circles, regularly visiting the Swiss embassy (where a newspaper called him “Dr.” Popoff), frequenting Kensington's “Russian House” where high-level tsarist Russian expatriates and Londoners built friendships, befriending a Hungarian ambassador whose daughter later invited him to her wedding, attending official receptions, interviewing British and foreign ministers and dignitaries, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

He still wrote for *Rigasche Rundschau*, the paper run by his friend Ewald Ammende, who now lived in Vienna. Ammende became famous for his institutional diplomatic work as founder and head of the 1920s-1930s European Congress of Nationalities. The “minorities question” loomed large in Europe at the end of the first world war. Germans, Poles, Russians, Jews, and many other groups found themselves within new borders; the Congress offered them a political voice. While many governments participated in the Congress with representatives or provided some

support, the Soviet Union declined to participate and instead monitored it as a political threat. Hardly remembered today, in its heyday from 1925 through the early 1930s Ammende's congress was a well-known advocacy force.

When the great famine known as the Holodomor (the “hunger plague”) hit Ukraine beginning in 1932, Ammende shifted focus a bit and became *the* leading European figure speaking out about the starvation the Soviet system was consciously inflicting on millions of humans. He and Popoff had already earned the enmity of Minister Litvinov and the security organs with continued focus on minority rights in Europe and the Soviet famines of the early 1920s and early 1930s. They pointed out not only the human cost, but how Soviet economic policies and management practices wasted much of the famine-funded industrialization efforts. An expensive, wasteful experiment using fear and violence with impunity — this was their message about the Soviet Union. However, the two friends maintained a judicious public distance, neither co-authoring publications nor citing each other. Today, Ammende is little remembered, Popoff even less, and the connection between the two has been overlooked.

### **Aliases, real and otherwise**

British investigators first opened their file on Popoff after he moved to London, and kept it open if not highly active for more than two decades. Most of the contents have been removed, but the remaining material is in the National Archives. The earliest materials concern a complaint from a British judge in India about Popoff's deleterious influence on his son and the possibility that he was a Soviet spy. The son later arrived drunk at Scotland Yard and petulantly repeated this claim, but was dismissed as not credible.<sup>12</sup>

An alias in the British file, “Papuni”, first seen in Popoff's 1923 Estonian citizenship application, came from Papunidi, Papunidze, Papunaishvili, and Papunashvili, names found near Georgia's southern border. We infer his stolen Armenian passport had one of those names.

In 1929 Popoff wrote a glowing assessment of a professional colleague, a fellow refugee journalist who used the clever pseudonym “Augur” (meaning to foretell or to serve as an omen or foreshadowing), who was “perhaps the most remarkable of all Russians in England”, with “considerable political influence” and whose opinions were of “great importance”. This sounds

like Popoff was congratulating himself, and indeed British and Estonian intelligence thought Poljakoff and Augur were aliases for Popoff. Ukrainian-born Vladimir Lazarevich Poliakoff (1880-1956) was quite real, though. He wrote for newspapers and for his own London newsletter of diplomatic happenings; the style and content of Augur's articles suggest he and Popoff routinely wrote together.<sup>13</sup>

Another alias in the file, "Yelagin", caused the journalist to be conflated briefly with a Georg Jelagin arrested in Belgium and Germany for theft and forgery. The Swiss federal police were equally confused — they thought Georg Jelagin was really Georg Wasileff Popoff, who maybe was a dubious journalist named Leonid Baranowski, whom the police thought may have been involved in the murder of Evgen Konovalts, a Ukrainian nationalist and former Swiss resident who was blown up by a small bomb in the streets of Rotterdam in May 1938.

In the 1930s British counterintelligence added more aliases, variations on the name Béboutoff. More than an alias, it became the journalist's legal surname: Estonia's Supreme Court granted his petition that "Popoff-Beboutoff" would keep alive a paternal uncle's surname, and he updated his British alien registration and Estonian passport, and offered acquaintances a "beautifully engraved" card with his new name. The name descends from the wealthy Behbutyan family originally of Armenia, but research has not answered whether there is a real connection to Popoff.<sup>14</sup>

By this time Popoff regularly wrote for various German-language newspapers across Europe. His positive pre-Hitler view of young Germans, "a splendid generation...fresh and full of hope", was noticed when the Nazis came to power. German military intelligence soon began regular payments for private reports on his findings and views on England's government, conditions, and attitudes toward Germany. Most likely he was brought into the recruiting realm by an old friend: Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe, originally from Vienna, divorced from Germany's World War I espionage chief, and friend of Hitler who now lived in London and was bankrolled by British publisher Lord Rothermere (Harold Harmsworth, whom Popoff interviewed) to quietly develop high-level relations between Brits and Nazis. (A close mutual friend of the reporter and the princess was Lady Asquith, widow of the prime minister who founded Britain's Secret Intelligence Service.) Later, in 1937, German journalist and spy Eric von Salzman, talking to an informant for British intelligence, hinted at "some dark intrigue going on between Rothermere

and Hitler”. The United States later saw Stephanie as a significant espionage threat. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover called her “extremely intelligent, dangerous and cunning”, and she seduced the chief of America’s immigration service to avoid deportation. Her close friendship with Adolf Hitler was especially remarkable because both knew she was Jewish. <sup>15</sup>

### **First class to America**

In the summer of 1934, Popoff and Ammende spent nearly a month and a half in America and Canada seeking support for Ukraine famine relief on behalf of a committee organized by Catholic human-rights-activist Cardinal Innitzer in Vienna. Ammende’s repeated comments and coverage in the *New York Times* stoked the Soviets to no end — complaints came from an official in Moscow, the ambassador to the U.S., an attaché in their U.S embassy, the ambassador in London. Internally, of course, the Soviet Union was well aware of the famine — already by early 1933 OGPU foreign intelligence chief Artuzov recommended to Stalin detailed severe restrictions on foreign journalists. Popoff’s famine reporting a decade earlier, and now Ammende’s work, were major sore spots. <sup>16</sup>

Traveling in first class on *SS Bremen*, at the time the world’s best-known oceanliner, the two journalists had notable social and dining companions for the five day journey to New York, four of whom are described below: <sup>17</sup>

Walter Russell Batsell, 34, had much in common with the journalists. He spoke native-quality Russian as a result of his graduate work at Harvard, where his advisor was Archibald Coolidge, history professor, founder of the Russian studies program, traveler to Russia during the Civil War, and participant in famine relief efforts in the early 1920s. Batsell wrote an article on national minorities and a critical book *Soviet Rule in Russia*,(1928), opened an investment firm in Paris, and continued to travel to Russia. A few months after the *Bremen* voyage, he died from cyanide poisoning. The New York coroner deemed it a suicide, but his daughter Solange (who later dated Gates Helms, brother of future CIA director Richard Helms) saw “another side” to her father: he photographed military maps in his Soviet travels, developed his own film, and tinkered with chemistry for invisible ink; she believed he died accidentally, but later wondered whether he was murdered. <sup>18</sup>



Batsell played a still-confusing role in the famous “Zinoviev letter” of 1924, which Bolshevik leader Grigory Zinoviev allegedly wrote to support violence and diplomatic tools to spread Communism in the United Kingdom. Princess Stephanie’s future patron Lord Rothermere built an enormous scandal by publishing the letter in his papers just before Britain’s general elections, and left-leaning political parties suffered as a result. Somehow, Walter Batsell obtained a half-dozen glass photographic negatives of the original Russian letter and deposited them in the library at Harvard Law School, where they were rediscovered in the 1960s. Scholars now generally agree the letter was a forgery to stir anti-Bolshevik sentiment. Among the more intriguing claims are that it was written by British spy Sidney Reilly (Soviets counterintelligence lured and shot Reilly in 1925) and that it came from Berlin or perhaps Riga (Popoff and Ammende’s newspaper base).<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Karl Hochschwender, 51, lived in New York and worked at Chemnyco, an ostensibly independent American firm established by the giant German chemical cartel I.G. Farben, where he secretly ran a program of military-industrial espionage and legal-system sabotage. His role in exploiting and hindering American industry was analyzed as early as 1942, and he was mentioned repeatedly in the post-WWII Nuremberg war crimes investigations.<sup>20</sup>

Guido Enderis, Berlin bureau chief of the *New York Times*, was already raising alarms for coziness with the German government and articles which praised Hitler, Goering, Goebbels and other senior Nazi officials but downplayed violence, militarization, the diminishment of freedom, and abuse of Jews. There was little for Popoff and Ammende to like about Enderis, but they certainly understood the value of meeting such a powerful journalist.

Johann Addicks, 45, a blond, blue-eyed German postal official, repeatedly traveled on *Bremen*’s first-class deck. We can safely presume he did more than babysit mail cargo and oversee the ship’s catapult-launched airmail seaplane. He could intercept and read the letters posted by passengers, spend time with new travelers and regular voyagers, interact with influential people, make connections, shape views, gather information. German intelligence, both before and especially while the Nazis were in power, would not have missed this unique opportunity—each voyage meant living with a group of economically, politically, and socially powerful people for the better part of a week.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, Popoff seems to have written absolutely nothing about this ocean voyage or his shipmates, in marked contrast to his 1920s passage to India and beyond, a trip in which ships and passengers figured prominently in his newspaper missives. In America he wrote several articles about Soviet famine, expansionism, and propagandizing. He admired the *Times*, but he especially disliked its Moscow bureau chief Walter Duranty, whose false reporting concealed famines and whom British reporter Malcom Muggeridge called “the greatest liar of any journalist that I have met in fifty years”. Popoff knew Duranty from 1922, when the American showed a “bottomless indifference” toward the Russian people—when Popoff calculated deaths under the Bolsheviks, Duranty simply changed the conversation. A decade later, British reporter Gareth Jones had an equally surreal interaction with Duranty, recounted most famously in the 2019 Polish-Ukrainian movie *Mr. Jones*. Jones made three trips to the USSR, essentially re-enacting Popoff’s 1921-22 journey and book *Under the Soviet Star*. When he reported widespread starvation, Duranty publicly attacked him.

After their return, Popoff and Ammende’s trip to America poked the Soviets anew in January 1935 when America’s most famous news publisher, William Randolph Hearst, quoted Ammende in a radio interview about the evils of communism. The interview was syndicated in print and received wide coverage, including in the *New York Times*, and only added to Soviet displeasure. Interestingly, journalist Gareth Jones spent more than a week at Hearst’s ranch in California that same January then published several scathing anti-Soviet articles (one of which also offered the then-stunning insinuation that recently-murdered Leningrad chief Sergei Kirov had been killed by Stalin, a hint guaranteed to utterly enrage Moscow). We can infer that Jones, Ammende and Popoff knew each other.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ammende’s scandal and death**

Ammende’s 1935 German-language book *Muss Russland Hungern?* [*Must Russia Starve?*] was the written culmination of his famine work and provided facts, refugee reports and photographs to support his criticism of the Soviets. After another conference about European minorities late that year, he left Europe on a round-the-world ship, supposedly for work related to communism and ethnic minorities.<sup>23</sup>

That explanation is incorrect. Enroute he did patch together a semi-plausible voyage rationale, wrote a couple of brief articles, and ensured that German overseas consulates were given vague instructions to lend him assistance if needed. However, the real reason for the trip was much more personal—he was fleeing Europe.

No subject is more titillating than sex in the perceptions, rumors, and gossip which serve as the universal currency of political cities, the ephemeral poker chips with which power is won or lost, careers built or ruined. Ewald was avoiding the following week's court case in Austria, in which a man was put on trial for blackmailing Ammende for sexually corrupting the man's underage brother. Ammende never returned for court, his accuser was jailed for a few months, and the underage brother later survived two years in deadly Mauthausen concentration camp.<sup>24</sup>

It has been suggested, implausibly, that Ammende traveled to interview residents of Birobidzhan, capital of the Soviet Union's new Jewish Autonomous Oblast (JAO) on the Chinese border, but Birobidzhan and the JAO were physically inaccessible, legally impermissible, and on the far side of a grinding Manchurian war between China and Japan.

Another reason to stay away from the Soviet border was the recent murder of Gareth Jones, who several months earlier traveled in Mongolia with Peking-based German journalist Herbert Mueller. British intelligence, after lengthy surveillance, concluded Mueller was a Soviet agent and that their borrowed car and driver were provided by the head of a Soviet intelligence front company. Mueller was the uncorroborated source for a series of reports sent to Europe stating that Gareth Jones was kidnapped by bandits and eventually killed.<sup>25</sup>

Ammende needed to avoid his looming Austrian sex scandal, and China was a good place to stop, since his long-unseen brother Edgar lived there. The trip ended in early 1936 when he died in Peking's German Hospital, perhaps of natural causes, but perhaps murdered. The Soviets were active in China, the German embassy knew he was coming, and Moscow was generally well informed about Germany's diplomatic communications.<sup>26</sup>

A Swiss entry ban notwithstanding, Popoff wrote from Geneva in late 1936 that "There is hardly any other place in the world where the inadequacy of human deeds and actions stands out so

crassly against the perfect beauty of the scenic background.” This was grief in print: he and Ammende called Geneva home in the 1920s, but now his friend was dead.<sup>27</sup>

Is there a pattern of deaths in a small associated group of the fiercest critics of Soviet rural policy? First William Batsell’s cyanide “suicide”, then Gareth Jones’ bullet to the head, and now Ewald Ammende...followed by his brother Erich, who took over the European Congress of Nationalities but died a few months later, then his successor journalist Ferdinand von Uexküll-Güldenband, who died (it is claimed) of “*vabasurm*”, Estonian for suicide.<sup>28</sup>

In a bizarre postscript, the Russian State Military Archive possesses Ammende’s coin collection, PhD diploma and 11,000 pages of personal files and correspondence, stolen in Vienna or from his family in Estonia. Other useful material may be found in the United States—Ewald’s brother Edgar fled China for San Francisco and sent unspecified materials to the CIA.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Home Secretary and deportation**

At a 1937 meeting, Sir Samuel Hoare, Britain’s newest Home Secretary and thus the man who now reigned over Great Britain’s domestic counterintelligence, was handed a report on German espionage in the UK by John Curry of MI5’s “B Branch” (investigations and inquiries), who later described the scene:<sup>30</sup>

“As Hoare read it, the colour faded from his cheeks. He made a few brief comments, showed no desire to have the matter discussed or elaborated, and dismissed us.”

Hoare understood the need to build Britain’s domestic intelligence capabilities because he began as an intelligence officer in Russia in World War I; he was the first former intelligence officer to become a cabinet minister. Curry thought his tense reaction was because the report contained information on Hitler that discredited Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement, but the truth was more personal. Much of the report came from a high-ranking informant for MI5 inside the German embassy, an unhappy career diplomatic officer named Wolfgang zu Putlitz, who now revealed the existence and source of an ongoing series of secret analyses written by someone in London for use by senior German officials, including Hitler himself. Hoare ended the meeting because the German spy was his longtime friend George

Popoff. It is unlikely they met in wartime Petrograd (their roles and locations were quite different) , but in London they became friends, and in 1935 Popoff interviewed him at length. <sup>31</sup>

Even worse, investigators knew of Popoff’s homosexual relationships with young British men. Hoare himself seems to have been secretly gay, and his boss Neville Chamberlain was ruthlessly using personal secrets to consolidate power. The Putlitz report could easily ruin Hoare’s career and undermine his efforts to modernize British counterintelligence.

In 1960 zu Putlitz called Popoff one of Germany’s “best agents”, whose reports were “the most bountiful secret news sources” for the Nazis. He also called him a “meddlesome busybody”—perhaps this snarky personal disdain is related somehow to zu Putlitz’s own secret life as a gay man in London. <sup>32</sup>

Certainly in the early years, and even in the mid-1930s, the British file on Popoff is remarkable for its bureaucratic confusion and innuendo, and lack of substance. For example, in ten years investigators looked at only several of the reporter’s hundreds of articles, and none of his widely published books. One contributor to the file derided Popoff’s fifteen years of writing about the Soviet Union as a “pet hobby”, and no one asked whether he might be working for his home country (the British were unaware, it seems, that Popoff already was on the Estonian watch list).

By 1937, however, investigation became more deliberate, thanks to an MI5 informant’s tip, and the Brits verified Popoff’s work for German intelligence and began intercepting his mail. When questioned, Popoff admitted writing the reports. To demonstrate good faith, he provided at least one report, which included his perceptions of geopolitical forces, economic pressures in the Empire, forces for social change, and interpersonal dynamics of Britain’s senior officials. MI5 found no classified or secret information and concluded that his relationship with the Nazis was essentially financial. Popoff vowed to sever ties with Germany intelligence, and one file commenter suggested using him for British intelligence, but he was deported because he was just “too well informed” and because of the “unpleasant aspect” of his personal relationships:

“[W]e received independent confirmation of his undesirable associations. In our view the deportation order should stand...”

The investigation highlighted weak analysis, sexual prejudice, and bureaucratic risk-aversion, but he was given several months to leave. His last known article from England, in May 1937, was titled “The British Empire is passing...”<sup>33</sup>

### **Decades in Rome**

Popoff left London in January 1938 with an uncertain future. Estonia was not a center for international journalism, Germany and Austria were authoritarian, and Switzerland was unavailable because a sloppily recorded 1934 entry ban for traveling under an assumed name led Swiss security to wrongly associate him with a 1938 bombing in Holland.<sup>34</sup>

He went to Rome. Maybe his old friend the home secretary discreetly helped: Hoare worked there after World War I — and bankrolled a struggling journalist named Benito Mussolini. Popoff joined the Foreign Press Association and soon re-appeared in Austrian, Swiss, Hungarian, even Finnish papers.<sup>35</sup>

All foreign correspondents in Rome were required to work in one building, which is where American correspondents met “the mystery man”, exiled from Estonia for unclear reasons and called Prince Popoff. The prince soon saved those Americans, for on the day that Italy declared war on the United States, Popoff intercepted his colleagues outside the press club building and warned them of arrests. They turned and fled to the American embassy.<sup>36</sup>

He continued working part-time for the Nazis. By 1942, America’s Office of Strategic Services (OSS) associated him with Germany’s government; today the political archives of the German Foreign Ministry hold monthly reports by Popoff in files connected to the Rome station of Radio Mundial, Germany’s trans-European news and propaganda network aimed at Allied forces.<sup>37</sup>

Popoff’s writing was useful for the Allies too, as in a 1942 article which described what had, and had not, been bombed in the industrial city of Turin. Whatever he was up to, his German overseers became suspicious and in 1943 Joseph Goebbels’ propaganda ministry opened an investigation of the correspondent.<sup>38</sup>

Several days after the Allies entered Rome, Popoff hosted a party for newly-arrived reporters, one of whom described him as a comfortable member of the “International Set”, with a servant, sufficient wine and food for entertaining, and a “roof-top apartment with [a] wide terrace...tubs of sweet-smelling jasmine and oleander and...a spectacular view of Rome and the Tiber River.” Asked by one American about the occupation, Popoff responded with admiration and optimism:

...I’ve been struck most by the [soldiers’] attitude...laughing and gay and friendly, so different from the German soldiers, who are cold and sullen and distant even when winning. Maybe it’s the better way to fight a war - with a smile.

...I was in St. Peter’s Square the second day after Rome was freed and I noticed two American soldiers being trailed by some 20 or 30 children... When they reached the steps of the Cathedral the two soldiers...acted as clowns and stood on their heads — yes, they stood on their heads on the steps of St. Peter’s to entertain the children. It is inconceivable to think of German soldiers doing such a thing. I can tell you the Romans who saw those Americans clowning for the children were absolutely delighted.”<sup>39</sup>

The British file mentions an interview by an American intelligence officer in which Popoff “kept steering conversation away from Switzerland”. Swiss officials soon advised his Basel newspaper that employing him was “undesirable”, and he lost his job. We know little after that, only several 1948-49 analyses in a Washington, DC newsletter and brief pieces in Europe. His fourth book, *I Saw the Revolutionaries*, came out in 1967. After his last known piece, a late-1974 newspaper complaint titled “Italy’s crime-boom”, he disappears.<sup>40</sup>

Areas of particular interest for continued research include:

- *The unusual deaths of five of Popoff’s professional colleagues:* Battsell, Jones, Ewald and Erich Ammende, and von Uexküll-Güldenband all were involved in work highly critical of Soviet policies, especially regarding the peasantry and the associated famines. In particular, the circumstances of their proximate deaths and the limited knowledge of Walter Battsell’s activities in the 1920s and 1930s merit particular attention.
- *Popoff’s time in Rome before and during World War II:* We do not know much about what led him to Rome or his intelligence-related work there. Also, one of his young British friends, Eric Garrad-Cole, , a nineteen-year-old Royal Air Force trainee, was on close terms and wrote several letters asking to borrow money and/or Popoff’s car when visiting London. Three years later, as a bomber pilot during World War II, he was shot

down over Libya and became a prisoner of war in Italy. After two escapes and captures, he escaped again by jumping from a moving train and made his way to Rome, where he obtained false papers to disguise himself as “Mario Monti” and worked for Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty, the famed Vatican official who helped thousands escape persecution and who later was celebrated in the book and movie *The Scarlet and the Black*. We do not know if Garrad-Cole and Popoff re-connected in Rome, but there may be undiscovered clues in his memoir *Single to Rome* and his personal archives.<sup>41</sup>

- *Additional intelligence-related materials*: His known files in official German archives remain unexplored; there may be more related material in Germany, Switzerland, certainly Italy, and quite likely the United States. Databases and materials in Russia appear inaccessible at the present.
- *His later years*: Due to the fragmented nature of Italian archives of all types, little has been discovered about his life in Rome, especially post-war, and his ultimate fate. More work is warranted.



## Appendix A: Popoff's articles

From *Rigasche Rundschau* unless otherwise noted. Titles are translated. Archived in the periodicals collection of the Latvian National Digital Library, [www.periodika.lndb.lv](http://www.periodika.lndb.lv)

### 1921

Art and intellectual life: Igor Severyanin. 26 Jan 1921.  
 After the London ultimatum. 7 May 1921.  
 Problems of the east. 18 May 1921.  
 Today's Warsaw. 30 July 1921.  
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 A "diplomat" by his own accord. 4 August 1921.  
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 England's attitude toward Germany. 4 December 1933, p.1.

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Impressions of the Rasputin trial. 14 March 1934.  
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 England's good king. 6 May 1935.  
 Lawrence of Arabia: The man who made kings and chose to remain a simple soldier himself. 25 May 1935.  
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 A summer's day in Eton. 15 July 1935.  
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Eden at work. 15 January 1936.

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 Berlin is getting ready for the Olympics. 11 May 1936.  
 Lake Geneva and Geneva Politics. 8 October 1936.

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The British Empire is passing... 19 May 1937, p. 7.

### 1940-1942

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### 1955-1974

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Ignoring the greatest danger? *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, 5 December 1964, p. 2.

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A false picture of the actual attitude. *Nidwaldner Volksblatt*, 30 March 1968, p. 1.

Der circus des Maxentius. Eine vernachlässigte Ruine Roms. *Antike Welt*. 1970, 1(1), 28-31.

Italy's crime-boom. *Die Tat*. 26 October 1974, p. 19.

## Appendix B: Partial list of Vladimir Poliakov's "Augur" articles

Except for one 1930 article in Latvia, all were published in Estonia's *Postimees*, for which only fragmentary archives remain (late 1926, late 1930, and 1933). There likely are many more unknown articles from other years. Many clearly were written with and some perhaps by Popoff. Archives: Estonian Literary Museum.

*Postimees* articles by Augur:

Autumn in London. The coal strike and the joys and sorrows of Geneva. Records in the English Channel and artificial sunbathing. 14 Sept 1926.  
 Danger in the East. China is threatening unexpected events. 18 Sept 1926.  
 Coal strike death cramps. 24 Sept 1926.  
 An economic weapon in the hands of politicians. 5 Oct 1926.  
 Not a strike, but a political struggle. 21 Oct 1926.  
 Agreement between England and France and Germany. 26 Oct 1926.  
 The new order is being completed slowly. 31 Oct 1926.  
 The English people are not in a good mood. 14 Nov 1926.  
 Advances in military technology in England. 24 Nov 1926.  
 In front of a broken trough. 25 Nov 1926.  
 European powers. 28 Nov 1926.  
 England heals wounds. 8 Dec 1926.  
 An important turning point in Far Eastern politics. Augur's answer to Tschitscherin. 15 Dec 1926.  
 Mussolini's policy is worrying. 22 Dec 1926.  
 Christmas letter from England: Anecdotes about Latvians, Englishmen and Americans. 24 Dec 1926.  
 The British state. 29 Dec 1926.  
 The two main concerns of England. *Rigasche Rundschau*. 17 January 1930, p. 1.  
 End of London summer holidays. Socialist Minister and Royal Newborn. 3 million unemployed by Christmas. National Conference and India Conference. German elections and Geneva. Kharkov GPU rose garden. 29 Aug 1930.  
 Germany is concerned. Fears of dictatorship, suspicious speeches by the minister and secret ties with Moscow. 8 Sept 1930.  
 The principle of free trade in danger. The change of mind of the English working community.- Attention. - The British National Conference is moving towards a customs union. - Danzig's amphibian game. - Rebellion against the dollar? - Gold charm. 18 Sept 1930.  
 The biggest disaster in England. Leaders do not dare to tell the truth. The reasons for Briand's failure in Geneva. 22 Sept 1930.  
 On the forthcoming British Conference in London and the issues to be discussed there. Unemployment and other economic difficulties in England. 28 Sept 1930.  
 However, Baldwin leaves. Negative messages are for smoke only. The headquarters of the English Old Party's party are rumoring revelations as if the party's leader, former prime minister Baldwin, was to step down as leader. 5 Oct 1930.  
 MacDonald is in trouble, but he persists. Descendant of Neville Chamberlain Baldwin. The national conference is looking for a golden mean. When will the socialist government fall? Ford and Moscow. On domestic political problems in England. 7 Oct 1930.  
 England mourns but does not panic. Impact of the "R 101" disaster on air shipping. Revenge on agriculture at the state conference. Russian debt and dumping. 11 Oct 1930.  
 Versailles and the neutrality of Estonia. It is premature to say that England is in favor of amending the peace treaties. 16 Oct 1930.  
 Annotation: On England's domestic and foreign policy. The political situation in Europe. 24 Oct 1930.  
 Conflicts between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The reasons for the contradictions. England's policy towards Palestine. 29 Oct 1930.  
 On England's domestic and foreign policy. 6 Nov 1930.  
 England's rising knee: On the domestic political situation in England. 11 Nov 1930.  
 MacDonald and "R 101". The weakness of the English socialist government. National Conference and Indian Conference. Anglo-French Gold Union. On England's domestic and foreign policy problems. 23 Nov 1930.



Domestic political situation in England. Briefly on situation elsewhere in Europe, especially in Germany. 2 Dec 1930.

European emergencies and London.Cecil-Bernstorff clashes in Geneva and their consequences. Claims and objections to the revision of the peace treaty and the reduction of the burden of reparation. Mussolini's miscalculation. Back to the Anglo-French Union. Doubts of German friends in England. Political situation in Europe. 14 Dec 1930.

Thunder clouds in the Anglo-Russian relationship. Aftermath of the Moscow Grand Process and Litvinov's stay in Geneva. Is Moscow getting worse? Behind the scenes of the events in East Galicia. 29 Dec 1930.

*Postimees* articles about Augur:

“Tallinn-German "foreign policy". They are trying to graft national intolerance onto Estonia.”: Article is about German foreign policy and the Treaty of Versailles. Criticism of how the topic has been discussed in the newspaper "Revalscher Zeitung". Also briefly about Augur [=Poljakoff], a contributor to "The Postman" and "Rev. Z." from taking a stand on him. 7 Nov 1930.

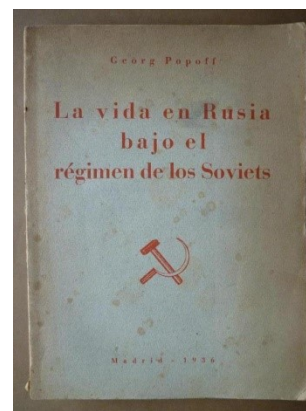
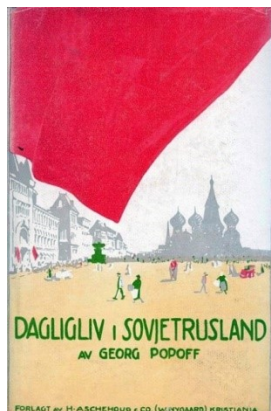
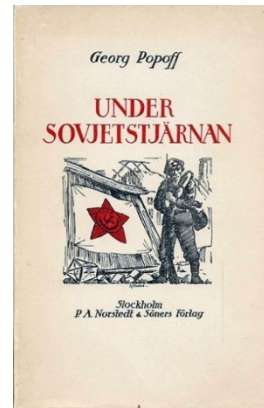
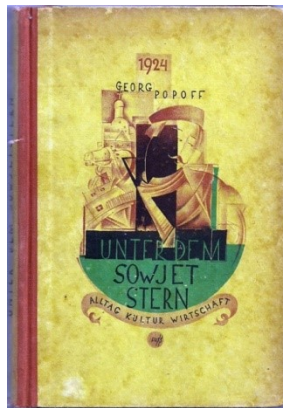
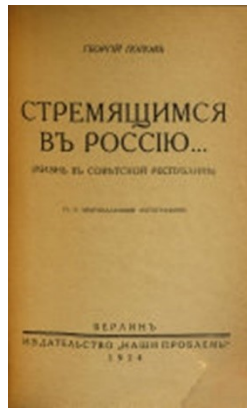
“If the world war had ended differently. Once again from Versailles, the Polish corridor, Prussia and Estonia.” Article is in response to the “Revalische Zeitung”, in which Auguri is called a Russian emigrant and it is said that his writings have an anti-majority orientation. Thoughts on the political situation in Europe after the Treaty of Versailles. 20 Nov 1930.

“Wolff against Augur.” Article is about the semi-official Wolff Agency categorically denying the content of Augur's article published in foreign newspapers, according to which the German general staff intends to attack France via Switzerland. Wolff's agency claims Augur's writing is too childish to be taken seriously. Augur, who must have good sources of information at his disposal as a *London Times* contributor, is unlikely to fail to respond to Germany's denial. This can only increase interest in this issue. 1 Oct 1933.

## Appendix C: Popoff's books

First book: built on 1922-23 USSR travel articles, no English version

- 1924 *Stremyashchiysya v Rossiyu: zhizn' v Sovetskoy Respublike*. Berlin: Nashi Problemy.  
*Unter dem Sowjetstern*. Frankfurt: Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei.  
 Cover art: An armored Slavic knight looking away from a fenced building with barred windows, a panicked horse, a dilapidated church tower, and blank-faced skyscrapers looming over it all. Artist Albert Fuss shows traditional Russia feeling ill at ease with the Soviet present and future.
- Under sovjetstjärnan*. Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt.  
 Cover art: A collapsing wall, broken streetlight, and ruined building in background. Well-known Swedish artist John Sjösvärd (1890-1958) draws a scene of Soviet rule.
- Dagligliv i Sovjetrusland*. Oslo: H. Aschehoug.  
*Neuvostotähdän alla: kuvauksia Neuvosto-Venäjän arkielämästä*. Helsinki: Otava.
- 1925 *Sous l'étoile des Soviets*. Paris: Plon.
- 1936 *La vida en Rusia bajo el régimen de los Soviets*. Madrid: Editoria Internacional.



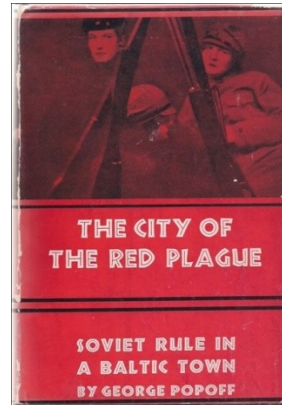
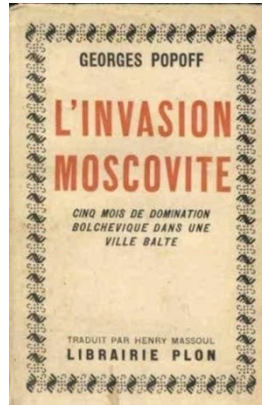
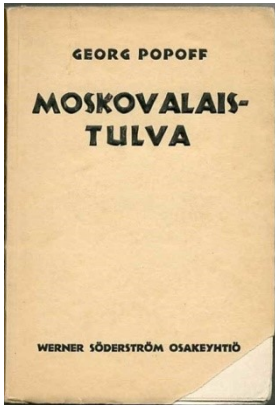
Second book: Popoff's arrest, brother's fate, role of secret police

- 1925 *The Tcheka: The Red Inquisition*. London: A.M. Philpot.  
*Tscheke: Der Staat im Staate*. Frankfurt: Societäts-Druckerei.  
*Tsheka valtio valtiossa: kokemuksia Venäjän ylimääräisestä komissionista*. Helsinki: Otava.  
*In de klauwen der Russische Tsjeka*. Amsterdam: Allert de Lange.  
*Tjekan: den röda inkquisitionen*. Stockholm: Albert Bonnier.  
*Tsheka: Staten i Staten: den røde Inkquisition*. Copenhagen: Gyldenhal.
- 1925-6 *La Cheka*. Madrid: M. Aguilar.
- 1926 *La Tschéka, mon emprisonnement et mes aventures à la Loubjanka no. 2*. Paris: Plon.
- 1928 *La Ceca: uno stato nello stato*. Milan: Guiseppe Morreale.
- 1931 *A Tschéka: inquisição vermelha*. Porto Alegre, Brazil: Edição da Livraria do Globo.  
*A tschéka minha prisão e minhas aventuras na Lubjanca n.º 2* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Globo)



Third book: Soviet occupation of Riga in early 1919

- 1928 *Moskovalaistulva: eräs Euroopan nykyhistorian syrjätapaus.* Helsinki: Werner Söderström.  
1929 *L'invasion moscovite : cinq mois de domination bolchevique dans une ville balte.* Paris: Plon.  
1932 *The City of the Red Plague: Soviet Rule in a Baltic Town.* London: Allen & Unwin; New York: Dutton.  
1935 *Sowjetherrschaft in Europa: Die Rigaer Kommunistenzeit und ihre Lehren.* Bern, Switzerland: Gotthelf-Verlag.



Fourth book: memories of early Soviet times, rework/expansion of first book

- 1967 *Ich sah die Revolutionäre.* Bern: Verlag Schweizerisches Ostinstitut.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> White House library gets 200 new books. *New York Times*. Wednesday, 17 October 1934, p. 24. White House Library, 1963 catalog. [www.librarything.com/catalog/WHLlibrary1963/yourlibrary](http://www.librarything.com/catalog/WHLlibrary1963/yourlibrary)
- <sup>2</sup> Wilhelmine Fluthwedel and Konstantin Popoff marriage, 1894. Riga Reformed Church records. LVVA\_F3030\_US3\_GV28\_0023. From [www.ra.ee](http://www.ra.ee)  
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 Konstantin Popoff as Pärnu district chief, see *Pernausche Zeitung*: 5 Oct 1901, p. 3; 29 March 1902, p. 3; 2 July 1902, p. 3; 19 July 1902, p. 3; 2 Aug 1902, p. 4; 1 July 1903, p. 3; 20 April 1904, p. 4; 31 Dec 1904, p. 3; 25 Jan 1905, p. 3; 27 Jan 1905, p. 3; 8 March 1905, p. 3; 6 December 1905, p. 3; 13 December 1905, p. 3; 18 April 1906, p. 3; 15 August 1906, p. 3. From <https://dea.digar.ee>
- <sup>3</sup> [brother Loris] *Rigasche Zeitung*, 24 October 1918, p. 3 and 12 November 1918, p. 8. From <https://periodika.lndb.lv>  
 Ansart, Pelat, Boelle, Carrat, Flahault & Valleron. May 2009. Mortality burden of the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic in Europe. *Influenza and other respiratory viruses*. 3(3): 99-106. From [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4634693/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4634693/)  
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- <sup>4</sup> See the Appendices for Popoff's articles from *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1922-23 and for the various editions of his four books.
- <sup>5</sup> Popoff, correspondent, killed in plane smash. [and] Popoff badly injured. *Vicksburg Evening Post*, 4 October 1922, p. 1. From [www.newspapers.com/image/201712510/](http://www.newspapers.com/image/201712510/)  
 Rome guesthouse registrations, Tallin. Address Bureau. Estonian National Archives.  
 Georg Popoff, 23-28 October 1921. [www.ra.ee/apps/aadresslehed/index.php/sheet/view?id=406484](http://www.ra.ee/apps/aadresslehed/index.php/sheet/view?id=406484)  
 Arrest of G. Popoff in Moscow. *Rigasche Rundschau*, 14 November 1922, p. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> [Litvinov: Popoff arrest a “misunderstanding”]: Baltische staaten, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 28 November 1922, p. 2.  
 For Popoff's articles, see the Appendix.
- <sup>7</sup> [Roller background] Simbirtsev, Igor. 2008. *VCHK v leninskoy Rossii. 1917–1922: V zareve revolyutsii* [The VChk in Leninist Russia, 1917-1922: In the glow of the revolution]. Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf. “The international element in the Cheka” excerpt available at <https://history.wikireading.ru/198956>
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- <sup>8</sup> Reds invading for food. *New York Times*, 30 November 1918, p. 3.  
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- <sup>9</sup> The Cheka, the Kremlin's secondary government. *Rigasche Rundschau*, 6 December 1924, p. 5.

Dzerzhinsky—the red Torquemada. *Rigasche Rundschau*, 22 December 1924, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Popoff affidavit of statelessness. Nansen Office for Refugees Delegation in Germany (Berlin) - Russian Refugees Case Files - Letters M-P (1925), page 216. File C1141-37-06-2.pdf from <https://archives.ungeneva.org/nansen-office-for-refugees-delegation-in-germany-berlin-russian-refugees-case-files-letters-m-p-1925>

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Dinner and reception. *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1930, p. 15.

Receptions. *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 1930, p. 15.

German visitors in London. *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 June 1931, p. 15.

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<sup>12</sup> Popoff, George Konstantinovich. Records of the security service: Personal (PF series) files: World War II: German intelligence agents and suspected agents. National Archives of the United Kingdom.

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<sup>13</sup> There likely are many more unknown articles, but we can see as examples several dozen “Augur” articles in the fragmentary archives (late 1926, late 1930, and 1933) of Estonia’s *Postimees* newspaper maintained by the Estonian Literary Museum. They are listed in the Appendix.

<sup>14</sup> George Popoff changes his name. *Päevaleht* [Daily News], Tallin. Sunday, 6 October 1929, p. 8. From [dea.digar.ee/cgi-bin/dea?a=d&d=paevalehtew19291006.2.43](http://dea.digar.ee/cgi-bin/dea?a=d&d=paevalehtew19291006.2.43)

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Popoff and Popoff-Beboutoff, London telephone directories, 1929-1938. From [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Lord Rothermere. 17 April 1934.

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<sup>16</sup> Cardinal asks aid in Russian famine, Moscow official issues denial. *New York Times*, 20 August 1933, p. 3. From [timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1933/08/20/90635861.html?pageNumber=3](http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1933/08/20/90635861.html?pageNumber=3)

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- <sup>17</sup> Ship's passenger-list booklet from SS Bremen arriving 28 June 1934. First class list and addendum, pp. 896-894 downward. From <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/157849131>
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- <sup>21</sup> Addicks can be found in ship pamphlets, manifests, and immigration records on multiple voyages of the two ships. For example: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/157839784?objectPage=167>
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<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand Uexküll. *Rigasche Rundschau*, 13 December 1939, p. 2

Ferdinand v. Uexküll. *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 13 December 1939, p. 8.

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<sup>29</sup> Ewald Ammende papers: Fond 1502k. *Ammende Eval'd - predstavitel' estonskogo gubernskogo prodovol'stvennogo komiteta v 1917 g.* (representative of the Estonian provincial food committee in 1917). 1938. Russian State Military Archive, Moscow. Archive: <https://rgvarchive.ru/>



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