The Tsar's other lieutenant: the antisemitic activities of Boris L'vovich Brasol, 1910-1960 Part I: Beilis, the protocols, and Henry Ford.

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No doubt Boris Brasol would be disappointed that his name is largely unknown today. Certainly, he was a man of some legitimate and significant accomplishments: author, international legal expert, criminologist, and authority on Dostoevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, and Oscar Wilde. But the accomplishment that he probably was the most proud of, or at least the most committed to, was his career as an antisemitic conspiracy theorist and agitator.

Brasol once proudly boasted that his writings had "done the Jews more injury than would have been done to them by ten pogroms."(1) He cut his teeth in this line of endeavor as an investigator assigned to the infamous Beilis ritual murder case in pre-revolutionary Russia. A few years later, he would abet the translation and publication of the work most commonly known as The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion in the United States and simultaneously finesse his way into being an operative of American War Trade Intelligence and then the Army's Military Intelligence Division (MID). This, in turn, opened doors to him and his ideas on Wall Street and, perhaps most notably, in the offices of the Ford Motor Company. That, in turn, would yield more connections in business, in Washington, and even to the circles surrounding Charles Lindbergh, Father Coughlin, and many other notables of the day. In the meantime, Brasol also became one of the most influential figures among Russian monarchist emigreis in the United States, which gave him access to kindred groups in France and Germany and ultimately to Nazi agents and sympathizers in both Europe and America. Yet, oddly, he also would connive with Soviet agents. Over a span of at least four decades, Boris Brasol would work like a diligent spider weaving a far-flung web of hate-mongering, intelligence peddling, and outright espionage, a kind of mirror image or, perhaps, unconscious parody of the worldwide conspiracy he claimed to combat.

As the above outline suggests, Brasol's activities were complicated and frequently shrouded in mystery, and most of that was of his own making. This essay will deal with the years from just before the First World War to the mid-1920s, and concentrate on his activities in the United States, especially those related to his connection with the Protocols in one form or another. It will, it is hoped, serve as a useful and informative introduction to a man who was one of the most relentless and resourceful Jew-haters of the 20th century, a man who, whatever else one may think of him, was a kind of genius at what he did.

Boris L'vovich Brazol, as his name is rendered in Russian, was born on March 31, 1885, in Poltava, although in other instances he inexplicably gave his birthplace as Kharkov.(2) He liked to claim that he descended from old Cossack stock, though other indications are that his line had its origins in medieval Novgorod.(3) Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly, there also were vague but recurring rumors that Brasol had Jewish ancestry. For instance, in 1931, one Casimir Pilenas claimed that "It has come to light that Brasol is of Hungarian Jewish descent, which fact I expect will be described fully in the press."(4)

Available genealogical information, however, suggests no such thing. His ancestors gained gentry status in the 18th century and went on to produce landowners, soldiers, and imperial officials. Boris's father, Lev Evgenich Brazol, was a noted homeopathic physician. Dr. Brazol had numerous Jewish associates and patients, and there is no indication that he held or promoted antisemitic ideas. So why did his son?

To that question, there is no clear or rational explanation. Boris Brasol was a student at the University of St. Petersburg during the failed revolution of 1905 and its tumultuous aftermath, graduating in 1908 with a degree in law. By his own admission, he took an early and intense interest in economic subjects and at nineteen wrote a paper on the labor situation in Australia. He studied socialism in Russia and abroad and "made a thorough and critical analysis of the theories of Karl Marx," ultimately concluding that they were a "complete fallacy."(5) That, at least, is the way he chose to remember it. There is a comment tucked away in one of his FBI files that suggests a rather different version. According to this notation,

... in his youth Brasol had been treasurer of a radical

organization of some kind in the University of St Petersburg and

had embezzled some of the money. When the embezzlement was

discovered, he was banished from the organization. According to the

informant, his embezzlement was discovered by some Jewish students

and he has since that time been very bitter against all Jewish

people.(6)

As an adult, Boris Brasol was a small, somewhat delicate, man with a broad, sloping forehead and--his most striking feature--dark, piercing eyes. There were those who later argued that he bore a certain resemblance to Joseph Goebbels.(7) Some persons were repulsed and took an almost immediate dislike to him, while others found him brilliant andfascinating. Almost all who knew him agreed that he was very clever and, when necessary, skillfully devious.

Brasol entered the employ of the Imperial Ministry of Justice in 1910 and served in the capacity of an assistant district attorney first in Pskov, then Peterhof, and by 1913 in St. Petersburg. During this time, he also studied abroad, most notably at Lausanne, Switzerland, at the Institut de Police Scientifique run by Professor Archibald Reiss. The fact that Reiss was Jewish did not seem to detract from Brasol's appreciation of him or his methods.(8)

Brasol served under the administration of the tsar's Minister of Justice, Ivan Shcheglovitov, who was well known for his antisemitic views. Shcheglovitov is generally credited with having been the prime instigator of the infamous Kiev Blood Libel case in which Menachem Mendel Beilis stood accused of the ritual murder of a Christian boy. The case was also Boris Brasol's official debut as a Jew-baiter.

Beilis was arrested in 1911, but only came to trial two years later; the trial ended in acquittal. Brasol was not involved in the actual prosecution, but in the "investigation" that supported it. As Brasol later described his role, he was, by 1913, "the second greatest preliminary investigator in Russia," and as such was dispatched to Kiev "to take the [Beilis] case out of the hands of the local government."(9) This is basically confirmed by information in his FBI files, which records that while assigned to the 14th judicial district in St. Petersburg, he was "sent to conduct an inquiry on behalf of the Government of Russia into the activities of the Investigating Magistrate in the case of Mendel Beilis."(10) The Kiev authorities had come to the conclusion that Beilis was guiltless and that the boy had been killed by local thieves. But higher authorities, Brasol noted, "had different ideas."(11) The lead investigator of the Kiev police, Nikolai Krasovsky, believed Beilis innocent and refused to be an accomplice to the concoction of testimony and evidence to frame him. Brasol was more accommodating, but in the end even that was insufficient to convince the jury. Nevertheless, years later, Brasol proudly recounted his certainty that not only had a Jewish ritual occurred but also that Beilis was also part of a larger conspiracy involving at least two other Jews.(12)

Given his involvement in the Beilis affair, it is not unusual that Brasol was later frequently said to have been a member of so-called "Black Hundreds," aka chernosotensty--the ultra-monarchist vigilantes noted for their incitement of antisemitic rhetoric and actions, including pogroms.(13) Brasol's membership would have been entirely consistent with his views, though there is no documentary proof, and Brasol himself disingenuously denied ever having heard of the organization. He is also reputed to have become a member of another secret organization, the Russian branch of the Sovereign Order of St. John (SOSJ), better known as the Knights of Malta--the significance of which will be further explored.

When war broke out in the summer of 1914, Brasol enlisted in the Imperial Guard and received the rank of second lieutenant. He saw service at the front, was wounded, and by early 1916 was back in Petrograd/St.Petersburg, living at 56 Fontanka, coincidentally not far from the headquarters of the Okhrana, the Russian police organization.(14) In August of that year, after a brief stint in London, Brasol arrived in New York, where he assumed duties connected with the Russian Supply Committee operating there. Working out of Manhattan's Flatiron Building, he wore several hats, but the most important was that of a special investigator charged with ferreting out graft, treason, and subversion in the Supply Committee and related bodies. The importance of Brasol's role may be attested to by the fact that he earned the second largest salary in the committee, pulling in almost $1,000 per month, a princely sumfor a mere lieutenant.(15)

Brasol was particularly concerned with subversive activity in the supply apparatus; many radical Jewish emigres, for a time including Leon Trotsky, were active in New York. Brasol seldom failed to note it when a Jew surfaced in one of his investigations; he took a dim view, for instance, of Prince Alexander Gagarin's friendship with Stafford Talbot, a "known adventurist" and "English Jew."(16)

It was also during this time that Brasol first crossed swords with a man who later would become one of his most persistent critics, journalist Herman Bernstein. In 1917, the Russian-born Bernstein, working at the New York Herald, was approached by an Estonian wrestler-cum-spy named George Lurich. Lurich spun out a complicated tale that implicated one of the officers of the Russian Supply Committee, Col. Vladimir Nekrassov, in treasonous activity. Bernstein wrote up an expose that ran in the Herald and other papers in October 1917. Brasol rushed to Nekrassov's defense and wrote an eight-page memorandum refuting the charges and branding Lurich a liar.(17) He may have been, but Brasol also lashed out at Bernstein and the Herald, threatening them with a libel suit and calling the whole thing a plot by radicals and Jews to discredit the Russian government. He never forgot Bernstein, and Bernstein would never forget him.

Perhaps the most important thing about Brasol's wartime service in the United States was his acquaintance with two persons who would play important roles in his best-known foray into antisemitic propaganda: the creation and dissemination of an American edition of the Protocols. Both people could merit articles of their own and deserve some background.

The first individual was Casimir Pilenas, later known as Casimir Palmer. Depending on one's point of view, he could be characterized as an experienced investigator or as a professional snitch and stool pigeon. Born in Russian Lithuania in 1872, Pilenas and his brother Peter immigrated to London, where they fell in with the growing community of Russian revolutionary expatriates. Around 1898, the brothers were recruited by Scotland Yard as "spotter-informants" to spy on their fellow radicals.(18) A couple of years later, they began spotting for the Okhrana and remained on its payroll until 1913.

Pilenas never really quit working for Scotland Yard, and when the war erupted he was once more enlisted as a translator and informant and aided British intelligence with information about German intrigues among Russians in America. It was Pilenas who in March 1917 denounced Trotsky as the recipient of Jewish and German money on the eve of his return to Russia.(19) At the end of 1917, Pilenas switched to the employ of the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Division thanks to a glowing recommendation from his erstwhile British superior, Sir William Wiseman. Through his spying on Russian radicals, Pilenas was already acquainted with Boris Brasol, and in early 1918 he was "somewhat under the influence" of Brasol and his circle.(20) In fact, as late as February 1919, Pilenas submitted a report on Bolshevism to the MID in which he described the German Jewish banker Max Warburg as the man "at the bottom of it."(21) Was this his idea, or was he just parroting what he'd gotten from Brasol?

The second was Natalie De Bogory. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1887, De Bogory was the only daughter of Vladimir Karpovich DebogoriiMokrievich, a Russian officer and nobleman who joined the revolutionary Narodnik movement in the 1870s and fled abroad after escaping Siberian exile; De Bogory thus grew up in a milieu of anti-tsarist radicalism. When the family later immigrated to the United States and her father gained citizenship, so did she. In 1906 De Bogory and her family were in Bulgaria, where she met and married a progressive American journalist covering the Balkan troubles, San Francisco-born Albert Sonnichsen; Albert was Jewish.(22) The newlyweds soon returned to America, but the union did not prove lasting. By the time World War I rolled around, she was on her own and supported herself as an investigator and undercover operator for the New York Society for the Prevention of Crime.(23) City directories for 1916 and 1917 show that De Bogory ran a Russian translation service; at the same time, she was the personal assistant to Dr. Sergei Syromiatnikov, the Russian imperial government's chief PR man in the United States as well as a collaborator with the Okhrana.(24) Once he arrived on the scene, Brasol also worked closely with Syromiatnikov, even sharing offices in the Flatiron Building.

Brasol and De Bogory certainly knew one another well before 1918. A question is what led her to cast her lot with Brasol and aid in the production of the American Protocols. A partial answer may be found in that fact that she was engaged in a bitter divorce and child custody battle with her estranged husband, Sonnichsen.

The connection of Brasol, De Bogory, and Pilenas to the Protocols is well known but somewhat murky and vague. The story usually goes something like this:

At the close of 1917, a New York physician turned Army intelligence

officer, Dr. Harris Ayres Houghton was immersed in the

investigation of "Bolshevist" and related subversive threats. He

somehow came into contact with "Black Hundred Russians" and through

their influence hired Natalie De Bogory to work in his office. Soon

after, either from Brasol of some other officer, De Bogory obtained

a Russian copy of the Protocols, which Houghton assigned her to

translate into English. (25)

In some versions of the tale, Brasol assisted or guided De Bogory in this effort. In other versions, Brasol merely received the finished product, while in yet another he allegedly penned the translation himself in a Brooklyn hotel room.(26) Whatever the precise case, in the end, two English versions of the Protocols emerged from this effort. The first, and the one most directly associated with Brasol, was The Protocols and World Revolution: Including a Translation and Analysis of the Protocols of the Zionist Men of Wisdom, which appeared in Boston in 1920. The second was Houghton's own edition, Praemonitus, Praemunitus: The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, which came out in New York later the same year.

In following various threads, it becomes apparent that almost every reference to Brasol's Protocols connection can be traced back to Casimir Pilenas. As noted, he and Pilenas were close in that period, and the latter was in a position to know many things. For instance, Pilenas later recounted how, in April 1918, he had first heard of "the alleged Jewish attempt to dominate the world" from Brasol and testified under oath that he had received a copy of the translated Protocols straight from Brasol's hands in 1919.(27) An unnamed FBI informant, almost certainly Pilenas, described how he once went to Brasol's office and "found him actually working on the [Protocols] by Serge Nilus making a translation or doing some kind of work in connection therewith."(28)

For reasons never explained, Pilenas "became aware that he had been duped, [and] made a complete about face and began to inform on his informers."(29) Pilenas formed a kind of alliance with a Jewish MID officer, Nathan Isaacs, and began to funnel information from and about Brasol and his cronies to Isaacs. This relationship continued for many years after both left the MID. In a later confidential memo, Isaacs vouched that Pilenas "knows a great deal about Brazol [sic]," but he also cautioned that Pilenas' information "must be carefully sifted" in part because of certain "emotional qualities" that influenced it.(30) Simply put, Pilenas loathed Brasol and was inclined to give credence to anything that would reflect him in a negative light.

What did Brasol himself have to say about all this? Over the years, when questioned officially, he steadfastly denied any real involvement the translation or transmission of the Protocols. A 1944 memorandum to FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover admitted that despite the frequency of the accusation, "the file fails to reflect any substantiation of this charge."(31) During his 1942 examination by federal investigators, Brasol probably offered his most detailed statement on the matter:

The U.S. Military Intelligence in 1918 ... they discovered a

Russian copy of the Protocols. Under whose instructions, I couldn't

tell you, but the document was translated A to Z by a woman, Miss

Natalie De Bogory.... This translation, in typewritten form, was

circulated among Intelligence officers in the United States.... One

copy was submitted to the chief of War Trade Intelligence in

Washington.... He transmitted this copy to the Chief of the New

York Office of War Trade Intelligence [Paul Fuller, Jr.] where I

was working. He called me in and he told me that he got this

document and he wanted me to check the correctness of the

translation ... so I got hold of Miss De Bogory and she submitted

to me the Russian text of the copy and I went over the text and

found it substantially correct.

Brasol was a lawyer. He knew how to be careful with his words, and he knew that he was talking to hostile interrogators who would be quick to use anything he said against him. Surprisingly, when asked about his "personal convictions" on the authenticity of the Protocols, Brasol offered that "I am rather inclined to think they are a forgery. That is my opinion, but it is absolutely not supported in fact."(32) He went to admit that while he had made a study of the Protocols, he had never made an effort to ascertain any facts regarding their authenticity. Overall, he felt that "in parts they are over done," but in the end he declined "to express my final opinion because I have none." And in this he may have been quite sincere. From his perspective it did not matter whether he thought the Protocols were true; what mattered was that others did.

The matter of who gave what to whom, and when, remains a mystery, but there is a Bureau of Investigation document not from Brasol's files that may shed some fresh light. On October 14, 1917, L. S. Perkins, a Russian speaking agent assigned to the New York office, wrote his superiors on "Making Translations from Russian for the Russian Embassy."(33) He noted that an official of the Russian Embassy had approached him about doing "certain very confidential translation of Russian documents into English ... as soon as possible." The Russian official seemed to think it very important that someone connected to the U.S. government be involved. "Having learned the character of the documents," he added, "I have suggested ... that this office should have a copy of the translation." Most important, though, Perkins noted that "My work is carried on at Room 907, the Flatiron Building, which is the office of Lieutenant Brazol." Who else worked in or near that office? Natalie De Bogory.

The confidential documents Perkins was dealing with may have had nothing to do with the Protocols, but the air of secrecy surrounding them and Perkins' belief that they were something the Bureau of Investigation (BI, precursor to the FBI) would be interested in, suggests that they may have been. At the very least, it shows that Brasol's office was a center for the receipt and translation of sensitive material. A copy of the Protocols, recently arrived from Russia, would logically have landed on his desk, and it also explains how he could then easily pass it along to De Bogory or she to him.

A June 1920 letter from Brasol to publisher Charles Scribner also suggests a greater knowledge in the Protocols than he admitted elsewhere.(34) Brasol sent Scribner a book proposal dealing with the "masonry and Jewish question," which he expected to become a big issue in the next few months. He pointed out the recent publication of The Jewish Peril (another Protocols edition) in England and recent or pending editions in Germany, France, Sweden, and, of course, the United States of America. Brasol boasted that the Protocols had become "a world movement, or at least a subject in which the thinking world is deeply interested." He went on to emphasize that while the Protocols issue would not be the "center of gravity" of his proposed volume, he also thought it a mistake to omit analysis of a plan that bore such "striking similarity of the actual policies of the Bolsheviki ...." Scribner passed on the proposal.

It speaks to the reliability of Brasol's memory--or his honesty-that he later made a sworn affidavit that he resigned all his Russian government posts soon after the abdication of the tsar.(35) Obviously, as noted above, he was still busily laboring for the Supply Committee well into the autumn. The Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd on November 7, 1917, however, plunged the Russian missions in the United States into utter confusion and by year's end he was obliged to start looking for new employment. The first place he tried was the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation. On February 27, BI chief A. Bruce Bielaski noted that Brasol had that day visited him in Washington and offered to keep the Bureau informed about the activities of "American Bolsheviks." Bielaski wrote to his chief special agent in New York, Charles DeWoody, noting Brasol's prior acquaintance with agent Perkins. Bielaski offered that while foreign birth prevented Brasol becoming a regular agent, he might still be useful as a "confidential informant." Soon, he became just that.

Foreigner or not, in March 1918 Brasol secured employment in the New York office of the War Trade Board's Intelligence Bureau as a "special investigator" charged with "investigations of importance and of the most confidential nature" and that utilized his "knowledge of European political and territorial problems" and the "chaotic conditions in Siberia and Russia."(36) It was an important step in Brasol's career; he would make friends and allies who would serve him and his activities well for years to come. Brasol's overall boss, and presumably the man who hired him, was Paul Fuller, Jr., who also happened to be a partner in the powerful Coudert Bros. law firm. Coudert, not incidentally, had functioned as the American legal representatives of the Russian imperial regime and Fuller and Brasol already had a long acquaintance. Brasol's immediate supervisor in the War Trade Intelligence office, however, was another Wall Street Brahmin, investment banker George Melmine Bodman.(37) Last, but by no means least, Brasol would find an especially devoted friend in Bodman's "confidential secretary" and soon-to-be bride, Louise "Lulu" Clarke. The Bodmans would act as Boris Brasol's political and financial angels for years to come, and they would introduce him to a host of other, like-minded, influential Americans.

Brasol resigned from the War Trade Intelligence Bureau in April 1919 and immediately took up a new post with the MID as a special assistant to its chief, Gen. Marlborough Churchill. Churchill was much concerned by the "Bolshevik Menace" and open to Brasol's suggestion of a Jewish conspiracy behind it.(38) Brasol remained with the MID for just over a year. As "Confidential Agent B-1," he produced at least thirty-six numbered reports on radical groups and activities and some related special memorandums. His intelligence activities did not exclusively focus on Jews, but is it easy to discern that anything related to them, real or imaginary, excited his particular attention and animus. In December 1919, he sent in a report that described an "international German Jewish gang," allegedly working out of Stockholm, that aimed at "world socialist revolution."(39) Its twelve leaders, he pointed out, were all Jews and included Trotsky, U.S. banker Jacob Schiff, and his German friend and co-religionist Max Warburg. "It is, of course, just a coincidence," Brasol smirked, "that the dozen happen to be a Jewish dozen."

Jacob Schiff was a particular focus of Brasol's suspicion. He proclaimed the banker "extremely active in promoting Bolshevism in this country."(40) He similarly smeared Rabbi Judah Magnes and declared the Zionist Poale Zion organization "one of the most dangerous Bolshevist organizations."(41) Reporting on a radical meeting, Brasol could not help but point out that the audience was full of "East Side Jews."(42) He even saw Jews where there weren't any, labeling Lenin as a "famous leader of International Jewry."(43) If it was Bolshevist, it was Jewish--and vice versa.

Arguably the most significant and revealing of Brasol's reports to the MID was his "Bolshevism and Judaism," marked "Confidential" and submitted to Churchill sometime in early December 1918. It begins and ends with direct quotes from the "Secret Zionist Protocol, 1897," which shows that Brasol was well acquainted with the document. In between he explains how the Russian Revolution was plotted in New York in 1916 by Jacob Schiff, Otto Kahn, and other Jewish bankers, how Schiff funded Trotsky, how almost every Bolshevik luminary was a Jew, how other American Jews like Judah Magnes and Paul Warburg connived with and supported them, how the same Jews were also behind the Red uprisings in Germany, and how, basically, "International Jewry" was "feverishly organizing, getting together, spreading their poisonous doctrines, gambling [and] raising enormous funds."(44)

In defense of the MID, it must be pointed out that Brasol's effusions--which almost never identified sources of information and provided the least evidence to back up assertions--did not go without criticism and even ridicule. Regarding "Bolshevism and Judaism," Capt. Edwin Grosvenor found its claims utterly unsubstantiated and "unworthy of serious consideration."(45)About the same time, Capt. Carleton B. Hayes, commenting on Brasol's Report #9, dismissed the whole thing as "another sign of the raving tendency of a fanatical if not of a diseased brain."(46)

Such criticism probably prompted Brasol leave the MID in April 1920. He later claimed to have then gone to work for New York State Legislature's Lusk Committee and its investigation of "Seditious Activities." He may have supplied the committee with some information, but that had to be while he was otherwise engaged by the MID. The Lusk Committee's investigation was completed and its report published in April 1920. What Brasol probably was obscuring here is that he actually went to work for Henry Ford's private intelligence outfit.(47)

Brasol was perfectly willing to pass his information on to anyone willing to read it. For example, at least through 1918 he maintained contact with Col. Norman Thwaites of the British intelligence (SIS) station in New York. On June 30 of that year, one of Thwaites' subordinates reported an interview with Brasol. He mentioned that while the interview was underway, Brasol received a call from the State Department asking him to come to Washington.(48) In December 1918, Thwaites himself recorded that he had received from Brasol, who was "now employed by the United States War Trade Board ... a somewhat ghastly account of what is alleged to be the details of the murder of the Czar and his family."(49) This story, as we will see, emphasized the murder of the family by Jews.

Brasol's feeding of information through various sources to anyone who would listen was not random. There was a method to his madness. ExMID officer Nathan Isaacs described it in this way:

A member of the group would supply a story to the Military

Intelligence Division; simultaneously a different and by no means

entirely consistent account of the same thing would be supplied to

the Office of Naval Intelligence. Still other versions would reach

the Department of Justice, the Secret Service of the Treasury, the

War Trade Intelligence Board, the American Protective League, and

the experts for various countries in the Department of State and in

Colonel House's Bureau.... Of course, these bureaus interchanged

information with the result that there would soon appear in the

files of all of them what seemed to be the cumulative evidence of

some plot. Usually the gist of this story was that some prominent

Jew in this country was in secret communication with the Russian

revolutionaries ... or some other such nonsense. (50)

While employed by the MID, Brasol maintained regular contact with the Bureau of Investigation. For example, in June 1919, his old pal Perkins interviewed him concerning Arkady Sack, former mouthpiece for the Kerensky regime, which Brasol thoroughly detested, and currently running a periodical called Struggling Russia.(51) Sack also was Jewish. Nevertheless, Brasol granted that Sack and his paper were "all right in a way, and quite all right so far as the American angle is concerned." They were anti-Bolshevist; that was enough. In August, Brasol was again questioned about a prominent New York radical, Alexander Brailowsky.(52) He noted that he recently made a full, confidential report on the subject to MID chief Churchill, and advised the BI to move against Brailowsky at once. While the interview was underway, the agent noted that another Russian, Vasily Shumsky, came in. Brasol introduced him as the editor of a small Russian paper called Sin Otchestva. He employed Shumsky to attend radical meetings and report back on what he saw and heard. No surprise, then, that Shumsky was also a member of Brasol's recently formed Association Unity of Russia (Edinstvo Rossii).

Brasol had time and energy as well to spread his influence among the Russian emigre community. In 1918 he became vice chairman, later chairman, of the Voluntary Association of Russian Army and Naval Officers, and in the following year one of founders of the above association Unity of Russia, and well as a leading member of the Russian National Society and the General Committee of Russian National Defense; these were all rightist or monarchist bodies. He also assumed the role of a vociferous public champion of the recognition of Admiral Kolchak's anti-Bolshevik regime in Siberia. There was even a story, likely started by Brasol himself, that he was made the head of the secret police in Kolchak's ill-fated government.(53)

Brasol also stayed busy on the publishing front. Between 1919 and 1922, besides numerous articles in the press, he churned out three books, Socialism vs. Civilization (1920), The World at the Crossroads (1921), and The Balance Sheet of Sovietism (1922). Most relevant to our discussion, however, was a fourth work, Who Rules Russia?: The Personnel of the Soviet Bureaucracy (1920), more a pamphlet than a book. Published and distributed through Unity of Russia, it largely consisted of list after list, all showing that Red Russia was not ruled by Russians but by Jews. As recently as 2000, it was reprinted in a book published in Moscow.(54)

It is curious that given Brasol's feelings about Jews, he seems to have had no problem living around them. The 1920 U.S. census reveals he and his wife, Eleanor, dwelling in a boarding house on West 84 Street. Among his fellow residents and neighbors were Walter Herzberg, Solomon Berkowitz, Moses and Joseph Bachrach, and Maurice and Marion Kaufman.

In December 1920, Brasol gained a new ally in his battle against Judeo-Bolshevik evil, albeit one Walter Laqueur has described as "obviously a clinical case."(55) This was Count Arthur Ivanovich CherepSpiridovich, who arrived from London. Originally from Montenegro, Spiridovich, who sometimes billed himself as the "Slav Bismarck," had served as Serbian consul in Moscow and labored in the years before the First World War as a Serbian and Russian intelligence agent. He also acted as a roving agent for the abovementioned Sovereign Order of St. John (SOSJ), and in recognition of this Pope Pius X made him a papal count in 1907. The count was also a tireless promoter of various arcane organizations such as the Celto-Slavonic Federation and the Latino-Slav League, which later morphed into the Anglo-Latino Slav League. This in turn spun off a press-propaganda outlet he ran out of Paris dubbed the Agence Latine.(56) More to our point, however, in the years before the Revolution, Spiridovich was acquainted with Sergei Nilus, the author of the first Russian edition of the Protocols--the version, not incidentally, upon which the above American versions were based.

Somewhere along the line, Spiridovich became a militant convert to the notion of a Jewish conspiracy for world domination. Soon after arriving in the United States, he began work on his magnum opus, The Secret World Government, or "The Hidden Hand," which praised, affirmed, and referenced the Protocols in extenso.(57) He also lauded Brasol's books as "clever."

Count Spiridovich is important for three reasons. First, if most problematically, he connects Brasol to the SOSJ and its intrigues. According to a history of the order, "Boris Brasol and Cherep-Spiridovich were that primary SOSJ intelligence operatives in the United States."(58) More provocatively, it continues, "the Order gathered intelligence on the international revolutionary movements. The SOSJ, under Czar Kyril I, engaged in psychological warfare operations including the distribution of anti-Bolshevist information such as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." This much we know: in 1922 then Grand Duke Kyril (Cyril) Romanov proclaimed himself heir to the imperial throne. Along witheverything else he was up to, Brasol promptly signed on as his American representative.(59) Were Brasol's antisemitic efforts parts of some even larger conspiracy? That remains a mystery.

What is clearer, at least, is that Spiridovich also formed a link between Brasol and Kyril and other Russian monarchists in Germany. They, in turn, provided entree to like-minded Germans, including leaders of the emerging Nazi Party. Laqueur ranks Spiridovich among the motley crew of "Russian experts" whom Alfred Rosenberg befriended and consulted.(60)

We will return to that second point in the next installment, but the third, and most immediate, point of common interest between Brasol and Spiridovich was their encouragement of Henry Ford's anti-Jewish campaign, which began in the Dearborn Independent on May 22, 1920, and continued in one form or another for the next seven years. For ninety-one straight issues, the paper churned out articles subsequently collected into the four-volume The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem. The Protocols were obviously its primary inspiration and source. The frequently repeated assertion is that Boris Brasol was somehow responsible for introducing these articles to the Ford camp, or that he was in Ford's employ. As with the American Protocols, there is definitely something to the accusation, but the exact details are again uncertain.

The Brasol-Ford link was exposed early on in a six-article series by Norman Hapgood, "The Inside Story of Henry Ford's Jew-Mania," that ran in Hearst's International from June to November 1922. Hapgood characterized Brasol as "reactionary-in-chief," a die-hard Romanov restorationist, and one of the unsavory gaggle of "adventurers, detectives [and] criminals" who crawled out the woodwork to pander to the Auto King's Judaeophobia.(61) Being the good muckraker he was, Hapgood dug up plenty of dirt on Brasol's link to the Beilis trial, De Bogory, Houghton, and the American Protocols, as well as a host of fellow Russian reactionaries in the United States and Europe, among them the colorful Count CherepSpiridovich.

In addition to recycling old information, Hapgood's sleuthing turned up some new, intriguing tidbits. He found a Russian, a former member of the pre-Kolchak government in Siberia, who swore (albeit anonymously) that "I have seen ...the documentary proof that Boris Brasol has received money from Henry Ford."(62) Another was that Brasol's and Ford's anti-Jew crusade had been abetted by, of all things, a prominent Jewish lawyer. The man in question was Maurice Leon.

Born in Beirut and educated in Paris, Leon was the stepson of Columbia professor and Zionist activist Richard Gottheil.(63) During WWI, Leon acted as a financial and propaganda agent of the French government. In this role he developed an intense antipathy toward rich German Jews, whom he believed were serving the interests of the kaiser. A special object of his hostility was Jacob Schiff, also Brasol's bete noire, and so the two, semite and antisemite, were drawn together in common hatred. To keep tabs on Schiff and his associates, Leon compiled a huge cross index. As Hapgood saw it, "there is good reason to believe that the Dearborn Independent vision of the Jewish World Conspiracy ... had its origin in this elaborate cross-index of Mr. Leon."(64) And Ford's men had Boris Brasol to thank for bringing it to their attention.

The Brasol-Leon connection may also relate to a stray comment made by Casimir Pilenas. In a 1925 letter to Isaacs, Pilenas let drop that "I have at last got the dope who inspired Boris Brasol to translate Serge Nilus's booklet [the Protocols]. There was a conspiracy to make the Jews pay for everything and the first $5,000 check was received from a wealthy but good hearted Jew in New York. He was a stranger and was taken in."(65) Was Pilenas saying that Leon had been duped into providing funding for the American Protocols? Could he have been convinced that its publication would aid his own cause against Schiff and his ilk? It also touches on another point: in the FBI files, Brasol is described as being "extremely mercenary."(66) To what extent did he promote antisemitism simply for the money?

However much Hapgood was aware of it, Pilenas played a part in his expose, at least where Brasol was concerned. In November 1921, Pilenas wrote Isaacs that he had recently "sold some articles to the Hearst newspapers" that would "expose the world-wide plot against the Jews."(67) In one of these he claimed to "have exposed Brasol and his fake 'protocols.' " A month later, Pilenas proclaimed that "I have enough dope to knock out Mr. Brasol for good."(68) He went to insist that "[Brasol] is solely responsible for the anti-Jewish propaganda [in Lithuania] as well as the States." In April 1922, however, Pilenas complained that his articles had not appeared anywhere, nor does it seem they ever did.(69) Thus, it seems probable that they eventually ended up in Hapgood's hands, where the data regarding Brasol and friends was incorporated into his own series. In May, Pilenas revealed that he was in contact with E. G. Pipp, the former editor of the Dearborn Independent, who had quit the Ford organization and started his own magazine. According to Pilenas, Pipp wanted him to supply material for a counter-series to the International Jew.

Other questions that remain are exactly how Brasol came into contact with Ford and his agents, and how close that relationship actually was. Hapgood notes that Dr. Harris Houghton, who had collaborated with Brasol and Natalie De Bogory in the production of the 1918 Protocols, was the family physician of one C. C. Daniels. Daniels, in turn, was the chief of the Ford detective agency that tracked and compiled information on suspect Jews. Moreover, De Bogory now worked for Daniels' agency.(70)

But the man who undoubtedly played the most important role in bringing Brasol into the Ford camp was the Boss's confidant and personal secretary, Ernest Gustav Liebold. As Neil Baldwin notes in his Henry Ford and the Jews, Liebold showed then-editor Pipp a letter from Brasol in April 1919, in which it was apparent that Liebold had already known him for some time.(71) Hapgood singled out Liebold as the one who had "persuaded the editors of The Independent to buy and publish the Brasol material."(72) Brasol reveals his appreciation of Liebold and Ford in a 1922 report on Russian monarchist activities in the United States sent to Baron Petr Vrangel. In it he praised Ford as a great man who had given generous help to the cause and someone especially approachable on the Jewish Question.(73)

For his part, Brasol, years later, under interrogation, denied having had any personal contact with Henry Ford--"I never met him in my life."(74) Not surprisingly, he also swore that "I had absolutely, just absolutely nothing to do with the publication, or rather the publishing of the Protocols by Henry Ford in his Dearborn Independent."(75) Anything to the contrary was just another scurrilous rumor. He did acknowledge having undertaken an assignment from legal firm working for Ford (more on that below), and to having once spied Mr. Ford from a distance while touring a Dearborn plant, but that was it. Just what he was doing in Dearborn and who gave him the tour, he did not say.

Once again, Brasol was likely being technically truthful while simultaneously highly misleading. It's quite possible that he never met Henry Ford face to face or communicated directly with him; neither did most of the people who worked for Henry. According to the report of the Exclusion Hearing Board that considered Brasol's case in 1942, "subject was reported in the employ of Henry Ford when Ford published the Dearborn Independent and was said to be still in Ford's employ and active in Ford's Secret Service."(76) If this statement is correct, it would mean that Brasol continued to work for Ford at least until 1940.

In the meantime, and as might be expected, Hapgood's expose provoked a sharp response. The first blow emanated from Spiridovich, not Brasol. In fact, he made a federal case out of it. Interviewed by Bureau agents, the count pointed to the June 1, 1921, letter to him from Brasol, which was reproduced on page 18 of Hapgood's first installment. This was the letter in which Brasol boasted of his recent books doing more damage than pogroms. Spiridovich made no effort to deny the authenticity of the letter. Quite the opposite; he accused Hapgood or his agents (Pilenas?) of stealing it and other materials from his hotel room in Chicago. The Bureau man conducting the interview noted that "[Spiridovich] displayed a rather unusual hatred towards the Jews and anything Jewish. He told Agent that his mission in life was to disclose to the American public the hidden Jewish hand and propaganda ... in order to undermine the Government of the United States."(77)

Brasol himself struck back in a letter addressed to Hapgood dated February 16, 1923. It opened with, "Gratifying news has just reached me: It is rumored that you are about to leave this country for good, sailing for the Soviet El Dorado. I know you will enjoy meeting your friends 'Bill Haywood,' 'B[oris] Reinstein' and the rest of the 'American Colony.'(78) Further on, Brasol fulminated that "your name has been closely linked up with that of Charles Recht, one of those innumerable Jewish Communists who go to make up the Soviet outfit with all its ramifications and agencies around the globe."(79)

The gist of the letter was fairly simple: in his attack on Brasol, Ford, and others, Hapgood had done nothing to prove them wrong, but had demonstrated himself to be a tool of the very conspiratorial forces they struggled against. Nor was Brasol content with a personal rebuttal. Through Unity of Russia, he had numerous copies made and circulated to members, friends, and anyone else he thought might be interested.

Evidence of Brasol's continued involvement in Ford-related anti-Semitic gambits can be seen in two incidents from the mid 1920s. The first took place in 1924 and centered on the fate of the Russian imperial family and Nikolai Sokolov, the magistrate who had carried out an investigation of their deaths in 1919 under the auspices of the Kolchak regime. In the early 20s, Sokolov, along with his voluminous files, had relocated to Fontainebleau, near Paris. According to information Brasol gave the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) in 1924, "[Sokolov's] investigation showed conclusively that the murder of the Imperial family was instigated by Jews and the actual killing was done by a group of men composed, with the exception of three, entirely of Jews."(80) Brasol somehow learned of this information, and, "knowing Henry Ford's attitude towards the Jews and his unlimited means, he apparently conceived the idea of telling Ford about it, knowing that Ford would use it as anti-Jewish propaganda and at the same time, the Royalist factions would get a tremendous amount of publicity ...."

Brasol may have known Sokolov from his days as a tsarist investigator and prosecutor, or he may have encountered him on trips he made to Paris in the fall of 1922 and again in October 1923. In any event, Nikolai Sokolov arrived in Boston on February 5, 1924, and headed straight for Detroit. On arrival, he listed his "employer" as the Ford Motor Co. According to the above ONI report, Sokolov "brought with him photostatic copies of the documents and translations that were delivered to Ford."(81) The Auto King apparently bought them--despite being warned by Sokolov's associate, the Grand Duke Nikolai Romanov, that the contents of the dossier were fakes.(82) One can be sure that Brasol counseled otherwise. One can also wonder what role Brasol may have played in concocting the documents. Was this the same story he had pitched to Norman Thwaites way back in 1918?

The whole thing ultimately amounted to little, except for Ford's expenses. In October, Sokolov returned to France, where he died the following month. The story that Jews were responsible for the murder of Tsar Nicholas and his family is still repeated today, with the added bonus that the actual order to murder came from none other than Jacob Schiff.(83) If he didn't think of that himself, Brasol would really have appreciated the touch.

The next incident, and the only thing related to Ford that Brasol ever admitted to, stemmed from a libel suit brought against Ford by his old antagonist Herman Bernstein. In response to The International Jew, in 1921 Bernstein came out with The History of a Lie, a book detailing the origins and fraudulence of the Protocols. Not long after, the Dearborn Independent ran articles attacking Bernstein's character and reputation, and, in 1923, he came back with the suit. Ford's men, maybe Brasol himself, also dug up some articles Bernstein had written for the New York Evening Journal in which he alleged a White Russian conclave in Constantinople in 1921, where the participants had conspired "to kill off all the Jews all over the world."(84) Bernstein even produced supposed minutes--protocols--of these meetings with names and dates. Whether he meant this as a parody is unclear, but the Fordites apparently believed that if they could prove Bernstein a liar they would blow him and his suit out of the water.

As Brasol later described it, sometime in 1926, he was approached by the law firm representing Ford--Nicoll, Anable & Nicoll. He first was paid to examine the Bernstein articles, and after doing so "very carefully," he "determined the whole lot was "a flagrant forgery."(85) A few weeks later, the same firm engaged him to undertake a trip to Europe, where he would track down and interview individuals mentioned in Bernstein's articles. Since Brasol claimed to know many of them personally, this would make the task easier. Soon after, he left for Europe, came back with the evidence, submitted it to the law firm, and "that is that." Again, his efforts largely came to naught. The court refused to admit the evidence, and Ford finally settled; in 1927, he publicly repudiated and apologized for the whole antisemitic campaign. Whether he repudiated it personally is another question.

But Boris Brasol may have undertaken another, far more secretive and far more important mission for Ford. According to James Pool, in his book Who Financed Hitler, Brasol served as secret intermediary and bag man between Ford and the nascent Nazi Party.(86) We will examine that function, and other things concerning the tireless and sinister Mr. Brasol, in the second half of this essay.

(1.) Norman Hapgood, "The Inside Story of Henry Ford's Jew-Mania," Hearst's International, Part I, 14, 18, June 1922.

(2.) Boris Brasol, application for naturalization, January 15, 1926.

(3.) My thanks to Vladimir Abarinov for his help in obtaining this information.

(4.) Pilenas to Nathan Isaacs, Nathan Isaacs Papers (hereafter NIP), Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, Box 2, File 12, July 7, 1931.

(5.) "Boris Brasol," Maria Vrangel Collection, Hoover Institution Archives (hereinafter HIA), Stanford University, Box 19, File 13.

(6.) "Memorandum for Assistant Attorney General Mr. Berge," Federal Bureau of Investigation (hereafter FBI), File 100- 22487, Section I, 5, April 17, 1941.

(7.) James Pool, Who Financed Hitler: The Secret Funding of Hitler's Rise to Power 1919-1933 (New York: Pocket Books, 1998).

(8.) "Serbia Remembers Archibald Reiss," <http://www.b92net/eng/news/societyarticle.php?yyy=> 2009&mm=08&dd=09nav\_id=61059 (April 21, 2012).

(9.) Hapgood, VI, 71, November 22, 1922.

(10.) FBI, File 100-22487, 5.

(11.) Hapgood, VI, 71, November 22, 1922.

(12.) Ibid.

(13.) See, e.g., Steven G. Marks, How Russia Shaped the Modern World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 172-74.

(14.) Which was at 16 Fontanka.

(15.) M. I. Gaiduk, "Utiug," materialy i fakty o zagotovitel'noi deiatel'nosti russkikh voennykh komissii v Amerike (New York, 1918), 92.

(16.) Ibid., 46-47.

(17.) Brasol, "Memorandum," Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC, File 861-20211, October 9, 1917; appended to Boris Bakhmeteff to Frank Polk, October 12, 1919, Department of State, and to "Col. Nekrassov," Russia Posol'stvo (U.S.A.), HIA, Box 370, File 12.

(18.) "PILENAS, Casimir; pseudonym WALLENROD." Okhrana Records, Paris, Deep Cover Agent (L-Z)-Russian, HIA, File 111F.

(19.) Records of the Security Service, National Archives, United Kingdom, MI5,KV2/502, CX 625.

(20.) "Memorandum Concerning Mr. Palmer and his Relations with Boris Brasol," NIP, c. 1933.

(21.) Pilenas, "Re: Bolshevism," NARA, Records of the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Division (hereafter MID) File 10058-285, February 19, 1919.

(22.) American Jewish Yearbook 5683 (1922-23) (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1922), 205.

(23.) The New York Times (hereafter NYT), July 9, 1915, 20.

(24.) Gaiduk, 10.

(25.) Robert Singerman, "The American Career of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," American Jewish History, Vol. 71 (1981): 48-78.

(26.) Neil Baldwin, Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 140.

(27.) Pilenas to Isaacs, March 25, 1933, NIP, 2.

(28.) Berge, FBI, 100-22487, 4.

(29.) Memorandum, NIP, 2.

(30.) Ibid.

(31.) "Memorandum for the Director Re, Boris Brasol," FBI, File 100-2487,March 14, 1944, 2.

(32.) "Confidential Report of the Exclusion Board Hearing, Case of Boris Brasol," II SC 91, FBI, File 100-15704, February 19, 1943, 14-15.

(33.) L. S. Perkins, "In Re: Confidential Work," Bureau of Investigation (hereafter BI), File 8000-14, October 14, 1917.

(34.) Brasol to Charles Scribner, June 29, 1920. Library of Congress, Boris L. Brasol Papers, Box 39.

(35.) Affidavit, FBI, File 100-22487, June 30, 1952.

(36.) George Bodman, recommendation letter, FBI, File 100-15704, April 28,1919.

(37.) For some interesting details on Bodman, see "History of the Bodman Foundation," <http://achelis-bodman-fnds.org/history_b.html> (April 21, 2012).

(38.) On the broader issue of antisemitism in the MID, see Joseph Bendersky, The "Jewish Threat": Antisemitic Politics of the U.S. Army (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

(39.) MID, File 10110-920, Report #8, December 9, 1919.

(40.) Ibid., Report #12, December 23, 1919.

(41.) Ibid., Report #5, November 27, 1919.

(42.) Ibid., Report #31, February 19, 1919.

(43.) Ibid., Report #9, December 11, 1919.

(44.) Ibid.

(45.) Ibid., "Memorandum for Col. Dunn," December 20, 1919.

(46.) Ibid., "Memorandum for Major Brown," December 19, 1919, 4.

(47.) Max Wallace, The American Axis: Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh and the Rise of the Third Reich (New York: St. Martin's, 2003), 62-63.

(48.) Unsigned to Thwaites, Sir William Wiseman Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, Box 10, File 263, June 30, 1918.

(49.) Thwaites to Wiseman, Sir William Wiseman Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, Box 3, File 84, December 9, 1918, 3.

(50.) Memorandum, NIP, 1.

(51.) Perkins, "In re: 'Struggling Russia,' " BI, #8000-121103, June 11, 1919.

(52.) Frank Francisco, "In re: Anarchist Activity, Alexander Brailowsky," BI, #375726, August 13, 1919.

(53.) "Exclusion Hearing," FBI, File 100-15704, 17.

(54.) Yuri Begunov, Tainye sily v istorii Rossii: sbornik statei i dokumentov (Moscow: Patriot, 2000), 241-263.

(55.) Walter Laqueur, Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict (Boston: Little Brown, 1965), 132.

(56.) "Notes and Comment on Foreign Affairs," NYT, February 19, 1905.

(57.) Maj. Gen. Count Cherep-Spiridovich, The Secret World Government, or "The Hidden Hand" (New York: Anti-Bolshevist Publishing Association, 1926).

(58.) "Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem: History and Lineage Charts since 1797," <http://www.spirituallysmart.com/History_After_Malta.html> (accessed April 10, 2012).

(59.) "Investigator's Report on Boris Brasol," FBI, File 100-22487, December 5, 1941, 2.

(60.) Laqueur, 131.

(61.) Hapgood, I, June 1922, 17.

(62.) Hapgood, II, July 1922, 14.

(63.) "Maurice Leon, Lawyer-Author, Dies in North," The Palm Beach Times, October 11, 1952, 3.

(64.) Hapgood, V, October 1922, 39, 110.

(65.) Pilenas to Isaacs, NIP, March 8, 1925.

(66.) Memorandum for Berge, FBI, File 100-22487, I, 2,

(67.) Pilenas to Isaacs, NIP, November 25, 1921, and February 18, 1922.

(68.) Pilenas to Isaacs, NIP, December 25, 1921.

(69.) Pilenas to Isaacs, NIP, April 30, 1922.

(70.) Hapgood, IV, September 1922, 47.

(71.) Baldwin, Henry Ford and the Jews, 81.

(72.) Hapgood, I, 18.

(73.) "Ocherk-deiatel'nosti russkikh monarkhichskikh'organizatsiia v SeveroAmerikanskikh' Soedinennykh' Shtatakh," Maria Vrangel Collection, HIA, Box 149, File 39, September 1922, 1-2.

(74.) "Exclusion Hearing," FBI, File 100-15704, 15, 17.

(75.) Ibid., 12.

(76.) Ibid., 8.

(77.) "General Count Cherep-Spiridovitch, Anti-Bolshevist," FBI, Chicago, File 62-531-9, July 19, 1922.

(78.) "Big Bill" Haywood was an American radical and one-time head of the International Workers of the World who had taken refuge in Moscow. Boris Reinstein was a Russian-born socialist activist who became a U.S. representative to the Communist International.

(79.) Charles Recht was an attorney who represented Soviet organizations and later the Soviet government in the United States.

(80.) Memorandum for Berge, FBI, File 100-22487, I, 6-7.

(81.) Ibid.

(82.) Anthony Summers and Tom Mangold, The File on the Tsar (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 173-175.

(83.) Juri Lina, Under the Sign of the Scorpion: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire (Referent: Stockholm, 2002), 247.

(84.) Exclusion Hearing, FBI, File 100-15704, 16.

(85.) Ibid., 17.

(86.) Pool, Who Financed Hitler, 87-88.

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