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The 1918 Attempt on the Life of Lenin: A New Look at the Evidence

On Friday, 30 August 1918, the day M. S. Uritskii, chairman of the Petrograd Cheka, was assassinated, Lenin was scheduled to address the Corn Exchange in the Basmannyi district of Moscow at 6:00 P.M. and the Mikhelson Armaments Factory in the Serpukhovskii section later. The first speech passed without incident; at the Mikhelson factory he gave the same fifteen-to-twenty minute speech he had delivered at the Corn Exchange, an attack on the forces of counterrevolution. In both locations he concluded his speech with the words "there is only one issue, victory or death!"[1] As Lenin returned to his car in the factory courtyard, three shots were fired and he fell to the ground with bullet wounds in his left shoulder and the left side of his neck; the third bullet hit a woman standing nearby. The workers accompanying him to his car ran off, crying, "they've killed him, they've killed him!" and the crowded courtyard emptied quickly.[2]

Moments later militiamen and factory Red Guards arrested several suspects and turned them over to the district Cheka. Among them was a young Jewish woman, Fania Kaplan, whom her Cheka interrogators initially described as a hysteric. She was soon declared to be the assailant, though she was unable to provide any information about the incident. At 10:40 P.M. Iakov M. Sverdlov, the chairman of the Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi Ispolnitel'nyi Komitet announced that an attempt had been made on Lenin's life, and placed responsibility for the attack on the Socialist Revolutionary party.[3] The Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee disclaimed responsibility for the assassination attempt. The Bolsheviks used this opportunity to attack their major political rivals, proclaiming the Socialist Revolutionaries to be neither socialist nor revolutionary. A few years later, during the 1922 Moscow show trial, the Socialist Revolutionaries would be formally charged and convicted of complicity in this attempt on Lenin's life. At the time of the event Fania Kaplan, the accused assassin, was also formally alleged to have been working on behalf of the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee.

Soviet historians follow the official version of Socialist Revolutionary involvement in the attempted assassination and assume that the accused assailant was a member of that party.[4] Western historians have, for the most part, adopted similar assumptions. Leonard Schapiro, for example, discounts the official 1922 charges against the Socialist Revolutionaries but accepts as fact the idea that Kaplan was a Socialist Revolu-

1. *Petrogradskaia pravda,* 4 September 1918, 1; *Pravda,* 30 August, 1918, 1.

2. David Shub, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 1966), 362.

3. *Pravda,* 31 August 1918, 1; "Ot Vserossiiskoi Chrezvychain Komissii" in *Pravda;* according to *Krasnaia gazeta,* 31 August 1918, 1, two people were detained. "K istorii pokusheniia na Lenina (neopublikovannye materialy)," compiled by I. Volkovicher, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 6–7 (1923), 277–280; V. Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis' v serdtse naroda" in *Neotvratimoe vozmezdie* [Moscow, 1973], 33–4; M. Latsis (Sudbars), *Dva goda bor'by na vnutrennem fronte* (Moscow, 1920), 4.

4. I. I. Mints, *God 1918-i* (Moscow, 1982), 515; *Istoriia Velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii,* ed. P. Sobolev (Moscow: Progress, 1967), 536; *Vystrel v serdtse revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1983), 7–8, 45, 210–220; N. Kostin, "Vystrel v serdtse revoliutsii," *Don* 4 (1968).

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tionary acting on her own initiative.[5] On the other hand, Adam Ulam generally accepts the Soviet version after briefly questioning both Kaplan's party affiliation and the Bolsheviks' proof of her guilt.[6] Soviet émigré historian Boris Orlov suggests that a member of the Socialist Revolutionary party, L. V. Konopleva, shot Lenin, but he does not consider all of the evidence or question his sources.[7]

Kaplan's responsibility for the assassination attempt is not at all obvious. Moreover, evidence suggests that Fania Kaplan was not a Socialist Revolutionary but, rather, an anarchist. To allege, as the Soviet authorities did, that Kaplan had personal ties with the Socialist Revolutionaries, is not to prove that she was a party member and certainly does not prove that the Socialist Revolutionaries were behind the attempted assassination. In general, historians have not looked critically enough at the relevant documents, especially the official records of Kaplan's Cheka interrogations published in 1923 in the journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*.[8]

In the early 1900s, after a decade of relative calm, terrorism had again become the order of the day in Imperial Russia. Several revolutionary organizations participated in the terrorist activity, principally the Socialist Revolutionary battle organization, the so-called Maximalists (who broke with the Socialist Revolutionaries in late 1905 and conducted their own terrorist campaign with particularly merciless executions of their victims) and the anarchists, who also became increasingly violent during the chaos of 1905–1907.[9]

Women played a prominent role in these organizations and performed numerous terrorist acts. Though personal motives or emotional instability may have been behind their deeds, such terrorists as Mariia Spiridonova, Aleksandra Izmailovich, Fruma Frumkina, and Dora Briliant became living revolutionary legends.[10] Many in these revolutionary circles, or even in terrorist groups, had been drawn in before they had sufficiently defined their ideological positions.[11] In August 1906 the government insti-

5. Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy. Political Opposition in the Soviet State. First Phase: 1917–1922* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 153–154. For instances of western acceptance of Socialist Revolutionary culpability, see Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 485–495; Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 416–417; Hellmut Andics, *Der Grosse Terror. Von den Anfängen der russischen Revolution bis zum Tode Stalins* (Vienna: Molden, 1967), 100–101.

6. Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 430.

7. Boris Orlov, "Mif o Fanni Kaplan," *Vremia i my* 2–3 (Tel Aviv: Vremia i my, 1975). On the other hand, M. Geller and A. Nekrich, in *Utopia u vlasti,* 2nd ed. (London, 1986), accept the official Soviet version of Kaplan's responsibility for the act and affiliation with the Socialist Revolutionary party.

8. "K istorii pokusheniia na Lenina (neopublikovannye materialy)," comp. I. Volkovicher, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 6–7 (1923), 275–285 (hereafter cited as *PR*).

9. For a brief but illuminating discussion of terrorist activity during these turbulent years, see Norman M. Naimark, "Terrorism and the Fall of Imperial Russia," Boston University lecture pamphlet (14 April 1986), 16–19.

10. There is some evidence supporting the theory that Spiridonova shot the local government official G. Luzhenovskii for personal reasons (see E. Breitbart, "'Okrasilsia mesiats bagriantsem . . .' ili podvig sviatogo terrora," *Kontinent* 28 [1981], 321–342). For instances of mental instability among female terrorists see Amy Knight, "Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party," *Russian Review* 38, no. 2 (1979): 152–153.

11. For a valuable discussion of female terrorists in the Socialist Revolutionary party battle organization, see Knight, "Female Terrorists," 131–159. For female Maximalists, see Paul Avrich, "The Last Maxi-

tuted effective measures to combat revolutionary terrorism, so that nearly all terrorists tried were convicted and usually executed or sentenced to hard labor (hereafter *katorga*). *Katorga* frequently led inexperienced young offenders into the camp of the revolutionary opposition.

Feiga Khaimovna Roitman, later known as Fania Kaplan, was typical of her generation of radicals. She was born into a Jewish family in the Ukrainian province of Volynia in 1887.[12] Her father was a teacher in the Jewish community and she had four brothers and three sisters. She was educated at home and soon left to become a milliner in Odessa. No later than 1906 Feiga Roitman began to use the name Kaplan and joined the anarcho-syndicalist group of the anarchist movement.[13] Carrying a passport issued in her new name but preserving her first name and patronymic, Feiga Khaimovna Kaplan, she came to Kiev, a city outside the Pale, in late December of 1906 and, together with two other young anarchists, made plans to commit a terrorist act against the Kiev governor-general. She and her two companions rented rooms in the third-class Kupecheskii Hotel in the center of Podol, the large Jewish quarter of Kiev.

On the night of 22 December an enormous explosion occurred in Kaplan's room, shaking the hotel and fatally injuring a maid who worked there. A large crowd gathered immediately. When Kaplan walked out of the building and was asked by the crowd what had happened, she replied, "I didn't do it . . . It wasn't me. . . . Leave me alone." A Kiev newspaper of the time reported that this response aroused suspicions and led to her arrest.[14] Both of Kaplan's accomplices managed to escape unharmed, while she was slightly injured by splinters in the leg, hand, and buttocks. A Browning revolver without cartridges was found in her room. She was not in the room at the time of the explosion and apparently did not know its cause; she refused to name any accomplices.[15] Her case was turned over to the local field court-martial for trial. Charged with armed assault (*vooruzhennoe napadenie*) because of the death of the maid, she was sentenced to death. In view of her youth, however, the sentence was commuted to detention for life in *katorga*.[16] She spent the year following the trial in an Odessa prison with a number of anarchist terrorists waiting for *katorga*.[17]

Following the trial she became known to the revolutionary world as Fania Kaplan,

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malist: An Interview with Klara Klebanova," *Russian Review* 32, no. 4 (1973): 413–420; and especially Klebanova's memoirs in Yiddish: Klara Klebanova-Halperin, "Erinerungen fun a revolutsionerke," *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), March 12–April 17, 1922.

12. Many different dates of birth are given for Kaplan. She contributed substantially to the confusion during her Cheka interrogation in 1918 when she claimed to be twenty-eight years old (*PR*, 282). Later Soviet sources provide various dates, but the most reliable, it seems, is Khomchenko, who was an official in the Soviet Ministry of the Interior with access to Kaplan's file. He states that Kaplan was executed by the Cheka when she was thirty-one (Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 33). Two early sources confirm his assertion, the Ukrainian language newspaper *Rada*, 24 December 1906, and the anarcho-communist *Burevestnik* (Paris) 10–11 (March–April 1908), 24; both claim that Kaplan was nineteen in December 1906.

13. *PR*, 283, 284; *Russkie vedomosti*, 24 December 1906, 4; *Rech'*, 24 December 1906, 4; *Burevestnik*, 23–24.

14. *Rada*, 24 December 1906, 3; *Russkie vedomosti*, 24 December 1906, 4; *Sputnik po Kievu*, 4th ed. (Kiev, 1910); N. Faleev, "Shest' mesiatsev voenno-polevoi iustitsii," *Byloe* 2 (1907), 66.

15. *Tovarishch*, 31 December 1906, 3; *Rech'*, 24 December 1906, 4.

16. *Rada*, 31 December 1906, 3, and 1 January 1907, 3; *PR*, 284; Faleev, "Shest' mesiatsov voenno-polevoi iustitsii," 66; *Russkie vedomosti*, 31 December 1906, 4; *Burevestnik*, 24.

17. Kaplan may have already been in *katorga* by December 1907; see *Pis'ma Egora Sazonova k rodnym*, 1895–1910 (Moscow, 1925), 158.

although the anarchists still referred to her as Feiga Roitman.[18] She probably did not assume the name Kaplan in 1906 specifically for purposes of revolutionary conspiracy. She most likely had acquired her new surname through marriage to a man named Kaplan who possessed the right to reside beyond the Pale.[19]

From early 1907 nearly all female terrorists were sent to the Maltsev prison of the Nerchinsk *katorga* in eastern Siberia. Kaplan was at Maltsev between 1908 and the spring of 1912 when some sixty female terrorists passed through the prison. These women lived a communal existence, sharing food, books, and parcels from home. More than half belonged to the Socialist Revolutionary party; the rest were divided almost equally between the Social Democrats (Jewish, Polish, and Lithuanian branches), and the anarchist communists. The overwhelming majority were between twenty-one and thirty years of age.[20] Despite their differing political affiliations, the female prisoners did not argue about party doctrine; they were firmly united in their ultimate goal of overthrowing the contemporary regime. "I considered myself to be a socialist with no particular party affiliation," Kaplan stated many years later.[21] Since female political prisoners in tsarist Russia were exempt from all work duties, prison typically became their only opportunity for intensive study. One of the prisoners called Maltsev prison "Our free [*vol'nyi*] university."[22]

Despite the relatively mild conditions in Maltsev, the sharp contrast between the prisoners' lives as active terrorists and their sudden confinement to years of inactivity had a profound and often traumatic effect on their mental stability. Several of the women suffered from chronic diseases, including mental illnesses of various types.

18. The mystery associated with her name derives largely from misunderstandings and inaccurate information provided by such well-known Socialist Revolutionaries as Zenzinov and Steinberg after Kaplan became famous in 1918. That they did not know Kaplan personally did not prevent them from misrepresenting the available data. The first Soviet commissar of justice, the prominent Left Socialist Revolutionary I. Steinberg, in his book *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist* (London: Metheun, 1935), refers to her on three occasions (100, 232, 236) as "Dora Kaplan," once quoting Sergei D. Sazonov's letter to his father, in which Sazonov does not mention Kaplan's first name at all (see *Pis'ma Egora Sazonova,* 158). Steinberg also quoted Spiridonova's letter to the Bolshevik Central Committee in 1918, in which she also omits Kaplan's first name (see *Otkrytoe pis'mo M. Spiridonovoi Tsentral'nomu komitetu partii bol'shevikov"* [Petrograd, 1918], 11). The same is true for V. Zenzinov's *Gosudarstvennyi perevorot admirala Kolchaka v Omske 18 noiabria 1918 g., Sbornik dokumentov* (Paris, 1919), 152. Zenzinov, like Steinberg, refers to "Dora" Kaplan using hearsay information. Western historians, relying heavily on these secondary sources, have only deepened the confusion surrounding Kaplan's name and party affiliation. See, for example, Schapiro, *Origin of the Communist Autocracy,* 153.

19. In 1908 her party's official press organ, *Burevestnik,* still referred to her as Roitman. Her husband may have been the future Bolshevik Max Kaplan, who in 1918 was working in the Bolshevik underground in the German-occupied Crimean city of Simferopol (V. Baranchenko, *Gaven* [Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1967], 97, 100). Women under police surveillance often concealed their identities through marriage; see, for example, I. V. Alekseev, *Provokator Anna Serebriakova* (Moscow, 1932), 19.

20. A. Pirogova, "Na zhenskoi katorge," *Katorga i ssylka* 59 (1929): 151, 154 (hereafter cited as *KS*); F. Radzilovskaia and L. Orestova, "Mal'tsevskaia zhenskaia katorga, 1907–1911 gg.," *KS* 59 (1929): 116–117, 129, 120–122; N. N. Shcherbakov, "Chislennost' i sostav politicheskikh ssyl'nykh Sibiri (1907–1917 gg.)," *Ssyl'nye revoliutsionery v Sibiri (XIX v.–fevral' 1917 g.),* vyp. I (Irkutsk, 1973), 232–233; A. Bitsenko, *KS* 7 (1923): 193.

21. *PR,* 285; Radzilovskaia, *KS,* 124–125; Pirogova, *KS,* 152.

22. Pirogova, *KS,* 151–152. During an inspection of Maltsevskaia Prison in 1908, a Petersburg police deputy pointed out that all the "dirty work" was assigned to the criminals, while the political prisoners did not work at all and spent their time exclusively for themselves ("Za zavesoi proshlogo [dokumenty iz 'okhranki']," *KS* 2 [1921]: 85). The prison administration was contacted through A. A. Bitsenko, the political elder for Kaplan's group.

The most tragic case, according to former prisoners, was Fania Kaplan. When she first arrived at the prison, she seemed to her fellow prisoners to be healthy and in good spirits, so that it was especially striking when she developed severe headaches lasting for several days at a time and during which she lost her sight. Finally, in the summer of 1909, she went completely blind.[23] She attempted suicide on at least one occasion, but the attempt was stopped by her friends, who thereafter never left her alone until she had adjusted to her blindness.[24] Gradually Kaplan regained her independence, learning to read with the help of the Braille alphabet and to take care of her personal needs without assistance.

In the spring of 1912, totally blind, Kaplan was transferred to the nearby Akatui Prison, where she acquainted herself with the other prisoners by touching their faces. One of these prisoners recalled her as "a young, beautiful woman with sightless eyes."[25] Since her pupils reacted to light, a sympathetic doctor urged her prison friends to seek permission from the authorities to transfer Kaplan to the prison hospital in Chita for special electric treatments.[26] In August 1912 she was transferred by special order of the military governor of the Zabaikal region to the Chita Hospital and, later, in 1913, to the hospital of the Irkutsk Prison for further treatment. One memoir states that after treatment her sight had apparently improved to some extent, since she was no longer in the "complete darkness in which she had lived for years."[27] After her hospitalization, Kaplan returned to Akatui, where she remained until finally released in 1917. She and the other political prisoners went to Chita where they remained until transportation could be arranged for their return to European Russia.

The group of women had become extremely close during their imprisonment, and, in fact, when news of the general amnesty came they refused to leave Akatui until two of their friends who were imprisoned as criminals were also released.[28] The women tended to maintain the close association established in prison. In April 1917, Kaplan went to Moscow with her close friend, the former terrorist Anna Pigit.[29] She stayed in Pigit's apartment in Moscow for one month and then left for medical treatment at a Crimean sanitarium for former political prisoners. Two months later Kaplan went to Kharkov to undergo further treatment and was still in the Kharkov hospital when news

23. In recalling the incident twenty-four years later, some of Kaplan's friends from Siberian prison offered reasons for believing her blindness to be a direct result of the 1906 explosion (Radzilovskaia, *KS,* 122–123). Other contemporary accounts indicate that the doctors did not actually know the cause of her affliction (see "Protokol doprosa Very Mikhailovny Tarasovoi" in *PR,* 281).

24. In *PR,* 281, her friend Tarasova mentions a different date for the onset of her blindness—January 1909. Radzilovskaia and Orestova, *KS,* 121–123; Pirogova, *KS,* 162–163.

25. Radzilovskaia and Orestova, *KS,* 121–123; Pirogova, 162–163; I. Kakhovskaia, "Iz vospominanii o zhenskoi katorge," *KS* 22 (1926), 184.

26. *PR,* 281; Radzilovskaia and Orestova, *KS,* 123. About the prison's doctor, N. V. Rogalev, see V. Pleskov, "Sredi sopok Zabaikalia (iz lichnykh vospominanii)," *KS,* 3 (1922): 51–52.

27. Radzilovskaia, *KS,* 123. Another sources suggests that Kaplan was blind in Akatui for five years and then partially regained her sight. A. Pankratov, "S katorgi," *Russkoe slovo* 1, no. 14 (April 1917): 4.

28. I. Zhukovskii-Zhuk, *KS,* 15 (1925): 63–65.

29. Kaplan's family apparently emigrated to the United States during her term in prison. Kaplan's friend Pigit had been involved in the 1906 attack on Stolypin's dacha on Aptekarskii Island. The Moscow apartment where Pigit and Kaplan stayed was actually that of Pigit's brother, David Savel'evich Pigit, who at the time was employed as secretary to the people's commissar of education, A. V. Lunacharskii. Three former Maltsev inmates, Pigit, Bitsenko, and Tarasova-Bobrova lived together there for many years after 1918 (*PR,* 281–284). On Anna Pigit, see A. Spridovich, *Partiia Sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i ee preshestvenniki 1886–1916,* 2nd ed. (Petrograd, 1918), 367–369; *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi biuleten'* 1 (Moscow, 1922), 37–43; *Vsia Moskva* (1918–1927).

of the October uprising arrived. She apparently greeted the event with less than full enthusiasm and soon went to Simferopol where representatives of socialist parties formed a non-Bolshevik government in late November 1917. She was offered a highly paid position in the municipal administration, where she seems to have worked with Faina Stavskaia, also a former anarchist. As a witness for the prosecution during the 1922 Moscow Socialist Revolutionary show trial, Stavskaia would claim to have been Kaplan's long-time friend.[30]

In January 1918 the Bolsheviks assumed power in Simferopol and one month later dissolved all existing organs of government, apparently causing Kaplan to lose her position.[31] At this time she began to think about using terrorism against Bolshevik leaders. She decided to leave for Moscow, where many of her former prison comrades were living, and may have told Stavskaia about her intentions to become involved in political terror there. In late February or early March Kaplan arrived in Moscow and again stayed in Pigit's apartment but did not make any serious effort to find employment. She saw many of her prison friends, including A. Bitsenko, who was now a member of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee and deputy of the VTsIK. One source indicates that she even visited the Kremlin, although the circumstances and her reasons are not known.[32] Her activities cannot be traced from that time until early September 1918, when the newspapers announced her execution.

On the day of the assassination attempt Lenin was ready to return to his car at approximately 8:00 P.M.[33] Kaplan had been detained at the factory entrance immediately upon her arrival, also at approximately 8:00 P.M.[34] Kaplan, therefore, was probably not seen at the factory before Lenin was shot. The records of her interrogations do not provide any details of her actions from the time she appeared at the factory until her arrest, although an interrogator would normally include such information as part of a thorough inquiry into such an important crime.[35] Lenin's chauffeur, S. K. Gil', and the Bolshevik secretary of the factory committee, N. Ia. Ivanov, did, however, provide information about her activities at the factory. Both testified that they saw Kap-

30. *PR,* 283–284; *Khronika sobytii v Krymu, 1917–1920 gg.* (Simferopol, 1969), 54; *V bor'be za Sovetskii Krym. Vospominaniia starykh bol'shevikov* (Simferopol, 1958), 10. Stavskaia, whose real name was Rufina Efremovna Stavitskaia, was well known among prominent Bolsheviks as an anarcho-communist activist. She was brought to Moscow from Simferopol as a defendant during the 1922 trial, and, in return for admission to the Bolshevik party, was used by the Cheka as a provocateur. She provided the prosecution falsified information on Kaplan and D. Donskoi, a Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee member. (Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge. The Origin and Consequences of Stalinism* [New York: Knopf, 1971], 382–383). Baranchenko, *Gaven,* 97, 113; *Pravda,* 22 July 1922, 3; B. A. Babina, "Fevral' 1922," *Minuvshee* 2 [Paris, 1986], 25, 78.

31. *Khronika sobytii v Krymu,* 65, 73.

32. *PR,* 281–285; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 35–36; Babina, "Fevral' 1922," 25–26; *Pravda,* 22 July 1922, 3. Kaplan may have visited the Kremlin with the assistance of either Bitsenko or Pigit's brother.

33. For the text of Lenin's speech, see *Petrogradskaia pravda,* 4 September 1918, 1; and E. Iampol'skaia, "V te dalekie gody," *O Vladimire Il'iche Lenine. Vospominaniia 1900–1922 gody* (Moscow, 1963), 378–379; A. Kozhukhov, "Na zavode Mikhelsona," in *O Lenine,* 428; *Imeni Vladimirova Il'icha* (Moscow, 1962), 129. In his biography of Lenin, David Shub confirms that Lenin arrived at Mikhelson on schedule and spoke for only a few minutes (Shub, *Lenin,* 321); see also *Pravda,* 31 August 1918, 1, 2). P. Posvianskii, comp., *Pokushenie na Lenina 30 avgusta 1918 g. Dokumenty, protsessa TsK Partii Sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, protokoly doprosa Kaplan i dr.,* 2nd rev. ed. (Moscow, 1925), 22, 35, 55.

34. *PR,* dopros 2, 282; dopros 4, 283.

35. *PR,* 282, 283.

lan at the factory before she was arrested. Their testimonies, however, contradict each other on many points and also lack internal consistency. Each testified on several occasions, and information from their initial statements is contradicted by later statements.

Ivanov described two different women in testifying about "the future assailant of Comrade Lenin." Immediately following the incident, he stated that he had observed Kaplan, before Lenin's arrival, looking at a display of newspapers and books at the factory. Testifying a few days later, after her execution, he confused her actions with those of M. G. Popova, the only bystander wounded in the incident. Popova was a storekeeper from the nearby Petropavlovskaia Hospital who was arrested and kept in custody under suspicion of having been Kaplan's accomplice. She was interrogated by the Cheka investigator V. E. Kingisepp and then released.[36] Probably Ivanov did not actually see Kaplan before she was taken into Cheka custody. His reliability as a witness is further undermined by his description of Kaplan's alleged accomplices. Initially he claimed that they included Popova and a sixteen-year-old high school boy, mentioned by none of the other witnesses. In his second testimony, published in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* and in a third version published in the newspapers on the fifth anniversary of the attempt, the student has been replaced by a seaman, while Popova is not mentioned at all.[37] The testimony of Gil′, who was recognized by the Soviet authorities as "the only real witness," also indicates that he did not really see Kaplan before her arrest, for he also confused Kaplan with Popova. He also incorporated into his testimony the actions of a third woman, a relative of Popova who happened to be present at the factory.[38]

The published evidence also suggests that no one in fact saw Kaplan shoot at Lenin. In his first testimony, Gil′ stated that he did not see the person who shot at Lenin but, after the first of the three shots, saw a woman's extended hand holding a pistol. Only in his later testimony did he claim to have seen the woman clearly and to have pursued her before returning to the wounded Lenin.[39] Gil′, whose testimony is the only one that discusses the actual moment of shooting, probably could not even have seen the assailant. Ivanov and another factory worker, A. M. Kozhukhov, stated that when Lenin came out of the factory, Gil′ was already seated behind the wheel of the car and

36. For the initial testimony of Ivanov, see *Pravda,* 3 September 1918, 4; *PR,* 278. For the second testimony see *Petrogradskaia pravda,* 4 September 1918, 1. Ivanov also mentions on various occasions that Kaplan was extremely nervous and smoked a lot and that she was wearing a head scarf. She did not smoke, and on that rainy night she was wearing a wide-brimmed white hat (*Nash Il′ich. Moskvichi o Lenine: Vospominaniia, pis′ma, privetstviia,* [Moscow, Moskovskii rabochi, 1969], 114–116; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis′," 33; Pirogova, *KS,* 161–162). A certain "eyewitness worker" provided even more confusing information, indicating that after the shots he saw two women running away, apparently referring to Kaplan and the wounded Popova (Posvianskii, *Pokushenie na Lenina,* 16–17). See also M. M. Glazunov and B. A. Mitrofanov, "Sledovatel′ po vazhneishim delam (k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia V. E. Kingiseppa)," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo,* no. 8 (1988): 102–103.

37. *Pravda,* 1 September 1918, 1; *PR,* 277–278; *Izvestiia,* 30 August 1923, 1. The changes clearly reflect the official point of view of the prosecution presented at the 1922 trial. The man wearing a seaman's uniform was identified as Novikov, who was said to have deliberately blocked the factory exit to allow Kaplan an unobstructed shot at Lenin. After 1923 no evidence contradicting Ivanov's final version was published.

38. *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 6 September 1918, 5; Gil′ also stated that the woman who asked him in the factory courtyard whether the speaker had yet arrived was blond; Kaplan had very black hair (*PR,* 277–278). For the various versions of his testimony, see S. Gil′, *Shest′ let s Leninym* (Moscow, 1947), 36–40. For a revised and supplemented version of his testimony, which has been widely popularized in the Soviet Union, see V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Tri pokusheniia na Lenina* (Moscow, 1930), 32–33.

39. *PR,* 278; Gil′, *Shest′ let,* 40.

had started the engine. The two factory workers claimed that Gil′ leaped out of the car only after the first shot and that "it was impossible to determine in the crowd, especially in the complete darkness of the courtyard, who shot, who could have committed such a crime."[40]

Two men, Deputy Commissar S. N. Batulin and Ivanov separately claimed to have apprehended Kaplan and to have arrested her. Their testimonies directly contradict each other, and neither man could have relied on hard evidence or material proof in arresting Kaplan. Ivanov stated that he arrested Kaplan on the street several blocks from the factory and identified her with the help of children who had run after her following the shooting. He had no evidence whatsoever that she had committed the crime, other than her alleged response to his question at the moment of the arrest: "Why did you shoot our great leader?" "I did it as a Socialist Revolutionary." This response, witnessed only by Ivanov himself, first appeared in *Rabochaia Moskva* in 1922 during the Moscow trial. In his most recent account of the events, published in 1969, Ivanov, however, states that at the time of the shooting he was inside the building seated at a table signing up Red Army recruits.[41]

A second version of Kaplan's arrest was provided by Batulin, the deputy commissar of the Red Army division stationed near the factory. Batulin at least seems to have been at the scene of the assassination attempt.[42] His testimony, however, suggests not only that he arrested Kaplan with no proof of her guilt whatsoever, but also that, based on his own description of the event, Kaplan could not have shot at Lenin from where he saw her standing. All evidence states that Lenin was shot at very close range, at a distance of no more than three or four steps, either from the side or from behind. Batulin said he was fifteen or twenty steps behind Lenin when the shots were fired and he did not see the assailant at that moment. Then he looked back and saw Kaplan standing behind him—a "strange-looking woman" who had apparently remained alone when the panicked crowd emptied the courtyard. When he asked her, "what are you doing here?" she replied with the same words she had used twelve years before after the hotel explosion: "Eto sdelala ne ia."[43]

It was only natural, Batulin stated later, to suspect her of something since she seemed so strange and was the only one whom he succeeded in accosting and stop-

40. *Imeni Vladimira Il′icha,* 131; *O Vladimire Il′iche Lenine,* 429; *Pravda,* 21 January 1926, 1.

41. *Rabochaia Moskva,* 22 June 1922; *Pravda* and *Izvestiia,* 30 August 1923, 2 and 1; *Nash Il′ich,* 114–116. During the 1922 trial the prosecution used Ivanov's story of Kaplan's arrest, in spite of its obviously contrived nature.

42. His testimony was published in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* along with Kaplan's interrogations and provided two slightly different accounts, one dated 30 August 1918, and the other 5 September, after Kaplan's execution. Since Ivanov was recognized at the trial as the person who officially arrested Kaplan, the portions of Batulin's testimony published in *Petrogradskaia pravda* appeared as the statements of "one witness" (I. Volkovicher, "Ochevidtsy o pokushenii," *Petrogradskaia pravda,* 30 August 30 1923, 2). A Bolshevik worker, N. V. Strelkov, claimed in 1935 to have been a witness of the attempted assassination. His account of the event, however, has never been made public (N. V. Strelkov, *Avtobiograficheskii ocherk Bol-′shevika-podpol′shchika zavoda im. Vl. Il′icha* [Moscow, 1935], 49).

43. *PR,* 279. In his testimony Batulin dismissed the story of Kaplan's high school student or seaman accomplice deliberately blocking the exit. He explained the obstructed exit in the most natural way: too many people trying to get out of the building at the same time. Another witness provides support for Batulin's explanation, saying that the entrance was blocked when the shots rang out (Posvianskii, *Pokushenie na Lenina,* 20, 24). Batulin changed his first short testimony of 30 August six days later, after Kaplan had already been executed, making corrections and additions that brought his testimony closer to conformity with the official 1918 pronouncement of her guilt. For both testimonies, see *PR,* 279–280. *Krasnaia gazeta* (Petrograd), 1 September 1918, 1. *Petrogradskaia pravda,* 30 August 1923, 2.

ping—the only one who did not flee the scene. Batulin then searched her, and, although he found nothing suspicious, he confiscated the suspected criminal's briefcase, which she held in one hand, and her umbrella, which she held in the other. He then asked her to follow him and apparently never questioned how, with both hands full, she would have been able to aim and fire a gun. On the way to the district Cheka Batulin, "sensing in her the person who had made the attempt on Comrade Lenin," asked, "why did you shoot Comrade Lenin?" She replied in a rather strange way: "Why do you have to know?" These words finally convinced Batulin that he had arrested the right person.[44] In spite of his certainty, Kaplan, even if she had been standing fairly close to Lenin with both hands free to hold a gun, would not have been a likely person to shoot him, in view of her history of blindness. D. D. Donskoi later described her appearance at the time of their brief meeting in the spring of 1918: "A rather pretty woman, but undoubtedly demented, and in addition to this with various afflictions: deaf, semi-blind, in a state of exaltation as if [she were] a holy idiot."[45]

At the district Cheka where she was first interrogated, Kaplan was again asked whether she had shot Lenin. Her reported reaction was characteristically abnormal: She suddenly jumped from her seat on a couch and cried, "I shot Lenin, I did!" She refused to say anything else, however, and would not sign the record of her interrogation.[46] Immediately after her initial interrogation at the local Cheka, she was transferred to the Lubianka, where government officials had gathered to interrogate her: Ia. M. Sverdlov, chairman of VTsIK; Dmitrii I. Kurskii, the people's commissar of justice; and Ia. Kh. Peters, the deputy chief of the Cheka and the official in charge of the investigation. According to Peters, Kaplan refused to provide any information about her identity, accomplices, possible connections with Boris Savinkov—the famous Socialist Revolutionary terrorist—and where she had obtained a pistol.[47]

The pistol used to shoot Lenin was not found in Kaplan's possession or at the scene of the crime on the evening of the shooting. According to the testimony of Gil', the

44. Batulin states further, however, that, after Kaplan's arrest, "someone" from the crowd recognized her as the person who had fired the shot at Lenin, but no name or evidence or testimony of this "someone" was ever produced (*PR,* 280, 282). Unnamed witnesses testified that several other people who were not from the factory approached Lenin immediately after his speech (Glazunov and Mitrofanov, "Sledovatel' po vazhneishim delam," 102).

45. Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 33–34; Ia. Kh. Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote v VChK v pervyi god revoliutsii," *Byloe* (new series) 2 (Paris, 1933), 121; Babina, "Fevral', 1922," 25.

46. *PR,* 280, 282; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 33–34; Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote," 129. Kaplan's blindness and other physical defects would seem to make her a less-than-ideal assassin. In addition, her nervous condition, remarked upon by all contemporary sources, and her clearly documented history of emotional instability, in combination with her lifelong devotion to the tradition of the Russian revolutionary movement, could perhaps partially account for her "confession." M. Iu. Kozlovskii, a senior member of the Commissariat of Justice who took an active role in the investigation, stated that Kaplan impressed him as "a nervously agitated person. She behaves distractedly, speaks disconnectedly and is in a state of depression" (quoted in V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Vospominaniia o Lenine 1917–1924* [Moscow, 1963], 283). When Peters began his interrogation at Lubianka during the night of 30–31 August, Kaplan behaved irrationally as if on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She suddenly burst out sobbing and cried to him, "Go away!" (Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 35; Peters, "Vospomineniia o rabote," 121–122). Her answers during the interrogations, as revealed by the records, were unsure: She forgot the district where she was born and was able to supply only the province and to say that she was twenty-eight years old, although she was in fact at the time thirty-one. Oddly enough, while strongly denying that someone else had taken part in the alleged conspiracy, she readily provided information about where she had been living in Moscow, which enabled the Cheka to find her comrades from *katorga.*

47. V. Mikhel's, "5-ia godovshchina pokusheniia na t. Lenina. Vospominaniia byv. zam. predsedatelia VChK tov. Ia. Petersa." *Izvestiia,* 30 August 1923, 1.

woman who shot Lenin threw the gun away at his feet, and he did not see anyone pick it up. On the other hand, a man who accompanied the wounded Lenin to the Kremlin, apparently his guard, told Gil′ that he had seen the pistol and had kicked it under Lenin's car. Two prominent Chekists, V E. Kingisepp and Ia. M. Iurovskii, went to the factory on 31 August to search for physical evidence and witnesses, but with no success. On 1 September the Cheka appealed to the general public to turn the pistol in. The records of Kaplan's interrogations and other relevant materials never mention the pistol, which was not presented as evidence in the course of the interrogations.[48] On 3 September *Izvestiia* finally reported that a Mikhelson factory worker (no name or testimony was provided) had brought the Cheka a revolver that had been forcefully taken away from Kaplan. Even then the Cheka could not establish that this pistol was even the same caliber as the weapon used in the assault, since the bullets fired on 30 August were still in Lenin's body.[49] This information, however, made no difference to Kaplan. The official investigation was concluded on 2 September and, if Kaplan was still alive at that time, she was in custody at the Kremlin and about to be executed.[50]

Lenin's testimony was not considered during the investigation. He seems to have been the only person who could have seen the assailant. An account of Lenin's injury was published for the first time in 1923 by two of the doctors who had treated him at the time, V. A. Obukh and B. S. Veisbrod. They state that Lenin was not killed by the bullet that struck him in the neck because he had suddenly turned his head at the moment of the shot.[51] He may possibly have seen the assailant in time to turn away. After he was shot Lenin did not lose consciousness but attempted to calm and control the panicked people around him: "Comrades, quiet! It is not important! Remain orderly. . . ."[52] Lenin's first question to Gil′ was "did they catch him or not?" Gil′ remarked upon Lenin's use of the masculine pronoun for the first time in print many years later, when he stated, "he probably thought he had been shot by a man."[53]

In the first days after he was shot Lenin was very anxious to know who had done it, but the identity of the arrested suspect was concealed from him. Unable to get any answers from his fellow Bolsheviks, he repeatedly questioned his doctors, but without success.[54] Lenin's persistent desire to find out who had shot him and the Cheka's failure

48. Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis′," 36; *PR,* 278; *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 1 September 1918, 3.

49. This glaring gap in the case was not closed until the Moscow trial four years later, when the provocateur Semenov testified that he had given the pistol to Kaplan, along with some poisoned bullets (N. Krylenko, *Za piat′ let 1918–1922* [Moscow-Petrograd, 1923], 293). The protocols of the Cheka investigation stated that a Mikhelson factory worker, A. V. Kuznetsov, brought the pistol and the bullets to the Lubianka on 2 September. According to his testimony, he picked it up immediately after Kaplan "dropped it" (Glazunov and Mitrofanov, "Sledovatel′ po vazhneishim delam," 102).

50. Kaplan may have been shot by the Cheka on 31 August 1918, rather than on 3 September as officially announced (V. Vladimirova, *God sluzhby sotsialistov kapitalistam* [Moscow-Leningrad, 1927], 303).

51. "U rannenogo Il′icha. Po vospominaniiam vrachei-kommunistov Obukha i Veisbroda" in *Pravda,* 30 August 1923, 1. V. S. Veisbrod, "Zhivoi Il′ich," in *Vospominaniia o Vladmimire Il′iche Lenine,* (Moscow, 1957) 2: 402.

52. *Bednota,* 1 September 1918, 1.

53. Gil′, *Shest′let,* 41; *O Vladimire Il′iche Lenine,* 24.

54. "Razgovor po priamomu provodu tov. Sverdlova s tov. Zinovevym," in the evening edition of *Krasnaia gazeta,* 1 September 1918, 1. The appeal for information published on 3 September and signed by Bonch-Bruevich on behalf of the Sovnarkom may have been an attempt by Lenin to bypass the official investigation and get information about the shooting directly from the public, rather than through the Cheka or VTsIK (*Izvestiia VTsIK,* 3 September 1918, 4). A week or two later, Maksim Gor′kii visited Lenin and expressed his indignation at the attempted assassination. Later he recalled that Lenin replied in the tones of a man dismissing a fact that no longer interested him: "A brawl. Nothing to be done. Everyone acts in his own

to find a likely suspect were perhaps the factors that forced the Cheka leaders and Sverdlov, head of state during Lenin's incapacity, to speed up the investigation and complete it before Lenin's return to full power. Similarly, at the 2 September meeting of VTsIK, the members were not informed about the current status of the investigation or about the suspect's identity. According to one source, before that meeting Kaplan had been secretly moved from Lubianka to a basement room under Sverdlov's Kremlin apartment. The transfer was conducted by the commandant of the Kremlin, P. D. Mal'kov, on orders from Sverdlov.[55]

Most sources indicate that Kaplan was executed on 3 September, the day after her transfer to the Kremlin. Her name appears on the list of "counterrevolutionaries" executed in connection with the attempt on Lenin and assassination of Uritskii.[56] In 1958, Mal'kov revealed in his *Zapiski* (written with the help of Sverdlov's son) that he shot Kaplan on 3 September in the Kremlin courtyard on orders from Sverdlov. Sverdlov's direct order to Mal'kov to shoot Kaplan (contrary to the original report that the order had been issued and carried out by the Cheka) indicates that Sverdlov may have been particularly interested in making sure that Kaplan was executed. When Mal'kov asked Sverdlov where to bury Kaplan's body, the secretary answered, "we are not going to bury Kaplan. The remains are to be destroyed without a trace."[57]

The numerous inconsistencies between this account and the original official reports of Kaplan's execution, along with the revisions in subsequent editions of Mal'kov's memoirs further confuse our understanding of the date and circumstances of Kaplan's death. For decades Kaplan was rumored to be alive and imprisoned. Numerous witnesses claimed to have seen her after 1918 in various Siberian labor camps or in prisoner transports or to have received books from her at the Butyrki Prison library, where she was said to have been assigned to work as a librarian.[58]

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way" (M. Gor'kii, "V. I. Lenin," *Vospominaniia o Lenine* [Moscow, 1969] 2: 255). This reaction could probably explain why the Cheka succeeded in convincing Lenin, if they did, that Kaplan had been his assailant. At the time pressing matters of state kept him from concentrating on tracing the sources behind the attempt on his life, especially since a perpetrator had apparently been found and shot. Lenin allowed the matter to drop.

55. Perhaps the members of VTsIK were not kept up to date because representatives of leftist socialist groups were still members of VTsIK. They probably would have demanded detailed information on the evidence produced by the investigation and would also have protested against the death penalty for Kaplan, a demented former revolutionary. Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 37; P. Mal'kov, "Zapiski Komendanta Kremlia," *Moskva* 11 (1958), 136–137; *Piatyi sozyv VTsIK. Stenograficheskii otchet. Moskva, 1918,* 10–12, 87–88.

56. *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 4 September 1918, 5; in *Ezhenedel'nik chrezvychainykh kommissii po bor'be s kontrrevoliutsiei i agitatsiei,* no. 6 (27 October 1918), 27. Kaplan's name was thirty-third on the list of those executed in connection with the affair.

57. Mal'kov, "Zapiski," 137. Mal'kov's memoirs were published in four editions, and were substantially revised each time. The revisions in connection with Sverdlov's participation in the execution of Kaplan are especially marked. For example, the fact that Kaplan was placed under Sverdlov's quarters in the Kremlin is mentioned by Mal'kov only in the first edition. See Mal'kov, *Zapiski,* 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1959), 159–161 (the first edition of the memoirs came out in the form of an article, as cited above); 3rd. ed. (Moscow, 1961), 160–162; 4th ed. (Moscow, 1987), 201–203. Mal'kov remarks that Sverdlov moved into Lenin's office on the very night Lenin was shot (Mal'kov, *Zapiski,* 2nd ed., 160–161). According to Bonch-Bruevich, during Lenin's recovery, Sverdlov once said, "You see, Vladimir D'mitrievich, we can manage without Lenin," which greatly surprised the far-from-naive Bonch-Bruevich (Bonch-Bruevich, *Vospominaniia,* 293). Sverdlov also found various pretexts to delay Lenin's return to full power following his injury (see Mal'kov, "Zapiski," 138–139).

58. A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation,* pts. III–IV (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 525. See also Angelica Balabanoff, *Impressions of Lenin*

No real evidence supports the claim that Kaplan was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary party. The allegations of a connection between Kaplan and the Socialist Revolutionaries originated with the VTsIK announcement on the night of the attack that the Socialist Revolutionaries were masterminds of a plot against Bolshevik leaders. The next day *Pravda* officially reported that the Cheka still had not been able to identify the woman who had shot Lenin the day before, but that her affiliation with the Socialist Revolutionary party and the Samara government led by the Socialist Revolutionaries had already been established. The alleged Socialist Revolutionary connection was a sufficient pretext for the Bolsheviks to destroy their major political rivals. The official announcement had stated that it was because of "the role this party played in the assassination of Uritskii and the assault on Lenin" that the Cheka had launched mass arrests of the Socialist Revolutionaries following the attempt on Lenin's life. The arrests clearly had been prepared before the terrorist acts.[59]

Kaplan's interrogation records suggest that the Cheka was well aware that the Socialist Revolutionaries were not behind the attempt. Looking for Kaplan's motive, the Cheka sought to establish whether she had been acting out of a desire for personal revenge or committing a deliberate act of political terror against the Bolsheviks. During the interrogations she was asked if any of her friends had been arrested or executed by the Cheka, a line of questioning that would probably have been unnecessary in the case of an assassination attempt motivated by political rivalry. Kaplan, whose only known affiliation was with the anarchists, repeatedly denied any connection with any organization or individual, including the Socialist Revolutionaries. For its part, the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee denied all complicity in the attempt on Lenin's life. Even the photograph of Kaplan in the Socialist Revolutionary archives, which was used by the Cheka in their 1922 indictment against the Socialist Revolutionaries, was merely one item in a file assembled by party secretary S. V. Morozov in 1919, well after Kaplan's death. Morozov denied ever having known Kaplan.[60] Nevertheless, the official attempts to establish Kaplan's association with the party continued; Kaplan was linked at various times with Victor Chernov's group and that of Savinkov, even though the latter had left the party in September 1917.[61]

Exiled party members also denied that Kaplan was a Socialist Revolutionary, as did members of the party's central committee during the 1922 Moscow trial. At that trial, members of the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee were accused of complicity in the 1918 attempt on Lenin's life, among other "crimes against the Soviet State."[62] All evidence of this complicity was hearsay and was based exclusively on the testimonies of provocateurs who during the trial were both defendants and witnesses

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(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 12–13; A. Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 187 and Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin* (New York: Pioneer, 1937). Similar rumors continue to surface. One recent Soviet émigré reports that during his 1956 turn in the Soviet army, residents of Poduzhem'e, a remote Karelian village on the Kem' River near the White Sea, showed him the house in which they asserted that Fania Kaplan had lived for twenty years and where she had died only three years earlier, in 1953 (interview with I. Garelick, conducted by this writer in New York City, 23 November 1986).

59. *Pravda,* 31 August 1918, 1; *Pravda,* 5 September 1918, 3; D. L. Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia v SSSR,* 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1980) 2: 222.

60. *Pravda,* 6 September 1918, 2. *PR,* 282–285; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 33–38; Schapiro, *Origin of the Communist Autocracy,* 153n; Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia* 2: 218–219.

61. *PR,* 283–284; *Pravda* and *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 31 August–4 September 1918; *Piatyi sozyv, VTsIK. Stenograficheskii otchet. Moskva, 1918* (Moscow, 1919), 10; M. Latsis (Sudbars), *Dva goda bor'by,* 24.

62. *Dvenadtsat' smertnikov. Sud nad Sotsialistami-revoliutsionerami v Moskva* (Berlin, 1922), 66; N. Krylenko, *Za piat' let 1918–1922* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 288.

for the prosecution. These provocateurs were former members of the most extreme left-wing Socialist Revolutionary groups—Narod and the so-called Menshinstvo PSR. Both the accused central committee members and their chief advocate, the Belgian socialist Emil′ Vandervelde, denounced the assassination charges as police fabrications.[63] During the trial the provocateur I. S. Dashevskii testified that he had known Kaplan since May 1918 when she had worked in the Moscow branch of the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee. His statement provoked immediate and angry denials from the indicted representatives of the Moscow group, especially from E. M. Ratner—at that time he had been party cashier and was in charge of party resources, including collection of membership dues. Morozov and E. M. Timofeev, who was also well informed about membership, vigorously denied any knowledge of, or acquaintance with, Kaplan.[64]

Despite these protests, Kaplan's affiliation with the Socialist Revolutionary party was accepted as established fact during the 1922 show trial. The prosecution, thus, only had to establish the existence of personal ties between Kaplan and the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee. This necessary connection was provided at the trial by two witnesses for the prosecution, G. I. Semenov and Faina Stavskaia. The latter had been brought to Moscow from Simferopol especially for the trial and was introduced at the proceedings as an old friend of Kaplan's from Siberian *katorga,* where Stavskaia had in fact never been imprisoned.[65] Semenov testified that a meeting be-

63. G. I. Semenov and L. V. Konopleva were the most notorious of these provocateurs. Both had worked for the political police since about 1918. See the testimony that M. A. Teslenko, an acquaintance of Semenov in 1918, gave to the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee in Berlin on 18 March 1920. ("Pokazaniia M. A. Teslenko" in Stanford, Calif., Hoover Institution Archives, Nikolaevskii Collection, Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionnerov, #7 Box 1 Folder 19.) The most complete discussion of the trial is presented by Marc Jansen in *A Show Trial Under Lenin. The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow, 1922* (The Hague, 1982), 24–26, 144–146, 86–90, 183; see also B. Sokolov, "Zashchita Uchreditel′nogo sobraniia," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* (Berlin, 1924) 13: 44–46; B. Dvinov, *From Legality to the Underground (1921–1922)* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1968), 114, 138. See records of the ninth day of the trial in *Pravda,* 18 June 1922, 3; L. Konopleva, "Pokazaniia Lidii Konoplevoi," *Pravda,* 28 February 1922, 1; G. Semenov (Vasil′ev), *Voennaia i boevaia rabota Partii Sotsialistov-revoliutsionnerov za 1917–18 gg.* (Berlin, 1922), 37–40. *Pravda,* 18 June 1922, 3. Vandervelde stated, "it is absolutely clear that all these charges were fabricated later by Semenov in collaboration with his defenders," the GPU (*Dvenadtsat′ smertnikov,* 35). Semenov played a similar role during N. I. Bukharin's trial in 1938 (Jansen, *Show Trial under Lenin,* 183).

64. For the replies of Ratner, Morozov, and Timofeev, see *Pravda,* 22 July 1922, 3.

65. See the report entitled, "Pokazaniia Stavskoi" in *Pravda,* 22 July 1922, 2. During the civil war Stavskaia and her Bolshevik husband, V. Baranchenko, played an active role in the Bolshevik underground in the Crimea when the region was controlled by various anti-Bolshevik forces. Like all of the other provocateurs who were witnesses for the prosecution in the 1922 trial, Stavskaia was released after the trial with no punishment. She returned to Simferopol. After 1924 she and her husband moved to an apartment in one of the prestigious Moscow buildings reserved for privileged employees of the All-Russian Council for the People's Economy (VSNKh). She was soon permitted to join the Communist party, which did not, however, prevent her from being shot in 1937 by her former protectors, the NKVD (*Minuvshee,* 26, 78; Baranchenko, *Gaven,* 7, 113; "Rech′ zashchitnika Kona," *Pravda,* 5 August 1922). Stavskaia probably knew Kaplan not from Siberian prison, as she testified at the trial, but from Simferopol in 1918, before Kaplan returned to Moscow. Another possibility was that Stavskaia met Kaplan before she was sentenced to *katorga* in early 1907 (*Z Pola Walki* 4, no. 40 [1967], 176). Both women belonged at that time to the anarcho-communist movement in southern Russia. Neither of these theories, however, is confirmed by any source. There is not enough evidence to establish that Stavskaia ever knew Kaplan. None of Kaplan's friends from *katorga* even mention Stavskaia in their numerous memoirs published in *Katorga i ssylka.* On the other hand, among the numerous trial participants, one person certainly knew Kaplan quite well—A. Bitsenko,

tween Kaplan and the defendant D. D. Donskoi, a central committee member, took place shortly before the August 1918 shooting. Semenov also claimed that the topic of a terrorist act against Lenin came up at this meeting. His testimony fit very neatly into the prosecution's story of Socialist Revolutionary involvement in the attempt and provided the chief prosecutor, Nikolai Krylenko, all he needed to condemn the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee for the attempted assassination. Although Donskoi confirmed that he had met with Kaplan, he never said Semenov was present at the meeting. Evidence suggests that the meeting had occurred shortly after Kaplan's return to Moscow from Simferopol.[66] After the trial, Donskoi confided to a party comrade that Kaplan had never been a member of the Socialist Revolutionary party, or even associated with any of its members either in *katorga* or thereafter and that no one even knew her except for a few former prisoners from Akatui and Maltsev.[67]

None of Kaplan's fellow former prisoners testified at the Moscow trial. Instead, the information about her was provided by prosecution witnesses, all of whom, except Stavskaia, were former members of the Socialist Revolutionary party. Stavskaia, however, was also presented at the trial as a former Socialist Revolutionary, despite the fact that her only known party affiliation before the trial was with the anarchists. Except for Stavskaia, none of the witnesses had known Kaplan; they differ in their descriptions of her appearance and her activities in preparation for the attempt on Lenin. They attribute to her deeds she never committed, and possibly was incapable of committing, and habits she never had. Semenov found Kaplan (who, we should recall, was deaf, chronically nervous, and semiblind) to be the "best perpetrator" to shoot Lenin; she impressed him as a true revolutionary terrorist.[68] Other prosecution witnesses (such as L. V. Konopleva, P. N. Pelevin, F. V. Zubkov and F. F. Fedorov-Kozlov) also failed to mention her striking physical problems, which were noticeable even to her Cheka interrogators in 1918. She emerged from the trial transcripts as a cold-blooded and experienced terrorist of the prerevolutionary Socialist Revolutionary–Maximalist type, something she had never in fact had a chance to become, if indeed the potential existed in her at all.[69]

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her old friend from *katorga* and Moscow. Bitsenko served at the trial as the attorney for one of the provocateurs, Fedorov-Kozlov; she was, however, never asked by the prosecution to provide any information about Kaplan despite the fact that the Cheka was aware of the 1918 relationship between Bitsenko and Kaplan (*PR,* 283; *Pravda,* 5 August 1922; "Rech' zashchitnika Bitsenko").

66. Semenov, *Voennaia i boevaia* rabota, 38. Three memoir sources confirm that Kaplan saw Donskoi and probably other Socialist Revolutionary leaders, such as Liberov (who, however, did not testify at the trial about his meeting with Kaplan), on only one occasion when she returned to Moscow in the spring of 1918: Zenzinov, *Gosudarstvennyi perevorot,* 152–153; E. Olitskaia, *Moi vospominaniia* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1971) 2: 143; Babina, "Fevral', 1922," 25.

67. Babina, "Fevral', 1922," 25–26. Babina, who was also present at the trial in 1922, accepted the prosecution's story regarding the guilt of the Socialist Revolutionary party; only later when she shared a prison cell with other party comrades at Butyrki did she find out about Kaplan's story from Donskoi. The pressure upon the accused members of the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee during the trial was so great that such long-time revolutionaries as Liberov (who was in charge of Socialist Revolutionary military operations in Moscow in 1918 and maintained a safe house for Socialist Revolutionaries returning from the provinces) were convinced by the prosecution's evidence. Liberov told Olitskaia in 1932 that the party did not do enough to prevent Kaplan from attempting to kill Lenin, although he never confirmed that Kaplan had been affiliated with the Socialist Revolutionary party (Olitskaia, *Moi vospominaniia,* 143).

68. Semenov, *Voennaia i boevaia rabota,* 37–38.

69. See, for instance, the testimony of Pelevin in *Pravda,* 21 July 1922, 3; of Zubkov and Kozlov in the same issue of *Pravda;* of Konopleva in the same issue as well as in the issue of 28 February 1922, 1. To

The confusion among historians regarding the validity of the charges against Kaplan and her party affiliation apparently results from the 1923 publication in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* of the records of her interrogation immediately following her arrest. Despite its obvious selectivity and inconclusiveness, this publication has served as the primary and nearly exclusive source of evidence on the case for the generations of historians who have dealt with this attempt on Lenin's life.[70] The published records of the 1922 Moscow trial show that the prosecution and its "witnesses" used the then-unpublished records of the 1918 interrogations extensively. The original 1918 interrogation records were obviously edited specifically for the 1922 trial and subsequent publication in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* since they contain many details that could not possibly have been known in 1918.[71]

A number of notable inconsistencies occur among the sources. For example, in 1918 the name of the alleged assassin was not known for several days after the attempt, and was first announced only on 3 September, more than three days after the investigation began. According to *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* however, this information was provided almost immediately after Kaplan's arrest.[72] According to the memoirs of an interrogator, Kaplan did not give her married name, and the Cheka was unable to establish it for several days. In a 1973 article, V. Khomchenko, who used the Kaplan files deposited in the Soviet archives, supports Peters's statement that, when the chief investigator first entered the interrogation room at Lubianka and called Kaplan by the name she had claimed when arrested, she failed to respond. The name she gave at the time of her arrest is unknown, but a Union of Railway Workers membership card that was found in her briefcase had been issued in the name of Mitropol'skaia. Kaplan later denied knowing that the card was in her possession. The records in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* however, state that she admitted finding the card but said she never used it. Curiously, the Mitropol'skaia story occurs only in the most recent publication, Khomchenko's article. This name would appear to be the one Kaplan (or her alleged accomplices) used to conceal her identity.[73]

At the time of Kaplan's execution, the authorities had not succeeded in establishing her maiden name, although they had interrogated more than forty people in the course of the four-day Cheka investigation. Kaplan's friends from Siberian prison (Pigit, Radzilovskaia, and Tarasova-Bobrova) were brought to Lubianka to identify Kaplan, but they had known her only as Fania Kaplan. Even the official newspaper reports pub-

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compare descriptions of Kaplan given by people actually acquainted with her, see Radzilovskaia, Orestova, and Pirogova in *KS; PR,* 280; Peters, *Vystrel v serdtse revoliutsii,* 100; *Pravda* and *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 31 August–3 September 1918. Konopleva, for example, claimed that she had lived with Kaplan in August 1918 and that they had prepared for the attempt on Lenin together. This conflicts with the official 1918 investigation report, which states that Kaplan had lived at the time in Pigit's apartment in a completely different section of the city. The official 1918 investigation report does not mention Konopleva at all (Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 35; *Pravda,* 28 February 1922, 1).

70. *PR,* 281–285. Historians who have relied on this publication as their sole source in describing the assassination attempt include Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks,* 430; Schapiro, *Origin of the Communist Autocracy,* 151–153; Payne, *Life and Death of Lenin,* 485–498; Orlov, "Mif o Fanni Kaplan."

71. Evidence that some of the provocateurs relied on this source in preparing their testimonies may be found in "Poslednie slova podsudimogo Zubkova" in *Pravda,* 6 August 1922, 2. For a discussion of other instances of such "editing," see John Keep and Liliana Brisby, eds., *Contemporary History in the Soviet Mirror* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), 134–136 and passim.

72. *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 3 September 1918, 4; *PR,* 282.

73. Ia. Kh. Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote," 121; *Pravda* and *Izvestiia VTsIK* for 31 August–1 September 1918; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 33, 35; *PR,* 285, 282.

lished the day after her execution gave her name as Roid-Kaplan. The records of Kaplan's interrogations, published in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* in 1923 but dated 30 August 1918, give her name in the nearly correct form of Roidman (rather than Roitman), suggesting that these records do not accurately reflect the information available at the time of the original investigation.[74]

The *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* report of the timing of the attempt in relation to the first interrogation does not correspond to the timing described in other sources. It does match the official version presented at the 1922 trial. While Lenin's chauffeur, whose testimony was first published in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* claimed that he drove Lenin to the Mikhelson factory at 10:00 P.M., the contemporary newspaper accounts and other sources indicate a much earlier arrival. The differences between these accounts seem insignificant at first but become crucial when considered in the context of the whole story, and especially in establishing the relationship between Lenin's and Kaplan's arrival times at the factory. The time of the first interrogation of Kaplan is reported in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* as 11:30 P.M. at the local Cheka branch, while according to other sources she had by that time already been interrogated by Kurskii, people's commissar of justice, at Lubianka.[75]

While someone did attempt to assassinate Lenin on 30 August 1918, it is impossible to establish either the identity of that individual or of any group that may have been behind the act. During a quick and superficial Cheka investigation, no connection between the act and any known organization or political party was found. It is also impossible to determine whether Kaplan was part of a conspiracy or had come to the Mikhelson Factory that evening by accident.

In both 1906 and 1918 Kaplan was arrested for terrorist acts after repeating the words "I didn't do it." This verbal reaction, along with her use of the conspiratorial name Mitropol'skaia in 1918, suggests that on both occasions she may indeed have been involved in a conspiracy, although on both occasions, according to official sources, she denied having any accomplices. With her physical disabilities and alleged determination to commit a terrorist act, she may indeed have been used by a group of conspirators as part of a plan to shoot Lenin. She may have been sent into the factory courtyard by these conspirators (who may have provided her a trade union card issued in an alias but no weapon) not to shoot Lenin, but as an expendable instrument available for arrest as a decoy to protect the identities of those who actually fired the shots.[76]

74. Tarasova-Bobrova was later driven to suicide by pressure from the Soviet authorities; Ia. Garelin, "Figner i obshchestvo politkatorzhan," *Pamiat'* 3 (1980): 395, 399; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 35–37; *PR,* 281, 283, 285; Radzilovskaia, Orestova, and Pirogova, *KS; Izvestiia VTsIK,* 3 and 4 September 1918, 4 and 5.

75. *PR,* 277, 282; *Pravda,* 30 and 31 August 1918, 1 and 3; *Izvestiia VTsIK,* 1 September 1918, 1; *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. Biograficheskaia khronika* (Moscow, 1975) 6: 113–114. A story in *PR* concerning a ticket to Tomilino Station may have been the basis for the story, fabricated during the 1922 trial, of a safe house for Kaplan's group, where she was supposed to have gone after the assassination of Lenin. Neither the denials of the accused members of the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee that such an apartment existed nor the fact that the provocateurs' stories were contradictory were obstacles for the compilers of the interrogations in *PR* (*PR,* 285; "Poslednie slova obviniaemogo Zubkova," *Pravda,* 6 August 1922, 2; "Repliki Ivanovoi," *Pravda,* 21 July 1922, 3; "Replika obviniaemogo Gendel'mana," *Pravda,* 5 August 1922, 2; Khomchenko, "Oni tselilis'," 36; Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote," 121.

76. This hypothesis might be consistent with the Solzhenitsyn's version of the assassination in *Gulag.* According to Berta Gandal', whom Solzhenitsyn interviewed for his work, her two brothers waited for Kaplan in an automobile outside the factory on the night of the attempt. (An automobile was a rare item in 1918 Moscow; all had been confiscated and were reserved for the use of high-ranking government officials.) The brothers were shot by the Cheka in connection with the incident, and when Gandal' arrived unsuspecting in

Dedicated to the Russian revolutionary tradition, in which the ultimate test of commitment and devotion was willingness to die for the cause, Fania Kaplan, like so many before her, "became a terrorist not to kill, but to sacrifice herself." In this spirit she may have elected to accept total responsibility for the act against Lenin.[77]

Moscow from Riga on the night of the assassination attempt, she was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment, "for her brothers." The three of them, Kaplan and the Gandal′ brothers, may have been part of some conspiracy to kill Lenin, but this version is not confirmed by any other sources. The brothers could very well have been shot in connection with the incident, but not necessarily because they were involved in it, since those executed at the same time numbered in the hundreds (Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag,* 525.) The story Berta Gandal′ recounted fifty years after the fact may well have been influenced by the official version of the incident, as well as other informal sources accumulated over the years; she did not, after all, learn the story directly from her brothers.

77. Vladimir Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe* (New York: Izdatel′stvo Chekhova, 1953), 311–312. The Cheka apparently understood that Kaplan probably had not committed the act itself and, for this reason, held her in isolation in order to prevent her from communicating her innocence to fellow prisoners (who would have included the Left Socialist Revolutionary leader Spiridonova and A. Izmailovich, both imprisoned in the Kremlin prison at the same time as Kaplan) (*Kreml′ za reshetkoi [Podpol′naia Rossiia]* [Berlin, 1922], 7–14).