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Subject: Oumansky in Washington and in Mexico City.

When I assumed my duties in the State Department in 1937 the Soviet Ambassador was Troyanosky. He and his wife were pleasant, unassuming people. He is undoubtedly a man of considerable intellectual stature. He was a university professor in Moscow before receiving this appointment to Washington. While it cannot be said that as Soviet Ambassador he enjoyed any particular sympathy, he was pleasant in his conversation and in his manners, and so far as I recall did not in any way make himself objectionable. As it fell to my lot to show him certain courtesies, my wife and I invited them to dinner in our home on a number of occasions and they always made pleasant, agreeable dinner guests. Sometime after my arrival in Washington Oumansky arrived as Counselor of the Soviet Embassy. We had a good deal of information on him. His performance in Washington from the outset did not in any way belie what we knew of him. He spoke English with unusual facility and had an excellent command of the language. He liked to quibble with me about the meaning of English words. He was relatively young, short in stature, heavy set, not unpleasant in appearance, but every line of his body and features and every one of his actions bespoke aggressiveness, self confidence and pronounced egotism. He put himself out from the beginning of his stay in the Soviet Embassy to be agreeable to everyone. Mrs. Oumansky was a quiet and in many ways very interesting woman. My wife and I liked her and the behaviour of her husband at no time changed our opinion of her. He cultivated certain people and I was one of those in the Department whom he singled out.

It was not long after his arrival that I said to some of my associates in the Department that I did not think it would be long before Troyanosky would be recalled and Oumansky named Ambassador. There didn't seem to be the slightest doubt that Oumansky would find the ways and means to undermine his chief in Moscow and getting his recall. In fact, it was only a few months after his arrival that Oumansky was made Ambassador. Troyanosky returned to Moscow and there were

many of us in Washington who feared as to what would happen to him, and our worst fears seemed to be confirmed when after his arrival in Moscow there was no way in which any information could be got about him. He seemed to completely and entirely disappear from the picture, and it was not until many years afterwards that he just as suddenly reappeared as a professor in the university of Moscow.

Oumansky had hardly taken over his post as Soviet Ambassador before Secretary Hull began to speak of his brash and incorrect behaviour when he came to see him. He did not wish to do any business with anyone in the Department except with the Secretary. This was characteristic of him. After a relatively short time Mr. Hull told me that he would no longer receive Oumansky. He was so incorrect in his language and in his approach when he called on him in the Department that he wished, whenever Oumansky asked to be received that the Under Secretary, Mr. Welles, receive him. This lasted I believe for several months, when Mr. Welles had exactly the same complaint. He made it clear that he would no longer receive him and indicated to me that when Oumansky came to the Department or asked for an appointment that I was to see him. The first time Oumansky came in thereafter and was shown to my office, he came in with all the air and behaviour of someone who was one of my oldest and best friends. I said to him that I thought before we got to the subject of his ~~xxxxxx~~ visit that I should say something personal and off the record. I said that he must have noted that the Secretary was no longer receiving him. He must have noted that Mr. Welles was no longer receiving him. The point had now been reached where he had to see me on business which he had with the Department. I did not think he could go any lower. I said that in the short time in which we had known each other, we had surely learned certain things about each other, and I thought it was only fair to him therefore to say that unless he handled his business with me in a correct way, that it would be a very short time indeed before he would no longer be able to see me. While I was saying this Oumansky was smiling, and when I finished he made absolutely no reference to what I had said but started out on

the business of his visit. Oumansky knew very well that he had reached the limit. He had no desire whatever to return to Moscow. It suited him to be in Washington. He knew very well that if he, as Soviet Ambassador, could no longer even see an Assistant Secretary in the State Department, that those in the Soviet Embassy who were watching him for the government in Moscow would report on this and that his time in the United States would be very short indeed. Oumansky had been the behind-scenes boss of an Ambassador before and he was far too wise and opportunistic to take any chances. We had no trouble because he knew he could go no <sup>further + longer</sup> longer and stay at his post.

It was I believe a year after we had arrived in Mexico that Oumansky was assigned to Mexico City as Ambassador. He was also accredited to the republics of Central America. He sought us out immediately after his arrival as old friends. As our countries were officially on friendly terms, we asked him and Mrs. Oumansky to the Embassy on occasions and they asked us frequently to the Soviet Embassy. When I had renovated the Embassy Residence in Mexico City on my arrival from Cuba, I had put on the ground floor a moving picture theater which held comfortably some 60 people or more. A bar was installed in the little theater. It was equipped with very comfortable seats. It was our custom to invite a considerable number of people for dinner and after dinner show them some of the new films produced in the United States. As soon as Oumansky got settled in an Embassy Residence in Mexico City, he installed a very elaborate moving picture theater. He told me very frankly that it was going to be much bigger and better than ours. The Tass correspondent in Mexico was a very intelligent man. He was really the man who reported to Moscow on Oumansky. Oumansky was very much annoyed because there were constant reports in the American press which were republished in the Mexican press about the espionage system he was maintaining in Mexico, and about the money which he was using to subsidize certain intellectuals and writers, etc., in the country. When these articles appeared in the press in the United States he used to come to me, furiously demanding



that something should be done. He always calmed down very quickly when I told him that we did not exercise any control over the press in our country and we certainly did not exercise any over the press in Mexico, and that if he had complaints to make he should make them elsewhere. I used to tell him that it came with very poor grace from him to make these complaints about these articles, when the Soviet press was publishing such scurrilous material about my country.

I always felt, and I think my wife shared the feeling, that Mrs. Oumansky was a lady and that she was not in any way a Communist and that she was really quite friendly to the United States and understanding of us. This was not reflected so much in conversation but in that indefinable way in which we intuitively know what people are thinking of. Whenever there was any public occasion to which we were both invited, she always sought out my wife and remained very close to her. She always gave the impression to a few of us that there was a real tragedy in her life. What it was we did not know.

~~One day Oumansky insisted that my wife and I should come some day during the week to lunch with him and Mrs. Oumansky alone.~~

One day Oumansky repeated an insistent invitation he had given me to come and lunch with him alone at the Soviet Embassy. He said he wanted me to see the offices of the Embassy. I had refused so often and I could find no further reason for not going. I went. We had a very pleasant luncheon. After lunch he said that he insisted that I go with him over the offices of the chancery, which were in the residence. He was sick and tired of all these stories being published in the American and in Mexican press, as well as that of other countries, about the Soviet espionage system he had established in Mexico and about how he was paying out large sums of money to all kinds of people in order to build up a friendly atmosphere for his government and against our government and the Mexican government. I walked with him through the chancery offices. They were relatively modest and not very extensive. He said that all the people whom I saw working were the only

people who worked for the Soviet Embassy in Mexico. When we got to his office he called an employee and asked him to bring in certain record books. He insisted that I look at these books showing the personnel of the Embassy, what they received, and what the Embassy was spending. I was very patient about it all. He ended up by saying that he thought my government or I should give out a statement to the effect that the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City was not engaged in any of these activities. I had the proof now.

I told Oumansky that I did not wish to be discourteous. I was his guest. I must, however, protest when he treated me as though I were so naive and so simple minded a person. That he had showed me the office quarters of the chancery and certain office records meant nothing at all. He might have any number of people on his pay roll and offices elsewhere, and no one know anything about it except he. Certainly there would be no statements by my government or by me as to the size of the Soviet Embassy and its activities in Mexico City or in Mexico. Oumansky took it all good naturedly. I had the very definite impression that he was carrying through this performance because he had been told to do it and to make the effort. He himself was far too intelligent to think that any purpose would be served by it. He knew what he had been going through with was a pure farce.

There is little doubt that the Soviet government had intended to use Mexico City as the basis for its Communist activity through Latin America. They thought that the climate in Mexico City should be most propitious for their efforts. While they found some friends, just as they would find them in our own country and in any other country, they were very much disappointed in their efforts. Concerning the efforts of Oumansky in Mexico to use it as a base for Communist propaganda in Latin America, there does not seem to be much doubt. There is equally good reason for believing that he succeeded in doing practically nothing.

He had not presented his letters of credence in the ~~XXXXX~~ Central American countries to which he was also accredited. Whatever the reasons were which impelled

him to go to El Salvador to present his letters is not entirely clear. He announced his intention of going there to present his letters. He went to the Foreign Office and asked for an army plane, that is a plane of the Mexican army. That he should have this affrontery and this arrogance was characteristic of Oumansky. He was of course told that it was not customary for the Mexican army airforce to provide transportation for foreign diplomats, and he was politely told that if the Mexican Ambassador to El Salvador was going to his post, he would be going in a commercial plane. Oumansky was very insistent in the Foreign Office but was told nothing whatever could be done to meet his desires. He went to see an important officer of the Mexican army (General Cardenas) and to make a long story short, on (date) he and Mrs. Oumansky and a number of officials of the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City left the Mexico City airport about 6:15 or 6:30 in the morning for El Salvador. The Mexican government had chosen as the pilot of the plane one of its very best pilots. It was still dark when the plane left the ground. The plane struck a wire fence surrounding the air field, crashed and burned up. Oumansky and Mrs. Oumansky and all of the members of the Soviet Embassy staff on the plane, with the exception of one, and the crew lost their lives in the accident. By the time I reached my office in the morning in the chancery around 8 o'clock the Air Attaché and the Military Attaché were making their report to me. Because of the close relations between the Mexican airforce and our own, our people were informed within a very few moments of the accident by the authorities at the central airport and were on the scene. There was no doubt in the minds of the Mexican air officials and of our people as to what had happened. ~~XXXX~~ The pilot was a very fine fellow. He had received his training in the United States and had done very well in his training. He had, however, persistently refused to do any night flying and had therefore no practice in taking off or landing in the dark. Further than this he was known to have the idiosyncrasy of flattening out too quickly after he left the ground. The plane unquestionably had



been in the best of condition. It had been most carefully inspected the day before and again early in the morning before the take-off. The pilot had taken off in the dark and misjudging his distance from the ground, had flattened out too quickly and had struck this fence around the edge of the airport. It was just one of those unfortunate accidents.

About 2 o'clock that afternoon one of my associates in the Embassy showed me a copy of a telegram of the Soviet Embassy to Moscow which had been decoded by us. It was signed by the press representative of Tass, the Soviet news agency in Mexico City and whom we knew to be really the officer of the Soviet government in Mexico City who was controlling Oumansky and reporting on him to Moscow. In this telegram he said there was no doubt that what had happened to the plane was not an accident and that it was a mishap to the plane which had been engineered by, and I quote his words, "a friendly government" -- which of course meant us. The Mexican government held an inquiry, as is normal in the case of an accident of this kind, and a very careful investigation was made of all the circumstances surrounding the flight and its preparation, and no investigation could have been more carefully and meticulously made. The conclusion reached was that it was an accident.

Sometime afterwards, while calling on the President at Los Pinos, I found him for the first time mention a matter with a considerable amount of heat. He said that the Soviet government was questioning the findings of the committee which had gone into the accident. They were claiming that it was not an accident -- that it was sabotage. I think he was really prepared to break diplomatic relations. None of this ever came to the public nor to the surface, but one thing is certain and that is that the Soviet government learned that it could not talk to the Mexican government in this way.

The loss of Oumansky was really an important one for the Soviet government. He was by far the most hopeful of the younger Russian diplomats. He was just as intelligent and resourceful as Vishinsky and Molotov. Like them, he did not know

what a rebuff meant. He was more flexible, if just as implacable and just as devious. Although Oumansky deceived no one by his open, disarming and usually pleasant manner, people if they did not like him had a certain tolerance for him which Vishinsky and Molotov and others of their school could not achieve. Oumansky, in spite of his facile manner was really a student. He always tried to flatter me by saying that if my chiefs had followed or considered my counsel with respect to Russia in the early thirties, as they did with respect to Nazi Germany, the whole situation would have been changed. He said that at that time his country was getting ready to collaborate more closely with the West. If we had gotten England and France to understand this situation, as for example some of the leaders in Czechoslovakia understood it, a Russian-Hitler alliance would never have been possible and a lot of things would have been easier. He liked to talk about how good things were in Russia, but he didn't do it to me or to my wife. He loved to speak of Russian cigarettes as the best at dinner parties and offered them freely to his neighbors, but surreptitiously<sup>if</sup> he sat next to my wife at dinner, and invariably when he sat next to her during the moving picture in his Embassy or ours, he would ask her for a cigarette and reach into her case and practically empty it with an easy "You don't mind if I help myself". If I had not known him and his country so well I could almost in some ways have liked him. I have sometimes been tempted to think that if he had not met with this accident he would be having a very important influence in his government today and in these difficult and critical times through which we are passing -- and that he would have been a better element to deal with than those who are in control.

The funeral arrangements by the Soviet Embassy for Oumansky and Mrs. Oumansky and the members of the staff of the Embassy were quite an occasion. At the ceremonies at the cemetery which were somewhat prolonged, I could see that my wife was thinking of something. As we were driving home she said that all during the ceremony at the cemetery she couldn't help but think that the lid of Oumansky's coffin would pop up



and he would lean out and say, "Well, haven't you got a cigarette for me?" There was nothing irreverent or flippant about this. During the years that we had known him she had become so accustomed to this gesture of his.