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1-4 + 6: Any of this worth doing?

NY TIMES article on the couple is attached.

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TRACE REQUEST

ABSTRACT

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DISPATCH		SECRET		PROCESSING ACTION	
TO Chief, NE		XXX		MARKED FOR INDEXING	
INFO. Chief, SR				NO INDEXING REQUIRED	
FROM Chief of Station, Oslo				ONLY QUALIFIED DESK CAN JUDGE INDEXING	
SUBJECT SATINWOOD/Production				MICROFILM	
SUBJECT REDCOAT/Report on Nellie BLOCK					
ACTION REQUIRED - REFERENCES					
<p>ACTION: For Your Information and Traces</p> <p>Forwarded herewith is a ⁰¹[SATINWOOD] report from a seaman source who while in Odessa on 2 April 1964 had a five hour conversation with one Nellie BLOCK, her husband, a diesel engineer, and daughter Tina. The report will presumably be of interest to ODENVY. Traces are requested on Subjects. The 28 April 1964 issue of the New York Times has a first page article on the BLOCKS.</p> <p><i>Kenneth J. Chatmead</i> Kenneth J. Chatmead</p> <p>Attachment: Orig & 2 cc of report, h/w.</p> <p>Distribution: 3--C/NE w/Orig & 1 cc att. 2--C/SR w/1 cc att.</p> <p><i>(R/mis: See 1896 for times)</i> <i>*h.B. subjects subsequently (May 64) returned to the U.S.</i></p> <p>RETURN TO CIA Background Use Only Do Not Reproduce</p> <p>201-174231 54-2-9/4</p> <p>33 COPY</p>					
CROSS REFERENCE TO		DISPATCH SYMBOL AND NUMBER		DATE	
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SOVIET UNION

ODESSA

April 2, 1964

Case: Meeting with American family BLOCK.

A Norwegian seaman who was in ODESSA on April 2, 1964, had difficulty in finding the city's largest hotel. While he was searching, he was approached on the street by an American-speaking woman, MOLLIE BLOCK, who offered her assistance. She was with her husband and daughter and told him that they were American citizens who had lived, among other places, in Bronx, New York, but had been living in Odessa for the past four years.

The following describes the occasion in greater detail:

The source was ~~in~~ the Interclub (seamen's club) in Odessa where he tried to buy Russian caviar. He was referred to the hotel Odessa. A hostess at the club said that there were two hotels by that name in the city. He was to go to the larger, and she explained to him how to get there.

The source tried to find the hotel but got lost. Twice he asked Russians but was not understood. The last time was on the "boulevard." Suddenly a woman's voice called out in English from the other side of an adjoining street, whereupon she came over to the source followed by a man and a young girl. In fluent American she asked the source if he were English and said that her husband and daughter were American and living in Odessa. Without any particular cause both she and her husband complained loudly about conditions in Odessa without any consideration for passers-by. The Russians to whom the source had addressed himself stood around a bit before they went further, otherwise there did not appear to be anyone who noticed the meeting particularly. The source explained that he was on his way to the hotel Odessa and invited the family to accompany him. They refused at first because they were not dressed well enough, they had come from work, had just picked up their daughter and were on their way home. When the source insisted, they allowed themselves to be persuaded. There were no formal introductions, but during the conversation it came out that the family was called BLOCK and the wife's first name was MOLLIE.

Hotel Odessa was located in the vicinity in a side street which led-off from the boulevard. At the entrance to the restaurant they were stopped by a waitress who protested in Russian. After some conversation between Mollie and the waitress they were allowed to enter. Mollie said the waitress had thought the daughter was too young but had given in because the daughter was in the company of her parents.

The guests in the restaurant were largely comprised of officers and some civilians including some young women who, judging from their

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behavior, were prostitutes. Everyone was nicely dressed, considering that it was Russia, so the Block family's reservations seemed to have had a basis. A waitress showed the source and his party to a table. To the amazement of the Block family as well as the source, the waitress spoke understandable English. Drinks were ordered and the source and his guests sat in the restaurant for about 5 hours. As they did earlier on the boulevard, the couple spoke freely and without taking care that the conversation was not overheard by others. At the closest table sat two prostitutes who were entertained by several different officers. It did not appear that they were interested in the source's party.

The source guessed MOLLIE BLOCK'S age to be about 45. Small and plump. Completely black, slightly curly hair which hid her ears. Dark (brown-black?) eyes. Broad nose. She was on the whole quite clumsily built with short fat limbs and quite unattractive. Source felt that she might be a Jewess with some Slavic background. She appeared intelligent, quick and effective, hectic, very egocentric and somewhat dominating. She was unusually talkative but a poor listener. She spoke perfect American and, as far as the source was able to judge, with a New York accent, and possessed the quick humor which is typical in New York. She was dressed in a tailored coat of a greenish colour, worn dress of poor quality, thick woolen stockings, flat and worn shoes.

Mr. BLOCK (his first name was not mentioned) might be between 40-45. About 183 cm tall, slender, blond hair. Colour of eyes not noticed. Might be of Baltic descent. Appeared to be passive and not particularly intelligent. He spoke little - possibly because he was interrupted by Mollie as a rule. Spoke definitely American but occasionally found it difficult to find certain words. He wore an old sumpce cap, a faded scarf and an old worn coat of grey and dark grey herring bone pattern which he did not remove in the restaurant.

The daughter's first name seemed to be TINA. According to Mollie she was 11 years old. Comparatively tall and slender. Black hair. Large dark eyes, fine features with a slightly crooked nose and somewhat sharp nose. She appeared pretty, but the source could find no real family likeness between her and either of the parents. Very childish. Spoke only Russian and kept to Mollie the whole time. Wore a dark burgundy-coloured coat.

Mollie said that the whole family was born in the U.S.A. and had mostly lived in the Bronx, New York, but also for a time in San Francisco. About 4 years ago they had moved to the Soviet Union and lived in Odessa. They were still American citizens. The source expressed his astonishment at the fact that this was possible, and Mollie reluctantly told that Mr. Block had been a member of the forbidden American Communist Party and that they had therefore gotten a visa to the Soviet Union. When the source doubted that they could still be American citizens, Mollie said that their passports were in Moscow, a fact which anyone could establish by referring to the American Consul, American Embassy, Peter Tajakovski Street 19, Moscow. (She wrote down

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the address and gave it to the source.)

Shortly after their arrival in Odessa they realized that this was not when they had expected. They immediately began applying to Russian authorities for permission to return. The applications had been returned with various comments, usually that they had to go to other Russian authorities. This had gone on for several years without giving any results. They had almost resigned themselves. But if they were ever to return to the U.S.A., they would settle quietly down someplace and not tell anyone that they had been in the ~~xxxxxx~~ Soviet Union.

Mr. Block said that he was a "diesel engineer" and the conversation revealed that he knew a good deal about diesel machines. He did not say where he worked, but complained that he was sent from job to job without being able to concentrate on a special area as he had done in the U.S.A. As a matter of fact this was an error in all of the working life in the Soviet Union, he said. No one specialized and no one could do a real job in a particular area. Mr. Block earned something over 40 rubels per month.

Mollie Block was a teacher at the polytechnical institute in Odessa. She earned 40 rubels per month. A chief at the polytechnical institute ~~xxxxxx~~ earned 900 rubels per month and had his own home by the Black Sea, she said bitterly, as an example of the fact that the class differences were as great in the Soviet Union as in the U.S.A.

Both told that they were unpopular among their colleagues and among Russians in general because it was their custom to criticize conditions in the Soviet Union. Had we not been American citizens we would have been sent to Siberia long ago, said Mollie. Both despised Khrushchev. Conditions were no better now than under Stalin, they thought. Now there was corruption in all areas. Mollie said that only 3-4% of the population of the Soviet Union were accepted as members of the Communist Party. No one got into the party without having worked hard to do so; but if one is the son of a Party official (pamp) it is easier to do so.

In the beginning the language had been a difficulty (in spite of the fact that they obviously must have had a knowledge of Russian before their arrival in the Soviet Union.) "Russian has too many synonyms," Mr. Block kept repeating while they talked about the language.

On the other hand they had been fortunate and gotten a two-room apartment for 19 rubels per month. It did not come out how, for example, the kitchen was equipped, but they considered themselves lucky in comparison to Russians in comparable positions. Mollie wrote down the address: PERETOPKOVOY POBEDI 18, APT. 31, ODESSA - USSR, and the source was invited to visit them or to write to them.

The summer vacation they had spent in a little resort town in the vicinity of BATH. There the food - particularly fruit and vegetables - was much cheaper and better than in Odessa.

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Mr. Block complained particularly about the food in Odessa. He had difficulties with his digestion because of the black bread, he claimed. It was not possible to get white bread anywhere except in Leningrad and Moscow and there where foreign tourists stayed. He had gotten a physician's certificate saying that he needed white bread, but to no avail. There was also a shortage of fruits and vegetables in Odessa except when they were in season in the surrounding agricultural districts. Transport of such wares from distant places in the Soviet Union did not occur.

They talked a great deal about the U.S.A., and the source said that there was no doubt that Mollie was locally familiar with New York. On one occasion the source mentioned the place Weehawken in connection with New York. Mollie corrected him instantly, saying that Weehawken was on the other side of the Hudson River and therefore in the state of New Jersey.

The daughter sat quietly the entire time and stared straight ahead. Upon being addressed politely by the source, she giggled childishly. It is possible that she understood something, but she answered in Russian via her mother and said that the source ought to come home with them and see her parrot.

Mollie asked several of the people at the hotel if they might get caviar for the source, but with no result.

The source and his guests left the restaurant at closing time (midnight local time). On the street Mr. Block tried to get a taxi for the source, but could not get one. Afterwards each went in his own direction.

SOURCE'S COMMENTARY:

The source was aware the entire time that the meeting might have been arranged. However, he found no real basis for this.

He was also aware of some lesser irregularities during the event, but these could easily have had a natural explanation.

The source emphasizes that they asked him for no favors or asked him to do nothing except visit them. They showed no curiosity, asked little, and Mollie was too occupied with what she herself had on her heart to listen and understand what the source said. The couple had no reservations about alcohol and did not react to the fact that the source drank little and remained sober while they gradually became quite animated.

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SOVIET WON'T LET U.S. COUPLE LEAVE

Moscow Gave Them Asylum
Visa Is Now Denied

Special to The New York Times
MOSCOW, April 28.—Soviet authorities have refused visas to two United States citizens who came to the Soviet Union as convicted Communists but who have become disillusioned and want to go home. Morris Block and his wife Melba, two New Yorkers now living in Odessa, say the police there turned down their request for visas a few weeks ago without an explanation.

In making her application, Mrs. Block pleaded that unless she were permitted to return soon she would probably never see her parents again. She said that her father, 84 years old, was seriously ill with a heart ailment and that her mother, blind in one eye, was in danger of losing her sight altogether.

U.S. Officials Hopeful

United States consular officials have taken up the Blocks' case with the Foreign Ministry. The officials said today that they were hopeful the couple would get permission to leave.

They confirmed that the Blocks had valid papers identifying them as American citizens.

In the United States Mr. Block was alleged to have been involved in a number of passport violations for which he might be prosecuted if he returned.

His troubles started in 1937 when he traveled to Communist China in defiance of a State Department ban. He was later alleged to have attempted to travel abroad on an altered passport and, on another occasion, to have obtained a passport fraudulently.

As Mrs. Block tells their story, they left the United States in 1939. Mr. Block crossed the United States-Canadian border under a false name. Their destination was Communist China, where he had seen Mr. Block on a previous trip and in which he wanted to settle.

They Were Interned

But things soon went wrong. In Poland, where they arrived without a visa, they were interned in a seaman's home. The Chinese Embassy in Warsaw never acknowledged their visa requests. The United States Embassy tried to reach them but the Blocks refused to answer its telephone calls.

After about a month and an appeal to the Soviet Embassy in Warsaw, the couple and their small adopted daughter were put on a Polish Army truck and driven to the Soviet border.

In Moscow, the Foreign Ministry put them in a downtown hotel, according to Mrs. Block. The Government paid for their room and their meals and even gave them change for incidental expenses.

Mr. Block went to the Chinese Embassy and applied for "political asylum" in China. The Embassy, this time, accepted the request and said it was forwarding it to Peking.



AMERICANS RETURN RUSSIANS' VISIT: James C. McKenzie, second from right, and his wife, left, flank Mr. and Mrs. Viktor Pozdneyev and daughter after arriving in Moscow by air. At right is Ronald McCowan of Portsmouth, Ohio, who helped arrange for Pozdneyevs to visit McKenzies last Christmas, and McKenzies to see May Day in Moscow.

plied to Moscow and applied to the United States Embassy for new passports.

The embassy had to consult Washington. Early last year, a decision was made. The embassy issued a new passport to Mrs. Block and issued to Mr. Block a document stating that he was an American citizen.

Armed with the documents, the Blocks applied for Soviet exit visas in Odessa last summer. There was no answer in spite of dozens of visits to the police by Mrs. Block.

Then, a few weeks ago, Mrs. Block was told by the chief of the passport division of the Odessa police that their request had been refused.

Last week they renewed their

applications in the hope that the intervention of the consulate would bring a reversal of the Soviet decision.

U.S. Explains Help

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 28.—United States officials said today that Mr. Block had a "long history" of passport difficulties, but that as a citizen he was entitled to their help in getting out of the Soviet Union. His difficulties began, they said, in 1937, when he went with 41 other Americans from an international youth festival in Moscow on a tour of Communist China.

In August, 1938, officials

said, he traveled to the Netherlands with the same passport after having altered the date of expiration. Later in 1938, officials continued, he obtained a passport by using the name and birth evidence of his brother, Samuel Block.

When the Blocks began to make efforts to return to the United States from the Soviet Union, the United States Embassy was instructed to make every useful effort to get permission for them to return home. Since every citizen is entitled to diplomatic and consular protection abroad, officials said, they had "no alternative" but to assist the Blocks.

Answer Never Came

Then the Blocks settled down to wait for the answer—which never came.

After about a month, the couple and the Soviet official who visited them periodically at their hotel agreed that they could not go on living at Soviet Government expense indefinitely.

They decided to accept Soviet asylum instead of Chinese.

Mr. Block had been a locksmith in a New York shipyard. The Soviet official suggested that he go to work in the same capacity in the port of Odessa. The offer was accepted.

In the Black Sea city, the Blocks were given a two-room apartment and 1,000 rubles (\$1.10) to buy furniture. Officials asked them whether they wanted to become Soviet citizens. But Mrs. Block, who was beginning to have second thoughts, answered that they wanted to wait at least a year before deciding.

Her disappointment grew rapidly. By February of the following year, she said, she was "very, very unhappy."

He Became Disillusioned

But Morris Block was still a convinced Communist. To a local newspaper, which interviewed him, he denounced American authorities for having "persecuted" him and declared that he was settling down in the Soviet Union.

Then, a year or so later, he too became disillusioned. He clashed with his superiors at the workshop, with party officials who admonished him and with authorities responsible for housing and food distribution.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 1941