

# THE SECRET ORIGINS OF COMMUNISM: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE HISTORY FROM MARX TO MAO

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## SUMMARY

Biographical literature on key historical figures of Communism published in the last several decades offers an interesting base for exploring the theory, movement and political track record of the doctrine itself. To do so this paper will be focusing on the seemingly secondary issue of counterintelligence. By delving into various biographies written on Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao and consulting other contemporary historical works that emphasize the role of secret/security intelligence in political history, the intention of this paper is to highlight the relationship between the 19<sup>th</sup> century Marxist-backed Communist ideology and the 20<sup>th</sup> century state terrorism of Marxist-Leninist one-party states. The derived explanation of a “counterintelligence history of Communism” is based on a causal chain that stretches from conspiratorial political activism of Marx, Lenin’s reinvention of Jacobin state terrorism and Stalin’s despotism to Mao’s wrongful misappropriation of mass counterintelligence. The covert origins of Marxist illegal political movements and parties, as well as their founders, are hereby proven to be essential building blocks of future Communist regimes and their consequential usage of counterintelligence and the power of security services used for political control. Although the paper is based on well informed secondary sources, the new intelligence perspective that it puts forth may serve as a guidepost for further detailed research.

Keywords: history, communism, counterintelligence, service, totalitarianism.

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## INTRODUCTION

In two decades preceding the centenary of the October Revolution, many authors published successful books on Communism and related -isms with a special focus on their ideological forefathers – Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong. The ongoing production of books on intellectual and political figureheads of Marxism proves that this topic is still considered fruitful. According to professional as well as personal inclinations, biographical approaches vary substantially; findings include everything from pop-histories to multi-volume academic syntheses based on diplomatic and military archival sources. Differences notwithstanding, a common aspect or an explanatory thread can be discerned on both ends – using counterintelligence and/or security services' means to achieve revolutionary political ends.<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, this evidence was almost without exception treated as a minor issue, or at best as a trivial curiosity well-known and blatantly evident to all. Seen in this light, it therefore begs no further explanation. Intelligence historian Christopher Andrew even puts forth a view that the history of security intelligence does not follow an easily traceable evolutionary (linear) and historical line (Andrew 2018: 6). However, when communist ideology is concerned, this can easily be disproved. Studies of Marxism-Leninism as a theoretical basis of Communism, especially its key-figure biographies, usually accentuated an almost linear political trajectory of every major revolutionary leader: radicalization, party formation, fractional struggles, revolutionary activities including war and eventual seizures of power, purges and falls from grace and/or death. Secrecy and counterintelligence work were present in every mentioned instance.

This paper is structured around the lives of the aforementioned Marxist figures and is accordingly divided into four parts in a linear fashion, dating from the early 1840s to the late 1970s. Biographical evidence shows that secret, conspiratorial, and thus illegal trademarks of politics that communist leaders and thinkers almost invariably promoted, led to the same kind of political behavior in the period after the seizing of power. The evidence, although not systematically explicated, corroborates the belief that this same political "recipe" will most certainly have the identical, ill-tasting outcome in every future empirical instance.

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<sup>1</sup> Counterintelligence is defined as an activity "aimed against intelligence, against active, hostile intelligence, against enemy spies" (Johnson 2009: 2). The counterintelligence services have overlapping meanings and duties with security ones where the latter are usually focused on suppressing active threats to political order, and thus no strict demarcation will be attempted here. Examples of overlapping are most certainly true in totalitarian states, also called "counterintelligence states" which are "characterized by the presence of a large, elite force acting as the watchdog of a security defined so broadly and arbitrarily that the state must maintain an enormous vigilance and enforcement apparatus far out of proportion to the needs of a real democracy" while the mentioned apparatus is "not accountable to the public and enjoys immense police powers with few checks against it" and "the civilian government is so penetrated by the apparatus that there is no clear distinction between the two" (Waller 1994: 13).

## MARX: POLITICAL PRIMITIVISM AND THE CONSPIRACY OF COMMUNISM

Comparing Marx and Lenin, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington called the former a “political primitive” in the sense that he did not have a precise political doctrine laid out in his writings, in contrast to the latter. For him, Marx “could not develop a political science or a political theory, because he had no recognition of politics as an autonomous field of activity and no concept of a political order which transcends that of social class” (Huntington 2006: 336). Yet, organizational secrecy of underground political societies, rudimentary reconnaissance missions, political vanguard elitism, advocacy of violence, and illegality as well as the molding experience of dealing with foreign and domestic intelligence services (“spies”) are all prominent features of Marx’s writings and political activism that had state terrorism – a staple of every revolutionary political order – as its logical consequence.

As early as in 1844, intelligence reports track young Marx’s affiliation with Communist League member Hermann Ewerbeck and only two years later Marx became one of the founders of the Communist Correspondence Committee “from which all modern Communist parties descended” (Stedman Jones 2016: 163; see also Andrew 2018: 386). This makes Marx *de facto* a proto-Leninist, or Leninist *avant la lettre* since the Communist League was a secret organization (Gilbert 1981; Liedman 2018). In other words, it would entail a “self-appointed elite” consisting of “convinced” and “ruthless” members with “dictatorial power” who’s task is to “educate the proletariat” in order to start the revolutionary upheaval (Berlin 1996: 172–173).

From that time on, the founding and actions of every modern communist party – especially their leaders and top members – were closely monitored by “reactionary” intelligence services. Even the most famous Communist pamphlet of all times, the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* explicitly refers to spies as top enemies: “All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter [of Communism]: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies” (Marx & Engels 2008: 31).

When Marx is concerned, this makes sense, greatly due to his involvement in a revolutionary conspiracy during his pre-Manifesto days in Belgium. In February 1848 Marx inherited a sum of 6,000 gold francs from his mother as his share of his father’s legacy and already by March had invested it in procuring daggers and revolvers for armament of German workers in Brussels (Wheen 1999: 126–127). The revolutionary radicalism of the Communist movement was groomed from the very beginnings in an atmosphere of espionage and danger. In the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848, in London “an army of spies” in service of various Continental powers stalked the members of the “revolutionary diaspora” while the “tiny “Marx party” was a favorite target” (Wheen 1999: 302). Following the 1848 revolt pacification in Vienna, Marx “claimed that “everywhere” the “bourgeoisie” had come to a secret agreement with the forces of reaction” (Wheen 1999: 285). A paranoid mindset was already beginning to form and Berlin accordingly described Marx at this time in unsympathetic terms: “He saw plots, persecution, and conspiracies everywhere; the

more his victims protested their innocence, the more convinced he became of their duplicity and their guilt" (Berlin 1996: 181). Although Marx was right in a sense, by holding radical political views that alienated most of its contemporaries because of its extremism, the enemies started multiplying accordingly. In 1850, Marx and Engels managed to publish a letter in the right-wing magazine *The Spectator* notifying the public sarcastically that they are being haunted by so many police spies that their whereabouts are always well known (Wheen 1999: 161–162).

Marx's answer was obviously to fight fire with fire. In the *Address of the Central Authority to the League* written by Marx in March 1850, it is stated that "it had been wrong to imagine that the time for secret societies was over and therefore to dissolve the [Communist] League" while the later one from June 1850 advocated the forming of "a strong secret organization of the revolutionary party" (Stedman Jones 2016: 299–300).<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the 1850s Marx (briefly) became a spymaster himself by securing a spot for his informer ("spy") Peter Immandt on the committee in charge of administering the loan of the Workers' Educational Association (Sperber 2013: 270). Yet, this "intelligence" episode was not novel in any way for him. While writing for *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* a year or so before, Marx sent "his agents" in the name of the Communist League to "agitate among the German industrial masses" and to gather valuable information for his inflammatory articles (Berlin 1996: 157).

Denunciations and accusations were common among Marx's radical contemporaries, but spying was always the severest form; cases of Marx's rivals such as Karl Vogt, a zoology and geology professor from Geneva and Mikhail Bakunin, a famous Russian anarchist, prove this in the most straightforward way. In a polemic against the former named *Herr Vogt* from the 1850s, Marx unsuccessfully tried to prove that he was a Bonapartist agent bent on compromising the radical exiles, especially Marx himself, who was by that time considered the most influential member of the Communist League (Stedman Jones 2016: 371). However, this may be interpreted as a response to Vogt's accusations of Marx being in charge of two secret societies, for being on the Austrian government's payroll and for betraying various radicals to the German political police (Sperber 2013: 331–337).

Although it was eventually proven that Vogt was paid 50,000 francs by Bonapartist intelligence services during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, by that time Marx "had been targeted by so many secret agents that he came to see spies in improbable places" (Andrew 2018: 397). And indeed, Austrian and Prussian secret agents were constantly spying on radical exiles in London, infiltrating their ranks and manipulating them to further "counterrevolutionary" goals by pitting them against each other. The best example for this would be Hermann Ebner's and János Bangya's political steering and "cultivating" of Marx in the interest of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Forming a close relationship with Marx resulted in him sending

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<sup>2</sup> This is why Engels's view of "uselessness" and "harmfulness" of "all conspiracies" that he espoused in the preliminary draft of the *Communist Manifesto* may be considered insincere at best. See full citation in Seed, 2010, p. 37.

them slanderous information on other émigrés in London which were in fact the Austrian emperor's enemies (e.g. Giuseppe Mazzini, Lajos Kossuth). Marx included the "compromising" information provided to him by his followers in his infamous polemical pamphlet named *The Great Men of Exile* (Sperber 2013: 275–277).

Marx's conspiracy-induced political paranoia after the crushing defeat of the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe reached new heights during the 1850s when Marx even put forth a bogus theory that the British prime minister Lord Palmerston was a long-standing Russian spy conducting British foreign affairs to the tsar's benefit, especially in Asia. In addition to that, in a series of articles that would later on become the *The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century* book, Marx's conspiracy theory expanded towards the conclusion that Whig politicians were being bribed by Russia for more than a century at that time (Sperber 2013: 406–407). When Mikhail Bakunin joined the *League of Peace and Freedom*<sup>3</sup> founding congress held in Geneva in 1867 at the time of the Luxembourg Crisis involving France and Prussia, Marx resorted to a familiar tactic of accusing (potential) rivals of being secret agents and spies: "the Peace Congress in Geneva was, of course, a fabrication of the Russians, which is why they sent along their WELL WORN OUT AGENT, Bakunin" since that would obviously confirm Marx's conspiracy theory of the Russian tsar colluding with the British at the expense of the disarmed and peaceful European powers (cited in: Stedman Jones 2016: 518–519). Marx's hatred against Bakunin was fueled by politically induced paranoia as well as egoism. Upon becoming Marx's political and ideological arch-rival, Bakunin was once again attacked by Marx and Engels on behalf of the General Council of IWMA (First International) in 1872 "by revealing that two of his supporters were Bonapartist spies and by linking him with the criminal activities of Nechaev" (Stedman Jones 2016: 522).

A few years later, in the book *Civil War in France* that themed the Paris Commune events of 1871, Marx points to "the conspiracy of the ruling class to break down the Revolution by a civil war carried on under the patronage of the foreign invader" (Stedman Jones 2016: 501). This kind of siege mentality later on seen in Bolshevism originated with Marx who was even named "the Red Terror(ist) Doctor" by *Journal de Paris* on March 19<sup>th</sup> 1871 and accused of sending the (forged) letter inciting the members of the Paris International branch to revolt against the provisional government. In this case, he blamed Wilhelm Stieber, chief of the Prussian political police, while the "Bonapartist press believed that the real author of the Commune was Bismarck and that Karl [Marx] was his agent" (Stedman Jones 2016:508; see also Avineri 2019). The same way Lenin stood accused of being a German agent after receiving substantial help from the Kaiser in order to start the revolution which would defeat Russia's war effort in 1917, Marx was also regularly accused of being an Austrian spy during the 1860s (Sperber 2013: 277).

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<sup>3</sup> A loose political association originally created as a "war-proof "collective system" of international life" that in reality turned out to be "the naive experiment in international pacifism". It may be seen as a precursor to the League of Nations. See Carr, 1935.

These examples paint a slightly different picture of Marx than the one many generations of students and scholars have grown accustomed to. The image of Marx as an illegal conspirator, an intolerant radical activist, a spymaster, the originator of paranoid political discourse and a proto-Leninist party leader with dictatorial character traits seems to add a new dimension to the image of a freedom-loving egalitarian messiah of the working class. Marx was indeed a political primitive in a sense, but his core political ideas on the revolutionary destruction of state and market in a capitalist society, coupled with espionage means and dealings, form the basis of Communism incarnate – Marxism-Leninism. His later “reformist accommodations” were merely fruits of 1848 European revolutions’ defeat, and not fundamental changes in opinion; his theoretical beliefs were not amended, only his political program (Berlin 1996: 172). Politically similar to Lenin after him, Marx still went against “reformist tendencies of the Social Democrats” and “Lassalleans” accommodations with Prussian statism’ in Germany as well as against “Liberal politics of trade unionists” in Britain, doing so until the rest of his life (Wood 2004: xxxvii).

## LENIN: BOLSHEVIK STATE TERRORISM AND THE WORLD REVOLUTION

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), later renamed the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), was infiltrated by the Russian intelligence service from its very beginnings. At the end of 1901 intelligence agencies throughout Europe were well aware of the activities of its prominent member (Sebestyen 2017: 108) – Lenin – about whom a lot was already known already in 1895 by the Paris branch of the tsarist secret police Okhrana:

According to information available to the Police Department, the above-mentioned Ulyanov occupies himself with Social Democratic propaganda among Petersburg workers. The objective of this trip is to find ways of bringing into the empire revolutionary literature as well as to establish contact between revolutionary circles and emigrants living abroad. (Rappaport 2012: 16–17)

Lenin’s illegal political activities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century included smuggling and distributing copies of the political newspaper *Iskra* into Russia (until 1905) which he delegated top-down from exile to his “party agents”, all the while acting by rules of secrecy. These “agents” dedicated their lives to the cause of communist cause and were initially selected on the basis of their conspiratorial and organizational skills and not working-class/intelligentsia distinction (White 2001: 61). A lot of them would eventually turn into arms smugglers and robbers, especially in the Urals and Georgia (where Stalin excelled in banditry himself). They all looked up to Lenin, the master-agent himself, as Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Krupskaya explained later on:

Of all our group Vladimir Ilich was the best equipped for conspiratorial work. He knew all the through courtyards, and was a skilled hand at giving police spies the slip. He taught us how to write books in invisible ink, or by the dot method;

how to mark out secret signs, and thought out all manner of aliases. (cited in: Read 2005: 21)

In Lenin's mind, the idea of a secretive vanguard organization intent on government overthrow in terms of a "heroic vision of leadership" (Lih 2011: 12) – which, among other precursors, initially hailed from conspiratorial (Blanquist) Communism of pre-1848 times – was obviously present even before the publication of his (in)famous political pamphlet *What is to be done?* in 1902. Lenin exclaimed already in 1897 that "the struggle with the government is impossible without a strengthening and development of revolutionary organization and conspirativeness" while in 1899 his version of "division of labor" in the party connoted "functional specialization" which would "permit the party to train experts in agitation, pamphleteering, fund-raising and spy-hunting" (Service 1985: 75–76).

"Enemy spies" were everywhere during all of Lenin's exiles, and especially during World War I. For example, double agent Roman Malinovsky spent years in Lenin's company and dealings. Eventually though, Lenin was seen by others as a spy himself. He was arrested and locked up at one point on charges of spying for Russians against the interest of Austrian-Hungarian Empire in Galicia at the start of World War I, in August 1914. Yet, the most famous revolutionary story of all, that of Lenin's voyage from Switzerland to Russia, perfectly sums up his own origin story of espionage and illicit activities. Travelling across Europe "in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus" (cited in: Merridale 2017: 8) in 1917, as Winston Churchill once poetically recalled, Lenin was in fact generously financed by the Germans to start a revolution which would result in Russian capitulation. This essentially made him an agent of German imperialism in the eyes of left-wingers around Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The paranoid governance style of Marxism-Leninism (Bolshevism) after the 1917 October Revolution quickly enough became an all-encompassing reality, seeing as how the initial practice of plotting against various "enemies" resumed seamlessly after the seizure of power. Conspiratorial pseudonyms such as Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky were kept although there was no objective reason for doing so. In this sense, Lenin was "a highly secretive man who enjoyed the cloak-and-dagger element of the revolutionary underground" and which "became a habit he was unable to break" because "secrecy was a way of life" (Sebestyen 2017: 108). Yet, the heavy understatement that the regime he created was "largely shaped by his personality: secretive, suspicious, intolerant, ascetic, intemperate" (Sebestyen 2017: 346) is not to be used lightly or taken word for word for the simple reason that it almost entirely omits the fact that the class struggle optics of the original Marxism mixed with Marx's own spy discourse of everyday political conspiracy dealings made Lenin

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<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the German Social-democrats were seen by Bolsheviks and their followers around the world as principal villains during World War I and thereafter. Although many on the Left still consider accusations of Social-democrats as "Social-fascists" Stalinist, it is in fact just an update of Lenin's term "Social-imperialists" directed at European Social-democrats during World War I.

think about politics in a fundamentally conflictive way, which in turn affected the way he shaped the Soviet regime.

Notwithstanding the fact that “the structure of the police state” (Sebestyen 2017: 53) had been established under Nicholas I in the 1820s, Lenin’s Cheka cannot be simply seen as a Bolshevik version of the tsarist Okhrana, despite the fact that the latter also acted as the tsar’s own police while some of the old cadres simply switched allegiances and joined Soviet ranks.<sup>5</sup> The October coup which ousted the Provisional Government formed after the 1917 February “bourgeois” revolution, marks a milestone in the history of state terrorism, the first one since the years of French revolution and Jacobin terror in 1790s. For over half a year a security vacuum existed, ever since the Provisional Government abolished Okhrana and the Corps of Gendarmes (used for surveillance of “politicals”) (Gerwarth 2017: 30). Then, under the pretenses of combating “counter-revolution, speculation and sabotage”, the newly formed Cheka and its successor services became a Bolshevik weapon for direct usage in domestic class warfare. Chekists thrived on Lenin’s metastasized list of enemies (e.g. “capitalists”, “spies”, “foreign agents”, “hoarders”, “kulaks”, “the rich”, “counterrevolutionaries”, “speculators”, “saboteurs”, “bandits”, “reactionaries”, etc.), especially after the failed assassination attempt by a Left Socialist-Revolutionary Fanni Kaplan (Lyandres 1989) and were pledged to eliminate Soviet but *de facto* Communist party enemies. From that time forward, the communist intelligence services were used predominantly for acts of extreme suppression of any political dissidence – real too, but mostly duly perceived.<sup>6</sup>

Nightly arrests were another one of Lenin’s ideas which he suggested to Cheka chief Felix Dzerzhinsky<sup>7</sup>, as was the murder of the Romanovs, also clandestinely executed by Chekists. Lenin’s close relationship with the Dzerzhinsky was additionally strengthened during the Civil War by co-signing an article for *Pravda* newspaper on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1919 named “Beware of Spies” in which they warned against (White) spies and conspirators plotting against “Soviet power” (Read 2005: 250–251). Finally, even though placing Cheka agents and security forces at the rear of the battlefield in order to prevent retreat and desertion was Trotsky’s warfare innovation set up in 1918 during the Civil War, and a practice used by Stalin later on, it was initially approved by Lenin (Ferguson 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> By 1921 Cheka would grow to 250,000 employees, while Okhrana apparatus never exceeded 15,000 men. See in more detail, Pringle, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Lenin was also responsible for the founding of Gulag prison camps while managing at the same time to devise new practices of eliminating broadly defined “enemies” in large numbers in order to prevent any future dissent. In March 1922 Lenin ruthlessly declared that „the greater the number of representatives of the reactionary clergy and reactionary bourgeoisie we succeed in executing ... the better. We must teach these people a lesson right now, so that they will not dare even to think of any resistance for several decades” (cited in: Applebaum 2013: 90).

<sup>7</sup> Relentless Dzerzhinsky was obviously the best fit for Lenin’s secretive state terrorist intentions. He even kept a little black notebook by his side most of the time, in which he used to jot down names and addresses of “enemies”. See Applebaum, 2003, p. 6.



Marx shed no tears for “class enemies” of his time even though he was never in the position of power to see his theories fully materialize. What Lenin did was only slightly alter Marx’s revolutionary theory and seize power thus becoming a role model for communist acolytes around the world, some existing even nowadays. Lenin’s most faithful pupil and a party agent himself, Stalin, presents the case of a first truly genocidal implementation of original communist ideas hailing from the Marxist canon; all supported or conducted by secret and security intelligence services in a counterintelligence manner.

## STALIN: ARCH-CONSPIRACY AND DESPOTISM

Stalin’s revolutionary path has always been inextricably connected with intelligence services. More bluntly put, his “existence” was populated by “comrades, spies, policemen, girlfriends and peasant landlords” (Service 2004: 69).<sup>8</sup> His persecution and exile by Okhrana agents in Siberia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was initiated due to his radical Marxist viewpoints and subsequent illegal political activity as a member of RSDLP. Exile soon became a way of life for him. Stalin’s later rise to power is in great part linked to his good ties with and eventual seizure of control of intelligence services from early revolutionary and Civil War times, onto the 1920s and even more so from the 1930s onwards. The OGPU even built a *dacha* for Stalin in Volynskoe in 1934 (Kotkin 2017: 163). Dzierzynski, Mzynski, Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria as central figures of Cheka-GPU-OGPU-NKVD were all very close to Stalin (Kotkin 2014: 459). In May 1919, “on Dzierzynski’s initiative, the Cheka was ordered to report weekly to the then newly established orgburo – that is, to Stalin” (Kotkin 2014: 438). At one point in 1922 Stalin was “inundated with materials from the secret police” and at that time accordingly started creating the dictatorial “apparatus” relying on secret intelligence services (Kotkin 2014: 441). It was shaped by the principle of secrecy and used for power consolidation even before Lenin’s death:

As of April 1923, it was forbidden to put in writing anything relating to state security; instead, security matters were to be discussed first in Stalin’s secretariat, before being brought to the attention of the politburo. (...) Hypersecrecy became an unquenchable thirst that strengthened Stalin’s grip. Out of the business directorate he and his functionaries carved out a separate entity named the “secret department”, which took charge of denunciations and investigations, the party archives, and the contacts with the secret police. Modest in size at first, the secret department would expand to several hundred staff by the mid-1920s and acquire affiliates in local party branches, the military, factories, and state agencies – eventually, all major institutions. These secret departments constituted a parallel information system, a regime within the regime, that could be used to intimidate: officials did not know what was being recorded and reported in these parallel channels. (Kotkin 2014: 434)

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<sup>8</sup> For more details on Stalin’s relationship with people belonging to the last two categories, see Montefiore’s popular accounts of his young (2007) and adult life (2003).

As a direct consequence of this newly gained power, during the power struggles with Trotsky in the mid-1920s, Stalin led an operation against (Trotskyite) "Left Oppositionists" using OGPU agents. They were charged as "counterrevolutionaries" with secretly planning a military coup in September 1927; by this time every opposing attitude to the Stalin-controlled Politburo could have been interpreted as hostile to USSR and Communist Party (Khlevniuk 2015: 84–85). Essentially, the "conspiracy to seize power behaved like a conspiracy in power", because the "opaque regime had originated as a conspiracy and had never ceased being one" (Kotkin 2014: 435; 2017: 422). Soviet state terrorism depended on security intelligence, which in turn was accentuated as a top-priority political issue by prime conspirators – most notably Stalin – in leadership positions. Counterintelligence was, above all other means, an indispensable instrument of absolute power.

Since the start of collectivization of agriculture which transpired at the same time as the ruthless "dekulakization" and heavy industrialization at the end of the 1920s, the Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) and, more specifically, Cheka's other successors (GPU, OGPU, NKGB) were constantly purging "enemies" and were finally purged themselves at the end of the 1930s. In 1937-1938 exactly 265,039 "spies" were arrested by NKVD and in addition to that, by 1939 "of the 450 secret police officials stationed abroad, at least 275 had been arrested" (Kotkin 2017: 486, 589). While having "no filter to wring out the hearsay and scrutinize the patterns of disinformation" Stalin still "insisted on receiving the intelligence more or less directly, leaving the analytical work to himself" (Kotkin 2017: 841). Paranoid self-destruction of Communist Party officials, the Red Army Officer Corps and NKVD agents happening throughout the Great Terror, borne marks of intelligence services concentrated on physically eliminating Stalin's real and imaginary opponents. Blurry classifications of "enemy categories" were taken directly from Marx's, Lenin's and at long last Stalin's writings including his notorious *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*.

Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War coincided with the Great Terror, thus exporting the merciless domestic practice internationally. NKVD even used to take passports of International brigade volunteers for "safekeeping" (Kotkin 2017: 338) while foreign communists hiding in the USSR were purged mercilessly as they eventually became "foreign spies" themselves. It was mainly due to Stalin's perception of the Comintern as a "nest of spies" (Kotkin 2017: 446). Foreigners were not to be trusted no matter their allegiance. Trotskyites were on the top of his imagined hierarchy of enemies, and even Soviet military advisers in Spain "increasingly wrote of treachery" while connecting "Trotskyite-Bukharinite bands" in USSR with the "fascist intervention" in Spain (Kotkin 2017: 382). Fabricated "fifth columnists" charges were also used as an alibi for purges in the USSR since the "counterrevolution" in Spain mirrored the one among domestic party and military ranks (Khlevniuk 2015: 155–156). For Stalin, Trotsky – once a revolutionary second only to Lenin, the famous creator of the Red Army and the leader of the Left Opposition in the late 1920s – was a "supreme spy" and since he was obsessed with seeing spies "everywhere" (Kuromiya 2005: 121–122), a great number of his victims were accused of being

“Trotskyite spies”. In 1936 “NKVD operatives would “unmask” enemies to win raises, medals, and promotions; informants, queried about a “Trotskyite” underground, would become eager to please” (Kotkin 2017: 325).

During Stalin’s reign, Lenin’s original Gulag system was at the height of its cruelty when the number of prisoners and the overall destructiveness is concerned. Along with control over the vast network of concentration camps, Stalin’s NKVD was involved in one human tragedy after another, especially after the signing of the 1939 Molotov-Ribentrop Non-Aggression pact. Following Stalin’s approval of mass execution on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1940, an astonishing number of 21,857 Polish officers and intellectuals perished at the hands of NKVD in a vicious clandestine mission, the most known execution site being the Katyn forest (Kotkin 2017: 745). This was actually the pinnacle of a long-standing Leninist practice of securing power in the future by liquidating any possible opposition in large numbers, but this time it happened on an international scale. The similar recipe was followed in the post-World War II seizure of power in Eastern Europe, namely in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland and Hungary.<sup>9</sup> At this time, namely in 1946, KGB emerged as the main Soviet intelligence service after the dissolution of NKVD, and soon became a world-renowned symbol of communist conspiracy.<sup>10</sup>

During the last years of his reign, Stalin did not cease adding to his endless list of enemies. Soon after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 and with the Cold War well underway, it did not take much for his latent anti-Semitism to manifest itself as anti-Zionism and shortly thereafter “Jew-nationalists” in his view became “agents of American intelligence” (Khlevniuk 2015: 286). Although Stalin’s death signaled the end of a potential new purge<sup>11</sup>, it did not mark the end of communist

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<sup>9</sup> The “bolshevization” of Comintern cadres through purges in the 1930s resulted in the formation of new party leaderships which would later on be used to bolster communist revolutions in Europe. “Muscovites”, or Moscow communists were trained for taking over power in Eastern Europe’s satellite countries using intelligence service methods. After World War II new Communist leaders of Soviet satellites – Walter Ulbricht (DDR), Bolesław Bierut (Poland) and Mátyás Rákosi (Hungary) – were all trusted agents of the Comintern in the past and for that part NKVD and Soviet military intelligence (GRU). The practice resumed after the formation of Cominform in 1948 and the signing of the Warsaw Pact in 1949. They also came to the fore of their respective Communist parties by accusing their comrades in the Comintern during the Great Terror. See Applebaum, 2013, p. 45–55. Secret police was one of the most important re-organizational issues for the newly established Communist regimes. Even Tito, once naively hailed for being an anti-Stalinist renegade Communist leader of Yugoslavia, later on upon seizing power (through war and revolution) used Stalinist intelligence service methods in order to keep it, especially after the Cominform split in 1948. See Banac, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Newly formed Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) took control of the Gulag prison system as a consequence. This proved beneficial to the intelligence and counterintelligence specialization of KGB. By 1970, the KGB became the largest integrated intelligence and security service in the world. See Pringle, 2010, p. 777.

<sup>11</sup> The purge was already set in motion with the secret show trial and the execution of fifteen Soviet Jews involved in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (and therefore suspected for treason and espionage) in July 1952 and the (Jewish) “doctors” plot’ to kill Stalin in January 1953. See Rubenstein, 2001.

conspiracy, just a shift of focus to the last great communist power after Khrushchev's turn to post-Stalinist "revisionism" – China and its times under Mao Zedong's reign.<sup>12</sup> The communist addiction to conspiratorial politics reached its apogee while trying to deal with the legacy of Stalin, the arch-conspirator himself; Khrushchev's speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of Communist Party denouncing Stalin's crimes was delivered in secret to party delegates without the presence of press members.

## MAO: THE SECRET UNDERPINNINGS OF RED POWER

Communism in China during 1920-1976, and more specifically Maoism, presents the final link in the "counterintelligence chain" stretching from original Marxism to its infamous Asian variant. Chinese Communism is one of the most difficult cases for secret and security intelligence exploration due to the scarce archival availability of relevant material, albeit valuable information may be found exploring the biographical literature written on Mao. Mao's revolutionary beginnings can be traced to a conspiratorial meeting with a Comintern agent who funded his first mission in 1927. But it was as early as April 1920, when financially well-endowed Comintern agents travelled to Beijing, that the forming of a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began, with the organizing of "communist circles" in secrecy (Short 2017: 118–119). The party was eventually formed in 1921, but "the history of CCP had barely even begun and it had already exposed a shadowy web of informants, secret police and spies" (Faligot 2019: 9).

The previously mentioned habit of funding continued well onto the mid-1930s, at which point CCP was relying on the Soviet backing of 30,000 U.S. dollars a month (Pantsov & Levine 2012: 89, 136). This included the financing of The Long March to Yan'an in 1934. However, Comintern's financial help should not be overestimated, especially since Mao tried to renege from Soviet embrace at least from 1930 when a group of Chinese Communists previously trained in Moscow and led by Wang Ming came back to China in order to impose "ideas and strategies on the CCP" (Lynch 2004: 77). Mao's general reliance on peasantry for revolutionary purposes is well-known from his writings of the late 1920 (Meisner 2007: 47–52). Communist party intelligence service work in China was "socialized" already during the 1930s in the sense that it expanded to vast popular involvement but along with the provision of supplies and recruits, peasants also provided valuable intelligence (Mann 2012: 400). Nonetheless, Mao's most valuable intelligence service cadres were "forged" in the Soviet Union.

At the end of the 1930s Mao started working in the secret Communist base in Yan'an with Kang Sheng, an insidious figure who was trained by the NKVD from 1933 onwards and was originally responsible for the purge of Chinese communist students in Moscow during the Great Terror period. At this time, Kang Sheng even founded a "secret police office" named the *Office for the Elimination of Counter-*

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough, Stalin suspected that Mao was a Japanese spy. See Chang & Halliday, 2005, p. 368.

*revolutionaries* which operated from the auspices of his Hotel Lux room in Moscow. By supporting Mao unquestionably, he managed to take control of the Red Army Secret Service and the Social Affairs Department in 1938, and later on in 1943 the *Commission for Work Behind Enemy Lines* (Faligot 2019: 39–44).<sup>13</sup> He was also responsible for the infamous “Rectification Campaign” of 1942–1943 directed against Mao’s opponents (mostly intellectuals) as nationalist and foreign secret agents during which Mao at one point concluded that “spies were becoming as thick as fur” (cited in: Short 2017: 374). Although he was demoted in 1945 due to brutality and his ever-growing power within the party ranks, he regained political influence during the Cultural Revolution. Many of Mao’s own closest cadres were Soviet intelligence officers and Comintern agents, according to what the sources indicate: for example, one of his closest associates Liu Shaoqi was first a Soviet (1930s), and then Stalin’s “personal” spy during the 1940s (Pantsov & Levine 2012: 395).

After the end of World War II and the Soviet-backed “liberation” in 1945, “special teams trained to take over public security arrived” while from 1946 onwards, a Soviet military intelligence unit was “attached” to Mao’s headquarters (Dikötter 2013: 46; Short 2017: 417). Soon afterwards, and more notably after Mao’s victory in the civil war in 1949, a new household registration system became connected with the practice of assigning class position to every individual; loyalty to revolutionary cause was used as the main indicator. Therefore, the good classes were revolutionary cadres, soldiers and martyrs, industrial workers and poor and lower-middle peasants; middle classes included petty bourgeoisie, middle peasants and intellectuals and professionals; and finally the bad classes were landlords, rich peasants and capitalists (Dikötter 2013: 47). These categories were eventually boiled down to an original Marxist friend-foe distinction, and most shockingly, inherited as family traits. Subjection to this hereditary classist stigma was closely tied with the espionage optics of social relations while police denunciations always began on the party’s cues as Communists tried to “hunt down *hidden enemies* of the revolution, undercover agents and enemy spies” (Dikötter 2013: 48). Also, this “overt side of political power” co-existed with a “covert network of political surveillance” under control of the Ministry of Public Security (and its regional bureaus) who’s only mission was to safeguard the regime and its party by placing “covert case officers” and “agent informers” into all societal institutions: government offices, universities, factories, banks, hospitals and others (Walder 2015: 104–105). In this sense, Faligot marked 1949 as the year when the “spy state” was born: Ministry of Public Security was founded for purposes of internal security, policing and counterintelligence as well as managing the Gulag-styled labor and re-education camps (Faligot 2019: 57).

According to Mao, the policy of the Communist party in 1950 was to “eliminate remnant Nationalist forces, the secret agents and the bandits, overthrow the landlord

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<sup>13</sup> Kang Sheng was even described as a sadist about whom little was known (including the exact date of his CCP enrollment), and whom even Comintern chief Georgi Dimitrov condemned as an “enemy helper” and a “murky character” in 1943. Although these “qualifications” should not be taken for granted, they paint an interesting picture of Mao’s loyal spymaster. See Chang & Halliday, 2005, p. 260.

class, liberate Taiwan and Tibet and fight imperialism to the end" (cited in: Dikötter 2013: 84). The classic paranoid discourse became a staple in China's propagandist repertoire and included threats of "sabotage and subversion by hidden spies and fifth columnists" while "paranoia was intrinsic to the regime, which lived in fear of its own shadow" (Dikötter 2013: 85). In Maoist China, intelligence services would periodically retreat on Mao's order and let the "masses" purge the party ranks. As people denounced each other with every new purge, the sentences were carried out in public via mass show trials and self-critique séances. This new form of "counterintelligence" work resulted in a permanent state of oppression and eventually, genocide. For example, in 1955 "the atmosphere of terror was such that (...) more than 190,000 party members, fearing public humiliation, voluntarily appeared at the security organs with false self-accusations" (Pantsov & Levine 2012: 407).<sup>14</sup>

The so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution period marked the high point of "national suicide" directly before which Mao traveled through China by train in secrecy for months, plotting revenge on his party rivals (Dikötter 2016: 66). When social turmoil began in 1966, CCP Central Committee instructed the Ministry of Public Security as well as the Army to stay neutral in the upcoming carnage dictated by the young Red Guards (Pantsov & Levine 2012: 511). In what was heralded by Maoists as a final move from Socialism to Communism, overzealous young people were brutally pitted by Mao against older rival party "bosses" and state bureaucracy supposedly infiltrated with "capitalist roaders" and encouraged to revolt against remnants of "bourgeois culture", all in order to cement aging Mao's influence and hold on power. Mao's trusted ally Kang Sheng was brought back to power during the Cultural Revolution and in September 1966 he declared "essential secrets" (archives etc.) of the party and state must nonetheless not be endangered and must be safeguarded by all against the ensuing chaos (Faligot 2019: 85). Eventually, the Army and the security intelligence services took control of the "public order" and broke down the Cultural Revolution as such, when Mao stopped deeming it useful for his ends.

After Mao's death, and the advent of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms by which he legitimized his reign, intelligence services once again took center stage in the regime's security and party rule: "if economic reforms produced undesirable political effects, the party could crack down. The security police were active, the courts were subordinate to the party, and prisons and labor camps remained. Order must come first" (Mann 2013: 225). Similar to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, Deng Xiaoping also delivered a secret speech in 1978 to the Central Committee's Third Plenum in which he declared Mao's legacy as 70% correct and 30% mistaken (Short 2017: xxv). Judging by the political oppression in the post-Mao era, the actions of Chinese secret intelligence services were obviously seen as

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<sup>14</sup> The Great Leap Forward period of late 1950s and early 1960s, marked by a brutal industrialization campaign intended to transform China into a modern superpower, does not offer detailed evidence on regime's secret intelligence work. However, "counterintelligence" in the form of mass public denunciations on charges of espionage and sabotage was prevalent. See for example, Dikötter, 2010.

belonging to Mao's 70% correct legacy. Today, and especially after the Tiananmen massacre that the Politburo Standing Committee under leadership of Deng Xiaoping ordered, repression bears the deep marks of a new secret intelligence era in which technological advantage becomes the crucial factor of long-lasting Communist Party domination over ever growing population and beyond. Order indeed must come first.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

While it may seem unusual at first, tracing a link throughout the history of Communism focusing on biographies that reveal secret intelligence practices is a logical feat. This is due to the numerous striking examples that emerge upon closer inspection. In general, the canonical thinkers of Communism were conspirators involved in illegal political activity who quickly developed a secretive attitude towards seizing state power. From the "original" Marxism to Maoism and beyond, communists were being spied upon the same way they spied upon others to achieve radical political ends. This marked the beginning of "siege mentality" formation and indissolubly connected Marxist theory and practice with secret and security intelligence, especially counterintelligence bent on destroying enemy spies. The siege mentality argument should not be simply interpreted as a mere consequence of a hostile "capitalist encirclement" of the infant Soviet state – which was a classical Stalinist *explanans* – but as a thought pattern and an action guide seen as early as the 1840s with Marx.

The most common denominators for enemies in communist class struggle or revolutionary wars were "spies" and "secret agents", both of which implicitly legitimated the elimination of any political opposition. The demarcation of class bipolarity and "dialectical superseding of (political) opposites" were mostly achieved through violent covert and clandestine missions. On the other hand, regular civil and especially military intelligence missions were often disrupted by fear-fueled disinformation provided to communist dictators. Being born in an atmosphere of spies and paranoia, communism in power always seemed to revert to mass terror due to ideological extremism according to which all "non-friends" were instantly charged as enemies. In an extremist ideological framework this also means that the only rational thing for the members of the international communist movement to do is act secretly, gather information and eventually start violently subverting the political order while subjugating external infiltration and internal enemies in the process or afterwards. In various countries on different continents, communist ideology mixed with local cultural and political features, but as historical evidence shows, it was still a matter of political conspiracy based on intelligence means. Conspiratorial origins of communist politics, originally imposed by the ideology's canonical thinkers and backed by intelligence means, led to the "conspiracy in power" depending mostly on counterintelligence services and police for maintaining their rule. In many cases, entire populations under the regime were immersed in paranoid mass denunciations directed at hidden enemies.

With regards to partial historical evidence – inductively presented and some of it indeed anecdotal in nature – this paper tried to connect the biographical evidence of the secretive lives, Manichaeic social theory and illegal political activities of the original communist thinkers with the state terrorism carried out by left-wing totalitarian regimes. Although several past attempts of proving this explanatory connection deserve being mentioned, such as Hannah Arendt's (1973: 379–380) and Adam Ulam's (1973: 33), they were limited to Stalin and Stalinism. The connection in this paper was made on a larger sample and by pointing out the often overlooked explanatory significance of paranoid espionage discourse and spy practices as well as counterintelligence services' role which appeared later on. Revolutionary communist theory advocating violent political change, which was entangled with secretive political dealings and security intelligence practices of various forms, in time projected itself onto every communist regime via its leaders' influence. The future of Communism was, almost in a teleological sense, set in advance.

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# TAJNO PORIJEKLO KOMUNIZMA: PROTUOBAVJEŠTAJNA POVIJEST OD MARXA DO MAOA

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## SAŽETAK

Biografska djela o najutjecajnijim povijesnim figurama komunizma objavljena u proteklih nekoliko desetljeća pružaju zanimljivu podlogu za istraživanje komunizma kao ideologije, pokreta i vladajućeg političkog sustava. S tom svrhom fokus ovog članka počiva na naoko sekundarnom problemu protuobavještajnog djelovanja. Proučavanjem različitih biografija Marxa, Lenjina, Staljina i Mao Ce-tunga te konzultirajući druge radove iz suvremene povijesti koji naglašavaju ulogu tajnog / sigurnosnog i obavještajnog djelovanja u političkoj povijesti, namjera ovog članka jest isticanje veze između komunizma kao ideologije utemeljene na devetnaestostoljetnom marksizmu i državnog terorizma onih država u kojima je bio uspostavljen jednopartijski sustav na čelu s komunističkom partijom. Izneseno tumačenje „protuobavještajne povijesti komunizma“ temelji se na uzročnom lancu koji seže od Marxovog zavjereničkog političkog aktivizma, preko Lenjinovog ponovnog otkrića jakobinskog državnog terora i Staljinovog totalitarnog režima do Maovog pogrešnog korištenja i zlorabe masovnog protuobavještajnog djelovanja. Skriveno porijeklo političkih pokreta i stranaka nadahnutih marksizmom, uglavnom ilegalnih, kao i njihovih osnivača i vođa, ovime se pokazuje kao ključni formativni blok budućih komunističkih režima te njihove posljedične uporabe protuobavještajnog djelovanja i moćnih sigurnosnih službi u svrhu političke kontrole. Iako je članak baziran na dobro informiranim sekundarnim izvorima, nova obavještajna perspektiva koju istiche može poslužiti kao putokaz za buduća detaljnija istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: povijest, komunizam, protuobavještajno djelovanje, službe, totalitarizam.