

Know Your Enemies!

The Insidious Methods of Work of the Fascist Secret Police ¹

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An effective struggle against the enemy demands a knowledge of the methods and tricks employed by them in their wrecking work.

In his report at the February-March Plenum of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (1937), Comrade Stalin said that “the necessary measures must be taken to enable our comrades, both Party and non-Party Bolsheviks, to become familiar with the aims and objects, with the practice and technique of the wrecking, diversionist and espionage work of the foreign intelligence services.” This advice of Comrade Stalin also fully applies to all the sections of the Communist International, to throughout the world.

In order to introduce the poison of disintegration among anti-fascist fighters and fighters for Communism, the fascist secret services resort to the most brazen, most subtle methods of provocation.

Foreign intelligence services have sent and still send fascist-Trotskyist spies, diversionists, wreckers and assassins to the Soviet Union, the country which the working people of the world regard with such joy, pride and hope.

These secret services do not stop at any crime, and incessantly and systematically recruit and place their agents provocateurs inside the Communist Party organizations which are compelled in the countries of fascist dictatorship to work underground under difficult conditions.

Of the extensive documentary material concerning the insidious methods of work of the secret police in capitalist countries, we give, in the present short sketch, only individual cases of the wrecking work done by the German, Italian and Polish secret police; but even these cases characterize convincingly enough the methods employed by the enemy in order to deliver blows at the Communist Party, the foremost detachment of the working class.

THE GERMAN SECRET POLICE – THE GESTAPO

I

G., an unstable member of the German Communist Party, is arrested in the street and is undergoing examination. At first, he tries to give evasive answers, but the guard shouts out: “We'll teach you to tell the truth, we'll grind you down to powder.” They begin to flog the arrested man and the “faint-hearted Communist” declares: “I will give truthful testimony.”

"Here's a pencil and paper," says the Gestapo interrogator, "sit down and write all you know about your comrades; in a couple of days, you will be released."

Incarcerated in his cell G. thinks over the situation and decides: "I hold a trump card – deception. I shall use every possibility of deceiving the Gestapo by telling them the most insignificant facts, mingle truth with fiction, so that it all looks like the truth."

In his testimony to the Gestapo G. plays his "trump card," the result of which, as might have been expected, was betrayal, for he mentioned forthcoming meetings with his comrades working underground, etc. The newly-fledged secret police agent, traitor to the Party, is given a job by the Gestapo:

"This evening when it is dark, you will go to Lena C. and try to discover whether other Communists still visit her, - whether they know you have been arrested, and tell them some story about why you have been missing. Understand? Only don't try to get away or talk about your being arrested; you'd better remember that we'll get you from the bottom of the sea, you're in our hands. Two of our people will accompany you and wait for you in a car. Stop in a street close by, go to Lena C., spend no more than an hour with her, return here, and report everything to me."

When G. went to Lena C., she asked in astonishment where he had been; to which G. replied that he had been trailed during the last few days and had been compelled to stop at home; and when she said in alarm that in that case he should not have come to her because she had noticed that they were on her heels as well, he replied that he had only dropped in for a minute. He then returned to the men in the waiting car, and reported to the Gestapo commissar that the organization knew nothing about his arrest, to which the latter replied with satisfaction: "'That's the chief thing."

The next day G. was warned that he would have to have an interview with yet another chief and take the oath before being released. "So, raise your hand and repeat after me: 'I swear to remain loyal to my fatherland, never to betray, to be a true subject of the Fuehrer, Adolph Hitler.' "

After taking the oath, G. was led to the chief, from whom he received a number of other jobs.

On parting, the chief made the following speech: "I tell you now that if you try to tell anybody that you have been under arrest, or attempt to flee abroad, we shall hear of

it all in good time and you will find no peace anywhere in the whole world. For you know that we destroy those who betray us; we shall unmask you to your former comrades, so that there, also, your goose will be cooked. Of course, you understand all that."

"I understand," replied G., "having said 'a' I must say 'b'."

G. kept his word to the secret police and continued his work of provocation and betrayal of his party and class.

II

The Gestapo frequently instructs recruited agents to "confess" to the Party organization that they became agents of the secret police in order to "deceive" the Gestapo. Thus, for example, one such recruited traitor related how, having been tricked into meeting a Gestapo agent in a cafe, he agreed, at the first meeting with a "solid gentleman about fifty years old.x" to become an agent, but "conditionally": as he was in opposition to the central institutions of the Party, he was prepared to give everything away to the Gestapo concerning the center, but was unwilling to betray the Communists of his native town. The "solid gentleman" accepted this proposal, noting, incidentally, that he was well-informed about the Communist activities of the workers of the town in question, even without the newly-recruited agent.

"For me," said he demagogically, "it is most important to have contact with the center ... which demands greater and greater sacrifices from the little people living and working in the country."

At the next meeting, the newly recruited agent asked the secret service agent as to what the prospects were regarding their future relations; to which he received the reply that he—the "solid gentleman"—was entrusted with the task of "destroying Marxism" by all means possible, and that, on the basis of experience, he had come to the conclusion that this question could not be solved by terror alone; "it is necessary," he said, "to get into the leadership and so break up the Communist organizations."

III

The agents of the fascist secret police strain every effort to get into the Party leadership, while at the same time spreading all kinds of stories about the Party's tactical line being incorrect, being either too Left, or too Right.

"The Central Committee drives you into strikes, demonstrations, to get you all cut about," says the secret police agent, who has wormed his way into the Party

organization of some outlying locality; in some other place, also far away in the provinces, another secret agent provocatively declared: "It is high time we stopped all the humdrum everyday work; the feeling everywhere is: 'give us arms.'"

Though the Gestapo discredits the central institutions and individual leading workers of the Communist Party, this does not prevent it from utilizing, for its own purposes, the efforts of the local Party groups, isolated from the center, to unite on a district scale and establish contacts with the Central Committee. For example, in the Ruhr, Gestapo agents, pretending to be representatives of the Central Committee, at one time "worked" hard to unite the local Party groups, in order later, through this district unity, to open up a way to the Central Committee of the Party.

IV

The Gestapo also tries to make use of the workers' desire for the united front. It instructs its agents to conduct "agitation" for the united front, reckoning thus to penetrate easily into the Social-Democratic and Catholic organizations, and then, through these organizations, into the Communist Party.

Not so long ago, the following incident took place in B. The Communist Party organization entered into an agreement with the Social-Democrats and Catholics to render aid to political prisoners. A short time later it was discovered that the "representative" of the Social-Democrats was a Gestapo agent. With his assistance, the whole organization was smashed and all its members arrested.

V

The Gestapo spreads its network of spies far and wide over the border localities, and for its own purposes, of course, "permits" the import of Communist literature into the country. For example, in Upper Silesia, a Communist received information from a comrade whom he had till then fully trusted that an opportunity had arisen for passing literature over a certain point of the frontier. The Communist organized the delivery of a large quantity of literature to the given point of the frontier, but on the German side it was not comrades who came for the literature, but Gestapo agents; and so, the literature was confiscated.

Once the Communist literature is in its dirty hands, the Gestapo resorts to new acts of provocation with it, as was the case in B., when all the inhabitants of two densely populated tenements in a working-class district suddenly received issues of the Rote Fahne. Soon afterwards, all those who failed to bring the newspaper to the police were

searched and arrested. This piece of provocation was planned to stop workers in general from taking Communist literature for fear that it came from the Gestapo.

The Gestapo instructs its agents, recruited from among the workers, to give the Communists information regarding the situation in the factories, regarding conflicts arising in connection with wages, etc.; and all is done for purposes of provocation, it being calculated that the provocateur, once having won the confidence of the Communists, will be able to worm his way into the Party organization, or remain a “sympathizer” and be to some extent “in the know” about the illegal work of the Party organization.

In an extensive network of special schools, Gestapo agents study the documents of the Communist Party, Party tactics, the structure of the Party organizations, and learn to write articles “on the line of the Party,” etc.

From among these more cunning agents with special qualifications, the Gestapo recruits cadres for more “responsible” provocation. In particular, the Gestapo sends these qualified provocateurs, masked as trusted men of the Central Committee of the Party, into districts in which, after mass arrests, the Communist Party organizations are smashed up and connections with the center temporarily lost. The “trusted men of the Central Committee restore” the local Party organization and in a number of cases, as shown by documents, these foul provocateurs remain unmasked for quite a long time.

THE OVRA, ITALIAN SECRET POLICE

The Ovra, the Italian fascist secret police, resorts to no less subtle provocation for the purpose of destroying all revolutionary, and particularly Communist, organizations.

I

Communist V. set out for a business interview with R., a woman member of the Party, but R. did not put in an appearance at the stipulated time — she had been arrested.

Two days later V. also disappeared. There was no doubt left in the minds of the comrades but that he had been arrested. However, a fortnight had hardly passed before

a letter was received from abroad, from V., asking the comrades to send him money. He gave the following version of his sudden disappearance:

“On his return from the meeting with R. which had not taken place, he set off for his apartment, but on seeing a light in the window of his room, and supposing the police to be in possession, he did not go home, or to any of his comrades, for fear of compromising them, but left the town and made his way across the frontier without outside help.”

The comrades felt doubts about V.'s letter, for it was difficult to imagine that the police, having made a raid, would leave a light shining in the window. It also seemed improbable that V. would have set off on a long journey without any help from comrades, without money, or contacts.

The Party organization set about an investigation of this puzzling affair. It was established beyond all possible doubt that V. had been arrested on the evening on which he had allegedly managed to avoid arrest and get abroad, and had then become an Ovra agent. The letter to the comrades had not been written from abroad, but from prison at the dictation of the secret police. The police had seen to it that the letter was sent from abroad. It was also established that on agreeing to collaborate in the Ovra, V. was given the job of getting close to the center of the Italian Communist Party.

Holding such high hopes concerning the recruited agent, the Ovra did its utmost to cover up all traces of him. Thus, contrary to custom, the newspapers received a detailed list of arrested Communists through the Stefani official telegraph agency, containing fantastic versions of the circumstances of their arrest. (Actually, it was established that it was V. who betrayed the arrested comrades.) As for V. himself, who was called by his real name, the report stated that he was a very responsible official whom unfortunately “it had not been possible to catch,” having “fled abroad.”

And when all this cunningly woven maneuver of the secret police collapsed, when V. was unmasked by the Party, a Trotskyite sheet hurried to the help of the secret police provocateur by supporting in its columns the rumors spread by the secret police that not V. was the betrayer, but those accusing him of being one.

By these methods, police agents are sometimes successful in temporarily paralyzing Party work in one locality or another and in concealing real agents provocateurs. In the given case, not even the support of the Trotskyite sheet was of help to the Ovra in its attempt to preserve its agent-provocateur.

II.

Here is another similar case from the “work” of the Italian “Ovra.” A certain member of the Party, J., was arrested. Months went by and J. suddenly turned up at the apartment which served for special conspirative purposes. Prior to this the address of this apartment had not been known to J., and when he arrived there, he told of how he had been arrested, and taken to another town, to the P. prison. He had been interrogated, he said, several times by the chief of the political department of the Ministry for Home Affairs. That official had told him a number of facts allegedly reported by other arrested Communists, one of whom he, J., afterwards met in the secret department. This comrade, he stated, had advised him to “compromise” with the secret police.

A few days later J. was sent by train to Rome. Before arriving at one of the stations, before which there is a steep incline and the train moves very slowly, J. jumped through the carriage window. His flight, his tale ran, was a complete success. For several days he had had to hide in the home of a priest, and then, after obtaining money from comrades, he had managed to get back to Rome by roundabout means.

As for the address of the conspirative apartment, he had obtained that in prison from the comrade who had recommended him, in the interests of the Party, to “compromise” with the secret police.

J.’s story of his flight might have seemed feasible, the more so since on investigation it turned out that the priest who had allegedly given him refuge really did exist; moreover, on the itinerary sheet of the train indicated, the stops on the way had been registered in connection with the flight of the prisoner. The itinerary sheet, of course, had been fabricated by the secret police interested in covering up their agent.

However, despite the apparent likelihood of the escape, the comrades nevertheless did not believe in the truth of J.’s tale, and made further investigations into the circumstances of the escape. Then J. the traitor and double-dealer resorted to the following trick: he admitted that he had told a false-story and asked to be heard by two leading comrades to whom he would tell the whole truth. The new story was that he had really made an attempt to escape, but that it had been unsuccessful and then, seeing that his position was hopeless, he remembered the advice of the comrade he had met in jail about compromising with the secret police, and agreed to become their agent, desiring at the same time to help the Party. The secret police had proposed that he do his utmost to penetrate into the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Party and

provide political information, in exchange for which J. would be released, without being asked to give away his comrades.

In order to convince the comrades of the sincerity of his story, that he, J., had not openly betrayed, but had made a “compromise” with the secret police in the interests of the Party, J. named two Party members, agents of the secret police, about whom an official had told him. Moreover, he reported that the secret police had obtained information from some source or other concerning a number of facts about the activities of some more comrades.

In both the first and the second story, J. played a foul double-dealing game in the attempt to mislead the Party. But he was unsuccessful. The Party organization established the point beyond all shadow of doubt that J. was an agent provocateur, recruited by the secret police without any “compromise” being made. As for the facts he reported allegedly to the advantage of the Party organization, the names of the two-Party members, secret police agents, were already known to the Party organizations, and investigations had been made concerning them. As to the facts concerning the activities of a number of comrades, they had been given to the secret police by J. himself, as well as the address of the conspirative apartment, which the secret police were able then to watch.

THE POLISH SECRET POLICE – THE DEFENZIVA

The methods of provocation and espionage resorted to by the Gestapo and Ovra are not unknown to the Polish secret police – the Defenziva. For almost twenty years the Polish “Defo” has been trying by all means to demoralize the revolutionary organizations of Poland, to crush the courageous fighters of the working class – the Polish Communists. Hundreds of provocateurs, under different guises, have penetrated into the ranks of the Polish Communist Party in order to betray people loyal to the working-class cause, to get into the U.S.S.R. as political emigrants and there carry on spying and diversionist work. In addition, the Polish “Defo” has made wide use of the method of discrediting honest Communists, in order to spread suspicions about them and crush the revolutionary organizations. Here are some examples:

I

An active Communist was arrested in a certain district; he was cruelly tortured and told to give away his comrades and enter the service of the “Defo.”

The comrade courageously suffered the torture, and made no surrender to the enemy; then the “Defo,” losing hope of making him an agent, discredited him in the eyes of his Party organization by spreading persistent rumors that he was a “Defo” agent.

In its efforts to compromise another popular Communist, the “Defo” planted a receipt, faked by themselves, for money allegedly received by the comrade from the “Defo,” in the office of the local trade union.

II

In the little town of B., the “Defo” marked down as their victims three Communist railway-men who enjoyed the confidence of the working people of the locality. Not hoping to break down the will of these people by threats, the “Defo” instructed its own obvious spies, who were known by all in the town as serving in that abominable institution, to approach these railway-men on crowded streets, to greet them profusely like good acquaintances, and even to visit them in their homes, in such a way that everybody could see and then spread rumors that the railway-men had entered the service of the “Defo.”

The local Party organization indicated, failed to see through the insidious designs of the enemy, and made the mistake of declaring these honest comrades to be “Defo” agents. As a result, there was great confusion among the railway-men of the district: “If people like that,” it was said, “turn out to be provocateurs, then we can’t trust anybody.”

The insidious designs of the secret police were on this occasion successful.

Conclusion

It can be seen from the examples given above how serious today for all Communists, for all anti-fascists, is the task of raising revolutionary vigilance, how serious is the task of combatting the “idiotic disease of complacency.” (Stalin.) ;

The sooner all sections of the Communist International, anti-fascists of the whole world, make themselves acquainted with the insidious methods of the enemy, the sooner will they be able to unmask the provocateurs, spies and assassins sent by fascist intelligence services into anti-fascist organizations and the land of socialism, the U.S.S.R., the sooner will they be able, with a firm hand, ruthlessly to purge their ranks

of fascist-Trotskyite provocateurs and spies, enemies of the working class and of the whole of progressive mankind.