

Political underworld at work: KGB in France

by Laurent Murawiec

Fifty years ago there erupted in Paris the “Affaire Fantomas,” as the French government unmasked and mopped up a huge espionage network set up in France through the nest of the so-called “workers’ correspondents” of the Communist Party: a major Comintern (Communist International) operation had been blown. One member of the Communists’ political bureau named Jacques Duclos had to flee the country precipitously—to become a member of the executive of the Comintern. Duclos was never prosecuted thereafter.

A few months after the last “Fantomas” trial had occurred, the Nazi takeover in Germany forced the Comintern to transfer its European operational headquarters from the Thaelmann-Haus in Berlin to Paris. This stationing was never challenged in later decades—until 47 Soviet “diplomats” and others were kindly requested to leave French territory a few weeks ago, after the French intelligence services briefed President Mitterrand that Soviet espionage, recruitment, and other activities, including the nastiest sort, had decidedly passed all permissible limits.

But in the intervening 50 years, the freedom of action enjoyed in France by Soviet secret services gave the Moscow center an unrivaled operational base.

Espionage, however, is not the major issue. In truth, espionage was the least important of the “activities” pursued by Comintern agents. *Political intelligence* was the name of the far more important game they played, and one never reaching the surface of the political theater played for the vast majority of citizens. The classic example is the en masse entry of several tens of thousands of German Communists into the Nazi Party and the SA and SS as early as the 1920s, on orders of their party, the KPD. Those who survived the later events were to be found in East German intelligence after the war—and in many other services. This kind of dirty, immoral business in the underworld of politics was also at work in France.

The recent death of underground-politician Georges Albertini and his career will substantiate our contention.

Socialism and Nazism

A name that rarely hit the headlines in France; let alone abroad, Georges Albertini was however one of the deeper and more powerful influences at play in French politics. An orthodox socialist until 1934, the young man drifted out of the French Socialist Party along with his mentor, top Socialist leader Marcel Déat, who was captured by the martial virtues of a national-socialist order as unleashed beyond the Rhine in 1933 and in Italy under Mussolini. Albertini became a prominent figure in the Paris of wartime “collaboration” (betrayal on behalf of the Nazi occupiers), and the secretary general of the party created in 1940 by Déat, the RNP. That party had made it a policy to send the enemies of the Nazis, Resistance fighters, Jews, etc., over to the offices of the Gestapo, the Nazi SA, and thence to their “final solution.” Such were the requirements of the “New Order.” Some activities of the RNP also involved the Anglophile aristocrats of the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service of Admiral Canaris.

In wartime Paris under the swastika, Albertini’s closest associates aside from Déat were Hubert Lagardelle, a leading doctrinaire in the “revolutionary syndicalist” or “anarcho-syndicalist” wing of the labor movement, who had turned up in Rome at the French Embassy in the 1920s and 1930s to become an important adviser of Benito Mussolini; Vichy regime “technocratic” Minister Bichelonne, a close associate of Nazi economic czar Albert Speer, and of the Banque Worms, the so-called “synarchist” bank; and Jacques Benoist-Méchin, one of the leading Abwehr operatives in France since the 1930s.

Even though French justice sentenced him to hard labor for five years in 1945, Albertini was fished out of it through special presidential amnesty bestowed by (Socialist) President Vincent Auriol before mid-term. Albertini was then able to resume his activities in that half-way house between Socialism and Nazism—demonstrating that the pedantic distinctions of the left-to-right shades of political opinion merely reveal the lying idiocy of the authors of academic textbooks. Albertini became the chief political adviser of the Banque Worms, one of the leading Anglo-French haute finance institutions, and from that vantage point, built a powerful political-intelligence machine that spanned the totality of the political spectrum. For Georges Albertini was a great Russian studies expert, a specialist of labor and communist affairs, an art he had learned with his master and friend Boris Souvarine.

A well-connected Bolshevik makes it

A founder of the French Communist Party, Boris Souvarine, born in France of Russian émigrés 95 years ago, represented the PCF at the leadership of the Comintern in 1923. His wartime and post-1918 actions on behalf of splitting the French Socialist Party in order to join the Communists had given him an enormous following in the party,

which he retained as an oppositionist to the official party line, and then a dissident who was “expelled” in 1924. Souvarine had kept, in Moscow and other capitals as well as in the PCF, a multitude of contacts and networks which he went on using, long after his official parting. As a result, the endless string of small “dissident” and “opposition-Communist” grouplets he busied himself creating for several decades were a privileged entry and contact point for disappointed communists as well as Comintern operatives, playing more or less sincerely the part of the “disaffected dissident,” or plainly playing interface with Western intelligence services.

In 1929, Souvarine published the first biography of Stalin on record, which not only established his credentials as a leading “Kremlin watcher,” but also testified to the wealth of contacts he had maintained beyond what was not yet known as the Iron Curtain.

In 1935, Souvarine was able to establish an institute of his own, the Institute for Social History, which was founded as the French subsidiary of the Dutch-based international clearing house for Fabian, social-democratic operations, the International Institute for Social History of The Hague. Souvarine’s professed violent opposition to Stalin—since he was a “democratic communist”—was no hindrance to working closely, for the establishment and development of the institute, with one Anatole de Monzie, one of France’s prominent Masonic politicians of the Parti Radical, the Third Republic’s leading left-of-center political force. De Monzie in 1924 had led the organizing for the New Franco-Russian Friendship Society, which paved the way for diplomatic recognition of Soviet Russia by France, and was Moscow’s key man in the pre-war political landscape. So much so, in fact, that in 1940, after the collapse of France and the Nazi takeover of Paris, the leaders of the French CP contacted De Monzie to request permission from German occupation authorities to publish the party’s daily *l’Humanité*!

Souvarine’s institute was a curious mixed bag of old Mensheviks, some of whom had kept their links to Mother Russia (notably among those who had peacefully passed from the Czarist Okhrana secret police to Felix Dherzinsky’s Cheka), pro-appeasement and labor leaders who favored the Munich surrender, Mussolinian social-syndicalists, and in general a motley fauna that tirelessly compiled and increased a mass of dossiers and files—that precious commodity that creates the basis for intensive blackmail and cover influence. Souvarine’s influence grew among the leadership layers of the Third Republic, and, no less significantly, among intellectual layers that had discovered Marxism but demanded a “non-dogmatic” brand.

The AFL-CIO French connection

Some time was necessary to rebuild Souvarine’s intelligence outfit after the war, but help came flowing from labor and left-wing liberal circles; the main input came from the European office of the AFL-CIO and its leader Irving Brown, whose principal activity at the time was to split European

labor unions and establish clandestine intelligence units run through the resources of those unions. Brown’s collaboration with the notorious Guerini brothers of Marseilles brought him into intimacy with the narcotics operation known as the French Connection—he had already used it to emplace as mayor of Marseilles one Gaston Defferre, who acquired rather unbecoming nicknames from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and is today France’s interior minister.

Brown was the Paris liaison of Jay Lovestone, former head of the Communist Party U.S.A., who had gone to Moscow summoned by Stalin in 1928 and been given the mission of establishing Comintern secret services in the western hemisphere, then, curiously, was expelled from the party just one year later—the best possible cover to undertake a career that has not yet come to an end. Lovestone and Brown were heavily involved in Allen Dulles’s “captive nations” operations which were, to a fair extent, conduited through Paris—the Souvarine-Albertini outfit—while Lovestone was still reportedly the KGB’s point man for the Americas as late as the mid-1950s!

A ferocious anti-communist is the best possible agent of disinformation to get anti-totalitarians to swallow the most absurd lies. Lovestone and Souvarine shared the same ideology learned from their mentor Nikolai Bukharin, one of the top leaders of the Soviet Communist Party from 1917 through 1935. Bukharin had led the fight inside the CPSU against policies of industrialization and urbanization, arguing on behalf of a “snail’s pace communism” that would leave untouched Mother Russia’s vast expanses of backward rural land and protect the peasantry from the dangers of modern life, so that Russia would remain what it had primarily been, a ready supplier of raw materials, from petroleum to grain, for Western financiers and commodity traders.

The extraordinary influence gained by former convict Albertini and Souvarine and their ring of semi-secret outfits in the postwar period is all the more shocking. The *Est-Ouest* journal and the others became secret power centers that penetrated the deepest recesses of French politics and abroad (*Est-Ouest* also had editions published in Rome and in Caracas, Venezuela). Their reports, their files, their “expertise,” their advice, were more than welcome to French Socialist Party chief Guy Mollet (who ran the party from 1946 through 1969); to Radical Party leader and Prime Minister Felix Gaillard; the Christian Democrats with Georges Bidault, who later became the head of the political branch of the OAS, the fascist terrorist organizations that tried repeatedly to overthrow and assassinate Charles de Gaulle; as well as to labor leaders in the (AFL-CIO-funded) Force Ouvrière union. It was used, too, by leaders even of De Gaulle’s party (although the general loathed Albertini and would have nothing to do with him), including writer André Malraux, Interior Minister Roger Frey, and the latter’s very close friend and controller, attorney Michard-Pelissier, and even Georges Pompidou, later president of France, who was usually better advised than to accept wisdom from an old Nazi.