

*The Shadow Man: At the Heart of the Cambridge Spy Circle*

Geoff Andrews

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This is a revelatory book that, in its own quiet, understated way, is likely to send shock waves through the historiography of British Communism. Geoff Andrews is the author of the disappointing last volume of the 'official' history of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), *Endgames and New Times*. In his new biography of James Klugmann, one of the Party's leading intellectuals, he shows beyond any shadow of doubt, that the man was an agent of the NKVD, the forerunner of the KGB.<sup>1</sup> Now it can be argued that this is hardly new information. On the Far Left, various Trotskyists and Anarchists have for many years insisted that the CPGB was involved in the work of the NKVD. More recently in 2005, from the right, Nigel West, in his neglected account of MI5 penetration of the CPGB, *MASK*, wrote of how the NKVD agent Arnold Deutsch recruited Klugmann, 'codenamed MER.... as a talent-spotter, recommending other suitable candidates from his acquaintances, such as John Cairncross'.<sup>2</sup> But whereas these accounts could be dismissed, effectively marginalised, as the work of the Party's enemies, Andrews' exploration of Klugmann's involvement in intelligence work for the Soviets is absolutely conclusive.

Andrews begins his biography with an account of Klugmann's meeting with a Cambridge friend who was working at the Foreign Office at the time, John Cairncross. They met in Regent's Park in the spring of 1937, where Klugmann introduced Cairncross to Deutsch, who was charged with his recruitment as a spy, and then walked away, job done. What is particularly interesting is that Klugmann was most unhappy

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1 Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2004). Andrews is also the author of the fascinating *The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

2 Nigel West, *MASK: MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 204.

in this role and, when first approached by the NKVD, had refused to assist them unless ordered to by the CPGB leadership. His scruples, such as they were, mean that we know beyond any doubt that the party leadership were complicit in Soviet intelligence operations in Britain. Harry Pollitt himself, the Party general secretary, ordered him to comply. Indeed, the Soviets were actually put out by Klugmann's attitude, with Yuri Modin complaining that to get him to act, 'Harry Pollitt.... had to be wheeled out. Provided the order came from Pollitt, Klugmann would comply'.

Some years later, in August 1945, Klugmann had a meeting with Bob Stewart, a senior official, at the Party's King Street headquarters, to discuss his future role in the organisation.<sup>3</sup> He complained about his unwilling involvement in espionage, telling Stewart that this was 'the only time I've really been unhappy in the Party'. MI5 had Stewart's office bugged ('Operation Table') and heard all the discussion, something all the more remarkable since the Party had known about the bug since Anthony Blunt informed the NKVD of its existence in 1940. At the time this interview took place, MI5 were tapping Klugmann's phone, his mother's phone and was having him tailed. Nothing came of this surveillance however. According to Andrews, it is most likely that 'Kim Philby, by now head of counter-espionage at MI6.... acted to protect him'. Klugmann remained in fear of exposure as a onetime NKVD agent with the attendant risk of trial, conviction and imprisonment.

Klugmann had first joined the Communist Party in the spring of 1933, while a student at Cambridge, probably in response to the rise of the Nazis. At this time Communist students were expected to actively involve themselves in working-class struggles, supporting strikes and demonstrations. This changed with the turn to the Popular Front when Communist students were expected to put their studies first and get good degrees. The number of Communist students getting firsts at Cambridge rose from 5% to 60%!

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Stewart was a key figure in maintaining the Party's covert links with Soviet intelligence and gets a whole chapter to himself in West's book.

Klugmann himself was seen as being potentially a leading Marxist intellectual, but instead of becoming an academic he threw himself into Party work. By 1936, he was effectively running the Comintern's student front, the *Rassemblement Mondial des Etudiants* (RME), based in Paris; and in this capacity he visited the USA, China, India, Yugoslavia and the Middle East. It was at this time that he first met Josip Broz, later Tito, who was organising the despatch of Yugoslav volunteers to fight with the International Brigades in Spain. On an RME trip to China in July 1938, he met Mao Zedong. It was while heading up the RME that he was recruited as a talent-spotter by the NKVD early in 1937, adding 'espionage to his main RME and research work'.

One problem with Andrews' account is that at no point does he seriously get to grips with the enormity of Stalinism. We shall return to this point, but it is worth noticing that his discussion of the Great Terror, of the destruction of the POUM in Spain and of the Hitler-Stalin Pact is cursory to say the least. On the one hand there is no real acknowledgement of the Stalin dictatorship and scale of its crimes, and on the other no exploration of how it was that working-class revolutionaries like Pollitt and Marxist intellectuals like Klugmann became apologists and serial liars for it. Having joined the CP in response to Hitler taking power in Germany in 1933, how on earth did Klugmann explain away, justify to himself, Stalin's alliance with the Nazis in 1939?

According to Andrews, Klugmann was told to volunteer for military service even while the Party line was still one of opposition to the war. The reason for this is not explored, but one is left with the inevitable suspicion that his volunteering must have been at the behest of the NKVD. Even though he had been an open member of the CP, working for a Comintern front, he ended up in Egypt, working for the Special Operations Executive (SOE), 'in the section dealing with Yugoslavia'. MI5's reservations regarding this were dismissed by his commanding officer who told them that he was 'not really interested in Klugmann's politics.... any Communist tendencies he may have had, he would appear to have grown

out of'. In fact, Klugmann, without any doubt, used his position to advance the interests of the Yugoslav Communists and of the Partisan resistance movement they led. This is still a subject of considerable controversy. Was Klugmann responsible for the British decision to end support for the royalist Chetnik resistance and throw their support behind Tito's Partisans? Persuading Churchill's government to help install the Communists in power in Yugoslavia would be one of the greatest achievements of the Cambridge spies, arguably putting the achievements of the likes of Philby, Burgess, Maclean, Blunt and Cairncross in the shade. Certainly, he and others highlighted intelligence that showed the Partisans in the best light and 'either suppressed other intelligence more sympathetic to the Chetniks or produced intelligence detrimental to their cause'. Klugmann actually admitted all this in his 1945 meeting with Bob Stewart with MI5 listening in. However this was not what determined the British decision to support Tito. Fitzroy Maclean, a staunch Tory, had considerably more influence than the likes of Klugmann.

In the immediate post-war years, as a faithful Party intellectual, Klugmann was called on to justify the Stalinist purges across Eastern Europe and to put the Party line regarding the Tito-Stalin split. As the Party's Yugoslav expert, he was 'given the unenviable task of delivering the intellectual justification for the change in line'. He produced a densely argued 200-page tract, *From Trotsky to Tito*, a classic of British Stalinism, that Andrews somewhat inadequately describes as 'a very disingenuous work'. It is worth considering this book in some detail. According to Klugmann, the trials in Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania in 1949 revealed the existence of 'a deliberate, counter-revolutionary, anti-Communist plot carried out by a gang of police-informers, agents provocateurs and intelligence agents, centred around the leading Titoites'. This conspiracy had been put in place at the end of the 1930s, according to Laszlo Rajk, the Hungarian CP leader, who not only admitted his own 'Trotskyism' at his trial, but went on to reveal that Trotskyists had been successfully planted in the Yugoslav Communist Party by the Gestapo and other

intelligence agencies. He quotes Rajk to the effect that 'the Gestapo and US Intelligence were competing as to who would take these traitors over'. These were the men who took over the Yugoslav CP: 'Tito himself, Rankovic, Kardelj and Djilas'.

Rajk was a lifelong Communist whose supposed confession, quoted by Klugmann, had been written by his torturers. Another victim quoted by Klugmann was Traicho Kostov, the Bulgarian CP leader, who revealed that Tito had been a fellow Trotskyist as long ago as 1934. Once again the confession was written by his torturers.

One of the most interesting parts of Klugmann's exposé of Tito's 'treachery' is his account of how the British came to abandon the Chetniks and support the Partisans. Initially the British urged the Chetniks to fight the Partisans with the 'British wireless.... even used to broadcast calls for the assassination of Partisan leaders'. He goes on:

'At a certain time, and exactly how and when history still has to disclose, the British political and military leadership, on a very high and top-secret level, must have received information, some of which it may have had all along, that there were leading elements inside the Partisan forces, inside the Yugoslav Communist Party, spies and provocateurs, Gestapo elements, Trotskyites, who could be "trusted" (from the point of view of British imperialism) and could be used to betray the Yugoslav People's Liberation movement.'

The British abandoned the royalists and gave their support to the Partisans because they discovered that Tito and his comrades were nothing more than 'a group of Trotskyites', a 'Trotskyite clique', and so were able to carry out 'on a big scale the policy of penetration and corruption of the left from inside'. Whereas once the Trotskyists had collaborated with the Italian Fascists (Klugmann remembered how in 1938 he had been in Milan and had actually seen 'newly translated works of Trotsky' in a bookshop window); with the Nazis ('the writings of Trotsky were widely translated and distributed' in Germany); with Franco's secret police (Trotsky's works 'were published by the Franco press at Salamanca and Burgos'); and

with the Polish secret police (who were 'specially educated in Trotskyism'); now they worked for British and US Imperialism. Himmler had handed his 'fourth international' over to 'Hoover of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation', but it was 'the same "scum", the same "Nazi germs"'. And just in case some of his readers had not yet caught on, he emphasised that 'the Titoites of today are the Trotskyites of yesterday'.<sup>4</sup>

'Disingenuous' hardly does *From Trotsky to Tito* justice.

What we have here is a 'Marxist intellectual' making his case by using the forged testimony of men who had been tortured into compliance and were subsequently shot; and moreover providing a case for his British readers for a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia with all the horrors that would have involved. Without any doubt Klugmann knew he was peddling lies, not everyday lies, but lies drenched in blood and pain. Andrews makes no serious attempt to explain how he ended up in this position.

And there is another interesting dimension to this story. If a Stalinist dictatorship had ever taken power in Britain, and had decided to identify those responsible for British support being given to the traitor Tito, they would have quickly identified a certain James Klugmann as one of those responsible, a Communist working for a British intelligence agency no less, something which could so easily be portrayed as being the other way round. Klugmann's *From Trotsky to Tito* would have been his own death warrant. Of course, Klugmann would not have been the only lifelong CPer to fall victim to a British Stalinist regime, headed up by the likes of Bill Rust. Harry Pollitt himself, who had on a number of occasions shown a dangerous degree of independence, would almost certainly have been persuaded to confess to being a secret 'Trotskyite' and shot. It is interesting to speculate on the number of British Communists whose survival depended on their party never taking power.

Klugmann remained loyal to the Party through the difficulties of 1956, the Khrushchev revelations and the invasion of Hungary, going on to edit *Marxism Today* until September

<sup>4</sup> James Klugmann, *From Trotsky to Tito* (London, 1951), pp. 32, 39, 43, 82, 85, 113

1977. He died soon after relinquishing the post. And we are left with the problem posed by an intelligent man, who went into politics committed to working-class emancipation and without any concern for personal gain, who prostituted himself in the most outrageous fashion in support of a brutal murderous tyranny.

*John Newsinger*

John Newsinger is a semi-retired academic. A new edition of his *British Counterinsurgency* has recently been published and is reviewed in this issue of *Lobster*.

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