

THE COMMUNIST WORLD

BY VICTOR ZORZA

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Tall tales by Gordon Lonsdale

The memoirs of Gordon Lonsdale, the Soviet spy who was allowed to go back to Russia after serving three of the 25 years to which he was sentenced at the Old Bailey, are much more than a spy's story of how he managed to outwit for years the intelligence services of Britain and the United States.

That the book is designed to discredit the Western intelligence services by showing up their incompetence is clear. But it goes farther than that. "Spy" (published today by Neville Spearman, 25s) also offers quite gratuitously information about traitors within the ranks of Western intelligence organisations who have sold out to Russia.

Is the KGB, the Committee for State Security for which Lonsdale works, paying off old scores to double-agents for whom it has no further need, or who have proved disloyal? Or is it simply "planting" information on Western intelligence services to cause confusion and dissension within their ranks?

Sometimes the information about the alleged traitors is detailed enough to make immediate identification possible. Sometimes just enough is revealed to cause a great deal of work in attempting to track down the people involved—if, indeed, they exist. Unless the information is obviously false as to be ludicrous—as some of Lonsdale's "plants" undoubtedly are—no intelligence service can afford to ignore it.

Bad blood

Even if it ultimately all proves false, some bad blood may well be caused between the services involved, and within them, by the very fact of an investigation being ordered. And even if Western intelligence organisations—which are used to having information of this kind planted on them, though by more conventional methods—emerge unscathed, there will inevitably be some people who will say that there is no smoke without fire. There always are.

On another level, the book constitutes a unique attempt by the Soviet Union to purvey to the Western public, by exploiting its curiosity about spies, a large amount of Communist propaganda which ordinarily reaches only those who buy openly Com-



Gordon Lonsdale

munist literature. On yet another level, it tries to sow dissension between Briton and German, American and Briton, German and American, by retailing stories of the contempt or distrust that each is supposed to have for the other—and true examples of which are, indeed, to be found in each of these countries.

But even all this does not plumb the depths of this remarkable book. Pretentious criticism of the American way of life provides the background for the descriptions of Lonsdale's

spying service in the United States, while the British section of the book is full of stories about the corruption said to be rampant in the British police forces, the unfairness of British justice, the inefficiency of the British penal system, and the pitiful unimportance of Britain in the modern world, compared with such giants as Russia and the United States.

The KGB will certainly spare no effort to have the book published outside Britain also, and it is just possible that some of the foreign readers may be prepared to accept Lonsdale's account of it. But in so far as the book was intended for the British public, it appears to have been planned by

some professor of English literature at the KGB's academy for spies on the assumption that, since the British lapped up George Bernard Shaw's criticism of British society, they would welcome some more of the same from a convinced Soviet spy.

The KGB literary expert has forgotten that GBS had other qualities as well, and this forgetfulness will certainly prove the book's undoing. The more people read the book in Britain—as the KGB would certainly want them to read it—the more will recognise it as the transparently false propaganda exercise that it is.

Nevertheless, in its objectives, if not in execution, the book is the first serious attempt to found a new type of political spy fiction as well as to forge a new weapon for psychological warfare between nations and for deadly intrigue between intelligence services.

Even if this book fails to accomplish its objectives, as it assuredly will, it will probably be followed by others of the same kind, just as the first artillery shell that falls wide of the target is followed by more accurate shots. We are in on the birth of a new literary genre which may be with us for many years to come. The book continues.

Already the Central Intelligence Agency has replied by releasing for publication the "Penkovsky papers," sent out of Russia by one of the most effective Anglo-American spies of recent years. My guess is that the "Penkovsky papers" will cause much more damage in Russia than the Lonsdale memoirs will in the West, if only because the political standing of important people in the Soviet Union is unsafe at the best of times.

Mr Khrushchev's fall is not the only example of this. Many Soviet leaders at the second and third level below him have fallen a long way in recent years owing to purges and political intrigue. The "Penkovsky papers" will now point the finger of suspicion at some others, and even if their careers do not suffer immediately their enemies in the Soviet leadership will seek to use the ammunition thus provided in some future political crisis or intrigue.

Early life

The Lonsdale book includes outright lies, half-truths, and distortions, but the first half of it, dealing with his early life and his espionage career in the United States is largely, and demonstrably, an invention. He claims to have been born as Gordon Arthur Lonsdale in Cobalt, Ontario, in 1924. In 1932 he left Canada with his Finnish mother and step-father to return to Finland, but, "by a happy chance," they ended up in Lvov, which was then in Poland and was to be annexed by Russia at the beginning of the war.

From Lvov he went to Warsaw and, after the Polish capital was overrun by the Germans, he joined a group in the Resistance movement. When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, his group was ordered deep into German-occupied Russia to establish a partisan unit. From this he graduated into intelligence proper, was sent to Berlin to work as the radio operator of an already established Soviet spy, and after the war married a Polish girl and hunted down Nazis in Berlin.

He then studied until 1950, and was brought back into the intelligence service, which sent him by way of West Germany to the United States as a radio operator to be attached to one "Alec," who, he makes it clear, was the Soviet ace spy Colonel Abel, later to be captured and exchanged for the U2 pilot Garry Powers.

Continued

In 1959 he obtained, in Canada, the passport which he claimed in the name of Lonsdale, and then he went on to Britain to establish the spy network that was to lead to his undoing in 1961. Three years later he was exchanged for the British business man Greville Wynne, arrested by the Russians for acting as the contact-man for Penkovsky.

This is what is known, in intelligence parlance as a "cover story," and a very poor one at that. What made Lonsdale persist in it, in defiance of the facts clearly established by Western intelligence investigations into his true background? His KGB literary advisers probably thought that it would make a more appealing story—what with a disillusioned Canadian family returning to Eastern Europe, the Polish resistance movement, the Russian partisans behind the German lines, and, later, hunting down Nazi evildoers in East and West Germany, America and Britain (for this, the book gives to understand, was Lonsdale's real life's work—not spying.

Or is it simply that, as he claims in the book, he hopes "that many FBI man-hours will be wasted in search of the identity I used in the United States." He adds, for good measure, that he has little doubt that they will be wasted, "because however efficient the FBI may be in pursuing gangsters and bootleggers, they are out of their depth when trying to deal with a sophisticated intelligence network." Guess which.

Principle

Some chapters later, he describes Britain's "by no means first-class police organisation" as "no match for a well trained and experienced intelligence officer inspired by love of principle and country." Guess who. Back in Moscow now, he must have forgotten that it was the British police that caught him.

As for his own highly professional intelligence organisation, it seems to have been unable to compose a fool-proof cover story even for the purposes of this book. In order to account for the disappearance of his "family" in Lvov, he recalls how he learned, at the beginning of the war, that the family had vanished "during the short German occupation" of the area.

The difficulty about this is that the "short German occupation" had at that time stopped just short of Lvov, and that the compiler of the cover story cannot have checked his facts, which ought to be available in any good intelligence service library.

If the same man is engaged in providing cover stories for Soviet spies for other than literary purposes, he is clearly due for a refresher course in the history of Soviet border lands—where many cover stories originate—or even for retirement. There is other evidence of sloppiness in the composition of the cover story which would be of interest to experts only, but the basic facts are, of course, wrong from beginning to end, and are known to Western intelligence to be wrong.

True story

The spy was born in Moscow on January 17, 1922. His name is Konon Trofimovich Molody. His father was a well-known science writer and editor. After the father's death in 1929, the family fell on difficult times. Two of the boy's aunts had emigrated earlier to the US, and in 1932 one of the aunts obtained an entry visa to the US for Konon by passing him off as her own son.

In 1939 he returned to Russia, possibly because the intelligence service regarded his American background as promising, rose to the rank of major in the Army and, after his first marriage broke up, married again. He left Russia in the autumn of 1953, travelled by way of the US to Canada where—and here the two stories meet for the first time—he applied for a passport in the name of Gordon Lonsdale, on the strength of a Canadian birth certificate issued in that name. There had, in fact, been a child of that name who left Canada in the early thirties with his family for Russia, where all trace of them disappeared.

This is the true story of Konon Molody, alias Gordon Lonsdale, who will probably go down in history as the founder of a new school of literature that combines a spy's adventures with psychological warfare, intelligence intrigues with political propaganda, and publishing with money-making. And we can never even be sure that he wrote the book himself.

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