

Change of Game Rules: The Policy of the Communist International during 1923–1925 vis-à-vis the Communist Sections

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Summary

The situation in Europe soon after World War I filled the Bolsheviks with the hope that revolution would soon engulf other countries. Founded in March 1919, on Vladimir Lenin's initiative, the Communist International was regarded as the headquarters of the international communist movement and an instrument to reach that goal. The Communist International promoted communism and mobilized the working class to fight for their rights. But from 1923, the international situation began to stabilize. Attempts to start a revolution in European countries failed, and the Soviet Union lost hope of an immediate worldwide revolution. Soon the question arose: What's next? The response was the attempt to build socialism when surrounded by hostile capitalist powers and wait for an opportune moment when the world again is ripe for a revolution. Joseph Stalin was prepared to take the risk of building a socialist system alone. The consolidation of Stalin's power and the victory of the idea of 'socialism in one state', in spite of the resistance on a part of the ruling elite, primarily Trotsky, also changed foreign policy significantly. The Kremlin was now facing the need to build normal diplomatic relations with the capitalist countries.

In consequence, the Communist International was forced to "change game rules" vis-à-vis the communist sections. The satellite communist parties now had to switch to long-term strategy under conditions of peace. There was a shift in policy: from direct interference of Soviet security services in the internal matters of sovereign states to long-term action, utilizing the local communist structures on a greater scale. This paper deals with the years 1923–1925, when the Commission for Illegal Activity operated within the Executive of the Communist International Organization Bureau, which outlined those plans. As a result, the Executive Committee gradually lost its autonomy, and ultimately, together with its communist parties, became a tool in the hands of Soviet foreign policy.

The situation in Europe soon after World War I filled the Bolsheviks with the hope that revolution would soon engulf other countries. Founded in March 1919, on Vladimir Lenin's initiative, the Communist International was regarded as the headquarters of the international communist movement and an instrument to reach that goal. The Communist International promoted communism and mobilized the working class to fight for their rights, but it also had other, less formal tasks. In the early post-war years, until 1923, it closely cooperated with military and political intelligence services of the Soviet state. Informally from 1920, and formally from 1921, the Executive Committee had its International Liaison Department [later: OMS, Otdel Mezhdunarodnykh Svyazi] (G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997). It was established by the resolution of Communist International Congress in July 1921. Its task was to support, lead and finance communist parties. The aid was not only financial, but also it consisted in supplies of weapons, cadres and technical know-how. The OMS, effectively, was the headquarters of intelligence operations carried out by communist parties all over the world; it was a center where civilian and military intelligence crossed their paths. This body within the Communist International naturally utilized the local communist structures to gather information for the Soviet state, the mother of the international communist movement.

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Apart from the many communists at that time, who consciously agreed to perform intelligence tasks, the OMS also used unaware local communists to fight against their governments (Ch. Andrew, O. Gordievsky, 1990; G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997; N.S. Lebedeva, 2019).

The turning point for the international communist movement came in the mid-1920s. After 1923 the international situation began to stabilize. Attempts to start a revolution on 9–10 November 1918 in Berlin, which succeeded in deposing the German monarchy, the hopes pinned to the revolutionary changes soon proved to be nothing more than a pipe dream, because the new revolutionary wave that engulfed Germany in the fall of 1923 was ultimately thwarted. Also after the initial success of the Hungarian communists, who proclaimed a Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919, already after Romanian troops marched in, Joseph Hapsburg declared himself regent and power in the country was seized by István Friedrich (Czubiński, 1988; J. Riddell, 2014; Materski, 2005). What is more, the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1921 failed to bring the Bolsheviks the expected results. After those events, in view of the gradual stabilization of the situation in Europe after World War I and the failed attempts to start a revolution, Soviet Russia lost hope for a swift global revolution (Dominiczak, 1992; Materski, 2005). Therefore, the Communist Party (then called the All-Union Communist Party [Bolsheviks]) faced the question of the future of the Bolshevik experiment. The reply was the idea to build socialism in hostile, capitalist surroundings as an autarchic system. The proponent of this idea was Joseph Stalin, who was prepared to take the risk of building socialism alone, as a way to live through the ripening of the revolution in capitalist states. It should be stressed, however, that the future dictator never doubted the validity of revolution and, just as Marx and Engels, believed in its inevitability (Musiał, 2012). On the other hand, a part of the ruling elite, primarily Lev Trotsky, did not believe that it was possible to build socialism in one country, thinking that it must be a process that would engulf the entire Europe. It was one of the main reasons for the polarization within the Soviet ruling camp.

The doctrine of ‘communism in one country’ began to gain popularity when unexpectedly Stalin consolidated his position in the fall of 1923, when he was the only one to voice his doubts about the success of the German revolution. And he was the only one who was right, which also protected him from removal from party bodies after Lenin’s death (Lenin, 1989). The principles of the new doctrine were finally formulated in 1925 by Nikolai Bukharin, who one year after Grigory Zinoviev became the chairman of the Presidium of the Communist International Executive Committee.

The situation was even more complicated as the Bolshevik state faced the need to establish good relations with capitalist states. They had to change the ‘game rules’ and drop the practice of overt interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, and employ more covert forms. It was a way for the Bolsheviks to wait out the revolutions’ ‘puberty’ period in capitalist states. So, what kind of action was taken by the Bolsheviks, who at that time implemented the principle of ‘communism in one country’ so as not to lose sight of the main goal – the global revolution? How did they realize these mutually exclusive goals?

In that situation the Communist International first needed to work out new methods for communist sections in capitalist countries to employ, rewire them for long-term activity in peace-time conditions. There was a shift in policy: from direct interference of Soviet security services in the internal affairs of sovereign states to long-term action, utilizing the local communist structures on a greater scale. The body charged with creating new rules for section work was the new Commission for Illegal Activity in the Organizational Bureau of the IC. The commission had the character of a working group, set up to carry out a specific task. The Commission also planned to charge the communists sections with other duties, which entailed certain structural changes. It also planned to develop a network of communist sections in those countries where either there were no such sections or they had been crushed by the local security services and it was planned to reorganize them again.

Decision to set up the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Organizational Bureau of Comintern’s Executive Committee was taken on 6 December 1922, i. e. one day after the Fourth Congress of the Comintern (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), f.495,op.27,d.1,l. 44-47). Formally, it began work on 17 January 1923, which we learn from the minutes of its first meeting.

Its membership was very characteristic: chairman Edward Próchniak (“Weber”) (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1, l.3; Samuś, 1983), member of Department I, subordinated to the Representation of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski, KPRP) to the Communist International Executive Committee that carried out tasks of the International Liaison Department of the Communist International Executive Committee on Polish Eastern Borderlands.

Other members included: Meier Abramovitsch Trilisser (“Moskvin”)(A. Velidov, 2011; RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.3), chief of the zakordonnoeotdielenye, that is the Foreign Department (Russian, INO VChK-GPU-OGPU), Peter Alexandrovitsch Wompe(RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1, l. 44-47) – chief of the International Liaison Department during 1922–1925, Yemelyan Mikhaylovitsch Jaroslavskij (f.495,op.27,d.1,l.3; S.L. Firsov, 2002). At the Commission’s session in February 1923, the body’s was expanded to include Vintsas Simanovitsch Mickiavitschius-Kapsukas, who sat in for Edward Próchniak when he was away(RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.3; f.495,op.27,d.3,l.24; G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997) and by Osip Piatnicki (actually Yosif Aronovitsch Tarszis, the chief of International Liaison Department during 1921–1922(RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.3; Lalayants, n.d.; Zelixon-Bobrovskaya, n.d.). Another member of the Commission was A. Kiyarini (Chiariini), responsible for the Italian communist movement, among others. Thus, the Commission was made up of people who had wide experience in illegal activity, and who operated illegally in the Russian Empire before the October Revolution. They also had significant influence in the security organs of the Soviet state. The character of its duties that the Commission was a cell very closely related to OMS.

The commission set to work immediately. Already in January 1923, it held three meetings that determined the Commission’s goals and its tasks for the immediate future (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.1-10). Notably, other prominent communist movement activists took part in the Commission’s meetings, among them Béla Kun, born Béla Kohn, who reported on the situation of the communist movement in Hungary (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.20). This demonstrates that the Commission was interested in the experiences of communist activists, who had seized power before. It found its confirmation at the second meeting on the 20 January 1923, where it was emphasized that its composition is incomplete and that the commission ought to work on co-opting appropriate comrades (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l. 5).

In its early days, the Commission devoted much attention to the situation of the communist party in Italy following the events of October 1922, when Benito Mussolini took power, as well as to the Weimar Republic, Romania, and Czechoslovakia (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1, l.10). The Commission was particularly interested in the communist parties in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Hungary, as well as in the United States, as it was emphasized at its first meeting. However, the Commission did not limit its attention to those countries and the communist parties there. It analyzed the situation in the entire communist movement. Instructions were issued to gather information where and how they are active, how many members they had and if they had established contacts with communist youth organizations. It was to be the starting point for further work of the Commission. According to the Commission’s instructions the communist parties were to designate one person from among its members, who would be constantly in touch with the Commission.

As early as 1923, the Commission drafted a project that was to be sent out to all the Communist International Executive Committee sections, regarding the coding of letters and reports. It was in this manner that the instruction was to secure the communist structures against repressions by the local state security organs. Based on letters and reports sent to the Communist International, the Commission decided that the communist movement had substantial shortcomings. In their correspondence the communists used their full real names, thus exposing themselves and the communist movement to the operations of security organs. According to the draft document, it was necessary to code all written information that could be used by state security against the communist parties. But if a given section had no cipher, it needed to avoid real names in their correspondence. The draft further forbade making lists of members at all party levels, and where they already existed, they had to be destroyed(RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.9). One example was the situation in the Yugoslav communist party, which was subjected to detailed scrutiny at the Commission’s session on 16 February 1923. Following the ban by the royal regime, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was completely shattered, and its activity practically stopped, despite enormous help of the RFSRR (Russian Federal Soviet Socialist Republic)/ USSR and the Communist International. The Commission explained this situation by the party’s failure to implement the rules of illegal activity(RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.10).

The Commission also tried to influence the communist organizations and, according to the plan, redirect their activity. Each section was to set up new organizational cells, and even the existing ones were to be assigned new tasks. Another important task for the Commission was to regulate the relations of the new structures with the communist party. As early as April 1923, in Italy, the so-called illegal bureau began talks with the presidium of the Italian Communist Party in order to normalize the mutual relations. The idea was that the local parties take over the tasks that so far were the domain of Soviet intelligence groups.

Not all communist parties were willing to agree to have intelligence cells within their structures. One such example is the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP) / Communist Party of Poland (KPP). In the new situation, the Comintern's objective was to destabilize the internal situation of capitalist countries. The Commission was planning to induct the communist parties into communist agitation in the military, to penetrate the legal organizations, as well as the technical aspects of publishing illegal literature, carrying out military intelligence, penetrating the state apparatus and running operations of armed groups. Plans were made to set up new departments in the central party committees: Communications and Technology Department, Military Department, and Syndicalist (Cooperative) Department, etc. This naturally meant increased financing of the communist parties (Adibekov, Anderson, & Širinâ, 2004; RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.24).

The Communist International strove to implement a system of conspiratorial work in the parties, modeled on that used by the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) under the tsarist regime, and in the armed organizations. Documents of the Commission for illegal activity show that the organizational changes began in the Italian Communist Party; however, one could observe substantial changes in the KPRP as early as the autumn of 1923. The years 1923–1925 see the final formation of the Polish communist structure, and its growing similarity to the Bolshevik structure. What is interesting, in Austria in 1923, this so-called 'illegal organization', made up of supporters of the new vision of communist party activity, existed independently of the party's Central Committee (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.27). But soon, as a result of a coup, the Central Committee yielded to this group. This is even more interesting when we add that all this took place against the background of the on-going factional fighting (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.28).

On 25 August 1923, the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Comintern's Executive Committee Organizational Bureau drafted a document containing the results of their work, in particular about how to organize self-defense groups in Communist International sections as well as cells in the army and the navy (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2,l.11-12). The Commission was also to organize in Moscow talks for representatives of sections, to be followed by discussions regarding conspiratorial work, and how train for it. In order to work effectively, the Commission needed to learn about the specific conditions in each country where a Communist International section operated. Thus, it collected information about the internal situation, the operational rules of other organizations, in the communist vernacular called 'fascist' (on the basis of the gathered material, the Commission developed methods to fight against them). The Commission also planned to organize short training courses for activists of each section, who were to organize in them the so-called 'illegal apparatus'. Importantly, the Commission was to cooperate closely with the Young Communist International (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2, l.11-12).

One of the early comprehensive instructions that outlined the operational rules of the communist party in conspiratorial conditions dates back to November 1924. It contains fifteen general points regarding the organization of the communist party, compliance with conspiratorial rules by party functionaries. The instructions required absolute compliance with the conspiratorial rule book, both at the central and local levels (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.44-45). These requirements pertained to the leaders of the local and regional structures, their work plan, and to the detailed guidelines for the activity of party functionaries. In party activity they had to play by ear, with no recourse to any auxiliary materials. Whenever they were necessary, party jargon or code was to be used. Furthermore, absolute secrecy was to be maintained. Upon completion of a given task, the functionaries were to destroy all traces of their activity. The instruction also contained dispositions regarding – so to speak – camouflage in a given environment. Both at home and outside the functionaries were to behave in accordance with the assumed role (e.g., traveling salespeople needed to monitor prices, goods, buyers, etc.). They were forbidden to speak about themselves or the party. The functionaries, even among themselves, did not know their real names. They were required to change their pseudonyms from time to time. They were also required to change their clandestine locales, conspiratorial apartments, etc. (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.1,l.44-45). The instruction also outlined work guidelines for the new departments: technical and communications. The technical department was tasked with preparing false documents, codes, as well as the logistical back-up for party meetings and conferences; the communications department was to secure the channels of communication between the communists. Central Committee members could contact members of district committees, while party cells (called yacheyka) could contact only members of district committees. So, members of a given party cell had no contact with and did not know the Central Committee members. Division committees designated contact people to deal with other organizations and parties.

As to the publications delivery, the instruction was rather enigmatic about it. With respect to foreign literature, the instruction considered the possibility of delivering it via legal and illegal routes (rail, or horses, or by people). In the next stage, literature was to be distributed among district committees, and then delivered to the storerooms of local committees in cities or directly distributed among people. The instruction also took up the issue of organizing printing networks. Each party level was charged (as party obligation) with the organization of a printing cell. When this was not possible, at least a mimeograph was required. Illegal printing cells were to be located in private apartments. The instruction categorically prohibited the use of legal printing facilities, naturally if possible.

In November 1924, the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Communist International Executive Committee Organizational Bureau issued one more, very important instruction regarding the documents produced by the commission and the Communist International Organizational Bureau. These guidelines were meant for the Commission's internal use but are nevertheless quite interesting in view of the methodology presented. The document describes the procedure of dealing with documents produced by the Commission. All documents were to be drafted in one copy for each Commission member and sent out just before the meeting so that the members could acquaint themselves with them. At the meeting, the members were to return their copies to the secretary responsible for it. The minutes of such meetings were kept in a special folder. The folder was also where copies – one in each language – were to be stored. The documents were to be retyped by specially trained typists under strict supervision of the Commission's secretary. The Commission's documents were to be kept separately from other documents produced by the Communist International, in a special coffer. Only a specially designated person had the key (RGASPI, f.495, op.27,d.1,l.47).

The Commission presented the draft guidelines, which contained all the existing, partial instructions at its session on 15 February 1925. It was a 27-page long document entitled "Principles of Underground Party Activity". It was made up of 19 sections and contained in a succinct form all the existing decisions. The individual sections concerned not only the rules of underground activity, but also of 'fighting against the secret agents of bourgeois regime', as well as steps to be taken during operations of state security organs and how to behave during interrogation by the court or in direct contact with functionaries of state security. It also touched upon activity in the military (RGASPI, f.495, op.27,d.2,l.19-46).

The "Principles of Underground Party Activity" drafted by the Commission, were meant to be drafted to be the "basis for further discussion and extension by comrades who had the same experiences". The archive fond with documents of the activity of the Commission for Illegal Activity contains only this draft, but it seems that the satellite parties implemented it according to their capabilities and adjusted them to the local conditions. At the same time, the communist sections were obligated by the Communist International to comply under the threat of 'party' penalty, such as loss of membership in the Comintern. Party leadership were to see to it that every party activist become acquainted with the new rules and follow them in their activity (RGASPI, f.495, op.27,d.2,l.19-46).

The instruction also pointed out the shortcomings even of the best organized conspiracy. So the parties were made aware of the danger of exposure by state security (RGASPI, f.495, op.27,d.1,l.21-22). In order to protect the party structure against such an eventuality, certain concrete steps had to be taken, such as the prohibition of holding different party posts by the same person, avoidance of delegating irresponsible people to underground work, and the requirement to inform activists of all matters concerning their activity. In order to protect the party, it was required that activists that were rather 'unknown' to other communists and those who had been released from prison or bailed out be kept away from underground work. The fear was that they might be recruited by state security. It was also forbidden to entrust an illegal activist (so called illegal) with underground work.

There was a key passage that specified that in the recruitment of activists for illegal tasks, it was obligatory to verify the political orientation, because "only the believers and those who put their hope in the communist movement qualify for and are capable of carrying out this type of tasks." The 1925 instruction excluded those communists who were reckless and prone to gossip. The instruction further warned against relying on people who were infirm, incapable of quick reaction, especially when it was necessary to avoid people with chronic diseases such as epilepsy.

Underground work was also out of the question for people with alcohol problems or people prone to develop addictions, e.g. gamblers (RGASPI, f.495, op.27,d.1,l.23). The instruction also contained detailed guidelines for finding appropriate conspiratorial apartments. In their selection one was forbidden to be guided by opinion about the person that was to make the apartment available, even that of other communists.

One needed to check carefully the owner and his acquaintances, his milieu, etc. Every party member, especially every functionary, needed to be very careful and pay attention to the behavior of his fellow comrades. It was a kind of internal control. Whenever an informer was identified in the party, his cell had to be quickly liquidated and replaced with a new one, so that the suspected activist loses contact with the members and orientation in the structure. What is interesting is that the same procedure applied to his close party colleagues with whom he was on very good terms.

What is very important, the 1925 guidelines mentioned providing security to the leading organs, central committees, district committees, and area committees in case of exposure by the local organs of security. The document mentioned the need for a replacement body, something like a 'shadow cabinet'. Just in case, they were to take over the illegal publishing infrastructure, that is printing shops with a stock of printing materials and have some reserves of workers who could do the printing. It was important to secure the secret channel of communication with the headquarters, reserves of 'uncompromised' and 'fresh' people who could be engaged in illegal work and auxiliary transport, primarily for the distribution of communist literature. According to the instruction, whatever documentation, especially that could be compromising for the party, such as receipts for remuneration were to be kept in a safe house (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2, l.24). The instruction also described a system of early warning in order to avoid exposure called 'bad breaks', arrests by state security, as well as steps to be taken when a 'bad break' happened (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2,l.41-43).

The guidelines prepared by the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Executive Committee Organizational Bureau effectively repeated a rule used by the communists before 1925 regarding how to behave when arrested by state security organs. In the first place one needed to be mentally prepared for such an eventuality. The document made communist activists particularly aware of possible provocation that were often used by security organs. Party members when they were imprisoned ought to be conscious that they are "surrounded by enemy agents". The instruction also prohibited using prison guards to relay secret information (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2,l.44).

The instruction also issued guidelines for strictly technical solutions to underground activity to be applied by technical and communications departments. The former concern the use of so-called 'overt' (yavaks), that is the rules of conspiratorial practice whenever functionaries appeared in public. Such appearances typically involved meeting somebody, transmitting brief message, information, etc. It could be done only when party work called for it. Meetings were to be held only in public places that did not arouse any suspicion, such as on the street, in restaurants or cafes. They were to be changed frequently (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2,l.28).

The instruction also specified that communication between activists only to be conducted by couriers who did not know the names of those they liaised with. The telephone, mail, or the telegraph or press advertisements were to be used much less frequently. They were to be used only in exceptional situations and the messages passed via this channel were to appear 'innocuous' (RGASPI, f.495,op.27,d.2,l.30).

In November 1925, the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Organizational Bureau of the Comintern Executive Committee also issued guidelines regarding the use of pseudonyms. The functionaries were to change pseudonyms periodically, at least every 5–6 months, also depending on the location. At the same time one comrade might have appeared under one pseudonym in Warsaw and under a different one, say, in the Dąbrowskie Basin. The real name of a member of the organization was to remain secret as it was deemed not necessary for communist organization work, whereas pseudonyms were to be inconspicuous, ordinary sounding. Those functionaries that had contacts with different organizations were to have different pseudonyms for contacts with each organization, e.g. A functionary who had contacts with the trade unions, and with other district committees, ought to have two additional sobriquet (klitschka), different from the party pseudonym used in the local party committee. Additionally, functionaries working in 'secret sections' such as finance, should have one more pseudonym for the purpose of this type activities, e.g. financial settlements (RGASPI, f.495,op.123,d.52, l.31). The party was also prohibited from keeping records of its members (RGASPI, f.495,op.123,d.52,l.31-32).

The instruction of Commission for Illegal Activity of the Organizational Bureau of Comintern Executive Committee of 1925 also contained guidelines for party documentation and coding. In uncoded documentation, it was prohibited to write secret messages, e.g., use addresses, meeting places or surnames. Particularly intensive coding was to be applied in correspondence whose transport takes a long time and passes 'through many hands'. Due to the fact that addresses on envelopes could not be coded, correspondence was directed to safe houses addressed to the apartment owners (RGASPI, f.63,op.1,d.13,l.27-29).

The 1925 instruction also specifies that the code ought to be as foolproof as possible, and the decoding key as simple as possible in order to be memorized and under no circumstances use the written key. Another item in the instruction specified that different codes were to be used for different addressees. For example, in correspondence with legally functioning workers, and a completely different one in correspondence with the foreign headquarters. Furthermore, the party Central Committee should have a different code for correspondence with each district committee, etc. But when a functionary was assigned to other duties, the code used by the previous cell was automatically changed (RGASPI, f.495,op.123,d.52,l.33-34). Moreover, coded information in correspondence with party members legally operating, for example, in trade unions, could not be handwritten or even signed with a pseudonym by hand in order to protect the organization against 'repressions'. And it was categorically prohibited to carry any copies of letters or instructions (RGASPI, f.495,op.123,d.52,l.34).

The activity of the Commission for Illegal Activity of the Organizational Bureau of the Communist International Executive Committee ended at a time when important decisions were taken by the Communist International Executive Committee and the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Central Committee. On 25 February 1925, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Politburo also submitted a draft document concerning the liquidation of Soviet sabotage intelligence groups operating on Polish territory (RGASPI, f.17,op.162,d. 2,l.78-81). Document of 25 February 1925 also specified that the "weakness of the communist party leadership in view of the spontaneous growth of peasant activity abroad, from which we recruited the cadres of sabotage intelligence groups, failed to fulfill the role of leaders of the groups, whose directives did not comply with the party line. Therefore, there was a whole series of actions by those groups that proved detrimental for [Soviet] diplomacy and made difficult the work of party structures." (G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997, p. 7-14) It was decided that, according to the draft of the VKP(b) Politbureau, responsibility for the operations of those groups that carry out 'politically purposeful' 'combat and political' activity to be assigned to the Polish communist structure and the representation at the Communist International EC. At the same time, the document separated the work of those groups from the intelligence activity of the state organs of the USSR. On the other hand, those groups that were not part of the party organization were simply ordered to withdraw to the internal military districts in the USSR (Adibekov et al., 2004; G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997; RGASPI, f.17,op.162,d. 2,l.78-81).

However, in item 4, the document specified that in lieu of active intelligence that existed before and was carried out for purely military purposes of the USSR, in the neighboring countries there should be organized conspiratorial cells that were to provide intelligence and with which constant contact should be kept.

They were to provide information about Soviet military installations, establish contact with the necessary people, and purchase weapons. These cells (called 'points'), were to have an informational and preparatory character so that at the 'appropriate' moment, such as in case of war, they could be the basis on which sabotage-military points could be developed. These points were never to be associated with the communist party. And the leadership of the central Soviet intelligence apparatus was to contact the representatives of the central committees of the relevant parties. The responsibility for the border line and the smuggling of partisans across it was transferred to the GPU (A. Krzak, 2007; Adibekov et al., 2004; RGASPI, f.17,op.162,d. 2, l.78-81). Naturally, these points were branches of civilian and military intelligence. The International Liaison Department of the Comintern Executive Committee continued to operate, and from the Fifth Comintern Congress (17 June–8 July 1924) "extended communications [cooperation] with the GPU-OGPU (Adibekov et al., 2004; G.M. Adibekov, E.N. Shakhnazarova, K.K. Shirinia, 1997; RGASPI, f.17,op.162,d. 2,l.78-81). We know very little about the activity of International Liaison Department. The International Liaison Department fund is listed among funds of the Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). Soon (on 8 March 1925), another document appeared, this time signed by the Communist International EC. The document was concordant with decisions previously taken within the Comintern structures. It dealt with the so-called military work and expressed the need to have the communist party activity in the army, gendarmerie, and police 'in a number of countries', especially in those that were deemed strategic for the USSR, namely Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland.

According to a Communist International Executive Committee resolution, communist parties in those countries were to set up military sections/departments, also called martial. Based on this resolution, the Comintern Executive Committee established a central organ, the so-called War Bureau, which was tasked with this work. Through the military departments of central committees of the party, the War Bureau instructed and drew guidelines for the activity of the individual parties in that respect.

The War bureau was made up of representatives of Communist International EC, All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Central Committee and of the Military Revolutionary Council (Revolutsyonnyi Voyennyi Sovet, RVS USSR). Its work consisted in organizing training courses and lessons in war preparation, keeping records of the 'fighting forces of the proletariat', and in preparation for a future, Soviet-planned war or for an eruption of revolution in other countries (Adibekov et al., 2004; RGASPI, f.508, op.2, d.5,l.3-4). The opinion was that a central school in Moscow should be established in order to prepare leaders of military and intelligence work in the sections. The war bureau used information from all institutions that had foreign apparatuses: RVS, GPU, Communist International EC, and others. The resolution was signed by Józef Unszlicht, Otto Kuusinen and Osip Pyatnitski (Adibekov et al., 2004). What is interesting, on 13 March 1925, at a session of the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Central Committee expressed substantial skepticism about the Comintern proposal. The Political Bureau deemed the Communist International proposal 'inadvisable' and instructed the Commission (Grigori Zinoviev, Mikhail Frunze and Dmitriy Manuilskiy) to monitor this work "in a secret order" (RGASPI, f.17, op.162, d. 2, l. 87).

Another important aspect, from the Communist International's point of view, was the training of people who would organize this kind of work in the individual countries. It was decided to establish schools to train the future organizers of conspiratorial activity of Communist International sections. The matter of schools was taken up at the Fifth Communist International Congress in the summer of 1924. It was then that it was decided to set up a school to train the cadres for communist sections. On 5 February 1925, Belá Kun, on behalf of the Communist International EC, at a session of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Central Committee Politburo submitted a motion to organize international party courses in Moscow. The All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Central Committee requested that the Presidium of the Comintern Executive Committee prepare this proposition and only then submit it to a session of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Political Bureau (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 487, l. 4). Finally, on 15 May 1925, this draft was adopted by All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Political Bureau.

This decision established, among others, the International Lenin School that operated from September 1938 (Adibekov et al., 2004). The Communist International Executive Committee also outlined a plan to open in 1925 party schools for communists from England, France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. The decision of the Communist International Executive Committee Presidium concerning the schools was passed on 6 May 1925 (Kowalczyk, 2016; Adibekov et al., 2004; RGASPI, f.495, op.2, d.45, l.45).

To accomplish these goals the Bolsheviks used the Comintern. Soon after the abortive attempt to start a revolution in Germany in the autumn of 1923, Vladimir Lenin let Zinoviev understand that the Communist International has no autonomy at all. The CI was to be merely an instrument in the hands of Soviet foreign policy. Not only the structure and the tasks of the communist sections was changed, but the Comintern Organizational Bureau also set up a special Commission for Illegal Activity, which prepared methods for the communist sections. They were prepared by the best conspirators from the tsarist times, people connected with the intelligence of Soviet Russia. From 1925 on, the Comintern structure became an increasingly docile executor of orders of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)/All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Political Bureau. As a result, together with its communist parties, Comintern structures were gradually becoming a tool in the hands of Soviet state.

The communist sections did not find it easy to accept the changes imposed by Moscow during 1923–1925. The establishment of new departments in the structure, the imposition of new goals and operational rules, alienated them even further from the society in which they functioned, exposing them even more to accusations of being Soviet agents. Implementation of "Rules of Party Conspiratorial Activity" required time to prepare their members for the new methods. Courses in conspiratorial work for activists of communist structures were organized as late as the 1930s. (RGASPI, f.533, op.12, d.47, l.1.3).

Edward Próchniak "Sewer", "Weber" (1888–1937), a communist activist. From 1903, member of Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, later of Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), from 1918 in the Communist Workers' Party of Poland. In 1920, member of the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee (Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski). After Red Army's defeat in the Polish-Soviet War, he stayed in Soviet Russia and the USSR. Arrested by the NKVD during the 'Great Purge', on 8 July 1937. On 21 August 1937, sentenced to death by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. Executed on the same day. Cremated and buried on the Donsky Cemetery.

Meier Abramovitsch Trilisser (“Moskvin” 1883–1941), activist of the international communist movement. In 1901, he joined the Russian Social Democrat Communist International Workers' Party (Bolsheviks), and in 1905 he joined the Bolsheviks. In 1906 he led the war-time Bolshevik organization in Finland. He was involved in purchasing special weapons from Japanese secret services for the Bolshevik military organization and received money to run the policy of destabilization within tsarist Russia. He was also involved with the Finnish radical nationalists, who organized a number of terrorist attacks and assaults. In 1918 he became chairman of the Irkutsk committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (RKP[b]) and organized the ‘red terror’ in the Irkutsk Guberniya. He was also the chief of staff of the Baikal Front, and later was secretary of the Amur District Committee of the RKP(b). In 1921, by Felix Dzerzhinski’s order, he was delegated to work in the central Cheka apparatus, precisely in its Foreign Department, INO VChK. From 1926, he was deputy OGPU chief. With the help of the intelligence services he transferred money to finance the international communist movement, among others. A Comintern agent, he supervised the attempts to organize armed revolts in Estonia (1924) and Bulgaria (1924). In 1935, transferred to the EC of the Comintern. Suspected of contacts with Lev Trotsky and the Japanese intelligence. Arrested by the NKVD in 1940 and executed the same year. Rehabilitated in 1956.

Peter Alexanrovitch Vompe (1890–1925), communist activist. From 1911, member of the Russian Social Democrat Communist International Workers' Party, Menshevik. From 1917 member of the RKP(b). High-ranking party activists: Central Committee head for the railroad workers’ trade union. From 1921, member of the Comintern EC. In 1922–1925, head of the International Liaison Commission.

Yemelyan Mikhailovich Yaroslavsky (1878–1943), real name Minei Izrailevich Gubelman. From 1898, activists of the Russian Social Democrat Communist International Workers' Party (Bolsheviks) (RSDRP). From 1901, stayed abroad as a correspondent of the Iskry newspaper. Later, member of RSDRP in Chita and Petersburg. One of the leaders of the party fighting organization which, among others, dealt with expropriation and robbery. Active mostly in the Yaroslavl area (hence his assumed name), as well as around Ekaterinoslav. Later in the Moscow RSDRP Committee. Arrested in 1907 and deported to eastern Siberia. During the October Revolution, he was a member of the Party center in Moscow and of War and Revolutionary Committee. In 1918–1919 he was empowered by the Central Committee RKP(b) to mobilize for the Red Army, and at the same time he was the commissar of the Moscow Military District. From 1921 member of the Central Committee RKP(b). In 1923–1934, member of the Central Control Commission of the Central Committee RKP(b)/RCP(b). From January 1939, employed as a historian in the Soviet Academy of Sciences; also chief of the High Party School of the Central Committee RCP(b). From the mid-1930s, an active supporter of Joseph Stalin. During World War II, his propagandist Communist International texts spurred soldiers on to fight. Died of stomach cancer on 4 December 1943 in Moscow.

Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas (1880–1935), organizer and founder of communist structures in Lithuania, activist of the international communist movement. During 1902–1904 studied at Bern University. In 1903, joined the Lithuanian social democrats. Took part on the 1905 revolution in Lithuania. From 1907 in prison and exiled. From 1904 to 1906, editor of periodicals: Draugas and Darbininkas, later cooperated with newspapers Naujoje Gaidynė and Skardas. He signed his articles with the pseudonym ‘Kapsukas’, which he eventually took as his own. In 1914, established contact with Vladimir Lenin in Cracow. Later emigrated to Great Britain and the United States. In July 1917 he joined the Russian Social Democrat Communist International Workers' Party (Bolsheviks), and headed the Lithuanian mutation of Pravda (Tiesa). After the October Revolution of 1917, he worked in the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities, where he took charge of the Lithuanian department. He was a member of the Lithuanian section of RSDRP(b), and later of the RKP(b), and a member of the Central Committee of the Central Committee of Lithuania. He became actively involved in preparations to establish a Soviet Lithuania. From 27 February to 4 July 1919. He was the chief of the Council of People’s Commissars of Belarusian-Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republ Communist International (Lit-Bel). In 1920–1921 he operated illegally in Vilnius during the Polish-Soviet War. From 1921, delegated to Moscow, in 1923–1935 member of the Comintern EC.

Osip Piatnitsky, actually Iosif Aronovich Tarshis (1882–1938), in the mid 1908 joined the revolutionary circle in an illegal trade union in Kaunas. Later moved to Vilnius, where he was secretary and cashier of the women tailors’ trade union. In 1900, he managed to establish contact with the editors of the Iskra newspaper, and he soon became one of the chief organizers of illegal publication distribution network in Russia. Arrested in 1902, imprisoned, and later escaped and moved abroad; active in Berlin. In 1903, at the second party congress in Brussels and in London, he took the side of the Bolsheviks. Having returned to Russia, he was a member of the Odessa RSDRP Committee.

Took part in the revolution of 1905. Subsequently, he headed the conspiratorial-technical apparatus of the Moscow RSDRP. Left Russia again in 1908 and became member of the party Foreign Bureau. In 1913 returned to Russia and was immediately arrested and deported to the Yenisey Guberniya (Central Siberia). After the February Revolution, he returned to Moscow and became member of the local RSDRP(B) Committee. From 1921, member of the Comintern EC; 1923–1935 its secretary. In 1924–1927, member of the Central Party Control Commission of the All-Union Communist Party [Bolsheviks, WKP(b)], during 1924–1927 member of the Central Committee WKP(b). He had influence on the staffing policy and NKVD decisions. Arrested on 27 June 1937, executed on 28 July 1938.

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