Cooperation Unavowable:

British government relations with communists in Britain and France, 1938 – 1945

DPhil Thesis

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For Maeve and Katherine

Contents

ABSTRACT 1
EXTENDED ABSTRACT 2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 10
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 13
INTRODUCTION 15
Historiography 17
Methodology 39
Sources 41
Chapter Plan 50
PART ONE 55
Chapter I: What should we do? 56
Chapter II: *Insaissable Sabotage* 82
Chapter III: Scattered networks 117
PART TWO 142
Chapter IV: Reaching out to the Soviets 143
Chapter V: Introducing NKVD agents into France 170
Chapter VI: Care to work with a Bolshevik? 207
PART THREE 242
Chapter VII: 243
The path to Liberation and a new political framework for France 243
Chapter VIII: Cooperation Unavowable to Operation Unthinkable 269
Conclusion 290
BIBLIOGRAPHY 302

ABSTRACT

More than thirty years on from the dissolution of the USSR, British government interaction with the Soviet Union, representatives of the Communist International (Comintern) and individual communists in the period 1938 - 1945 continues to be viewed primarily through the lens of ideological disparity and mutual suspicion, of espionage and counter-espionage. Nowhere has this been truer than in accounts of the activity of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), and its predecessor Section D, in France and the United Kingdom. While the past decade has seen an interest in the role of SOE in supporting, for example, the communist resistance in Yugoslavia, relatively little research has been conducted into the dynamics of proactive engagement between representatives of the British government and communists who followed the Soviet line (as well as the many who did not) or the impact of these associations on British colonial policy. Triangulating a broad range of archival evidence against literature from the UK, Germany and France, this thesis argues that there is much to be gained from adjusting what are effectively Cold War narratives to allow stories of transnational, and trans-ideological cooperation, however mutually manipulative, to emerge. By plotting a series of projects in which British representatives not only controlled, but also supported and learnt from current and former members of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), the International Brigades, and the Soviet *Naródnyy komissariát vnútrennikh del* (NKVD) along a continuum of cooperation spanning the years 1938 to 1945, the thesis complements recent studies around transnational anti-fascist cooperation, urging a re-assessment of the geographical, political and temporal boundaries of British government involvement in anti-Nazi resistance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In March 1938, the head of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair proposed that his organisation develop a 'theory of secret offensives' to be deployed against Nazi Germany in peacetime. The ensuing report, written by Royal Engineer Major Laurence Grand, suggested that efforts be made to identify émigré communists - many of whom were living and working in France and Britain - who might be willing to disseminate anti-Nazi propaganda and undertake acts of British-sponsored 'general sabotage' in Germany. Grand's report also proposed that prominent communist intellectuals be approached with a view to working on certain aspects of subversion directed against the Nazi regime. Despite some colleagues within SIS arguing that there were no communist groups left in Germany, or that the British government should not be actively seeking out contact with members of the Communist International (Comintern), the proposals were reviewed and endorsed at the highest level of government. While Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain pursued appeasement negotiations with Nazi Germany, therefore, a new section within SIS (Section D) was created to oversee Britain's early forays into anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion. The absence of an official paper trail ensured the Prime Minister could plausibly deny any knowledge of the scheme.

The proposals put forward by Section D in 1938 were not only heavily criticised internally but also by the pre-war French intelligence agency, the *Deuxième Bureau*, which was firmly set against Britain developing civilian-led sabotage and subversion units on French soil in general, and the recruitment of communist agents in particular. One of the key concerns of this study is the examination of how and why, in the face of such opposition, the idea of working with communists took such a hold within SIS, and why it was pursued even after

various experiments failed, or produced uninspiring results. In seeking to answer these questions, the narrative highlights the experience, determination and remarkable persuasiveness of a relatively small number of men and women from the UK, France, Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and Spain who, through their early embrace of a transnational and trans-ideological approach to anti-Nazi resistance, profoundly influenced attitudes towards allied intelligence cooperation and the conduct of irregular warfare in the 20th century.

When discussing British engagement with communists before and during the Second World War it is important to draw a distinction between the strategic decision to engage in sabotage and subversion against Nazi Germany, which has already been the subject of much debate, and the tactical approach of employing or supporting communist agents, which has not. This thesis is predominantly concerned with the latter. Although various aspects of this story have been examined in the past including, for example, Roderick Bailey's work on James Klugmann and the communist resistance in Yugoslavia, and Donal O'Sullivan's account of the secret agreement signed between the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the NKVD in 1941, no attempt has been made to date to set these examples along an historical continuum. By examining the evolution of, or causal relationship between, pre-war British theories about proactive engagement with communists and later wartime cooperation this thesis sets out to do two things: the first is to draw the focus on engagement between British agents and communists away from eastern Europe and back to the UK and France. While a considerable number of oblique references have been made in the historiography of the resistance in France to British engagement with communists, few have examined what this looked like in practice.

Secondly, this study seeks to redress the balance in the treatment of communists as the 'prey' of British intelligence operations by highlighting important moments where current or former members of the communist international actively gave of their time, knowledge and networks to support the fight against Nazism. The fact that little heed has traditionally been paid to such cooperation can be attributed to a combination of factors, not least among them the predominance of Cold War narratives that focussed on the security services' hunt for, or penetration by, communists. In addition to political and diplomatic imperative, for many years the inaccessibility of the relevant archives was used as a key reason for avoiding the study of intelligence in warfare. By drawing on a wide variety of secondary and primary sources, this thesis argues that there is now sufficient information to inform a study of how the British secret services harnessed a burgeoning state interest in irregular warfare and linked it to the potential of communists at home and abroad. A wide historiographical net has been thrown to capture clues from within texts relating to exile studies, transnational resistance, irregular warfare, and allied intelligence cooperation.

To support its evolutionary argument, the narrative follows a broadly chronological structure, presenting three discrete, but intimately related, 'group' biographies, whose characters rise and fall in line with distinct, but inherently connected, periods of British interaction with communists, from early outreach to Trotskyists, via a secret agreement with the NKVD, to ad hoc relations with communist *résistants* in France. This approach, in which 'biographical detail permeates, but is not necessarily or systematically separated out in the text',[1] has been employed to emphasise not only how a small number of individuals

1 Krista Cowman *Collective Biography* in Simon Gunn & Lucy Faire, (eds), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 83 -100.

influenced and were influenced by critical aspects of government policy, but also how the very nature of the individuals involved was impacted by constantly evolving political, diplomatic and military directives. This approach owes much to Rod Kedward's concept, developed in the 1980s, of 'routes of resistance' between France and Britain.[2] It also contributes to the growing body of works on transnational resistance, as explored by, among others, Robert Gildea, Hilary Footitt, Charlotte Faucher and Laure Humbert.[3]

In addition to its focus on British relations with émigré communists, this thesis seeks to address the overwhelming tendency to view British intelligence interaction with communists in the UK through the lens of mutual distrust. While it is true that the Security Service's treatment of home-grown communism was generally uncompromising, the story is more nuanced than is generally recognised. Although many communists including former CPGB member Tom Wintringham were denied commissions in the British army, Wintringham acted as a valued adviser for the first SOE pamphlets on guerrilla warfare, lobbied for the creation of a trained Home Guard, and developed an irregular warfare training school that introduced topics such as street fighting, camouflage and sabotage to the general public – subjects that would go on to become the cornerstones of later SOE training programmes. There are two main reasons why Wintringham and his comrades have for so long been overlooked in histories of Section D and SOE, both largely influenced by the onset of the Cold War. The first is the British government's desire to suppress

2 H. R. Kedward, 'Mapping the Resistance: An Essay on Roots and Routes', *Modern & Contemporary France,* 20/4 (2012), pp. 491 – 503.

3 Robert Gildea & Ismée Tames, (eds), *Fighters across Frontiers* (Manchester, 2020); Hilary Footitt, 'War and Culture Studies in 2016: Putting 'Translation' into the Transnational?, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 9/3 (2016), pp. 209–221; Charlotte Faucher and Laure Humbert, 'Introduction – Beyond de Gaulle and Beyond London: The French External Resistance and Its International Networks'*, European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 25/2 (2018), pp. 195–221. See also 'Resistance and Collaboration in the Second World War as a Transnational Phenomena', *Journal of Modern European History* 16/2 (2018), p. 180.

information about British communists' influence on British military strategy. The second was that British communists themselves in all probability wished to obscure and bury evidence of their pro-active involvement with the British government for fear of the negative impact this might have on their own image, and on communism more broadly as the movement at the vanguard of the fight against British imperialism. As Paul Laity has argued, Tom Wintringham was 'written out of the political history of 20th century Britain: the right has preferred to forget that the Home Guard was transformed by a revolutionary, while communists have dismissed him as a renegade.'[4]

If individual émigré and British communists who engaged proactively with British officials often found themselves side-lined or forgotten after the war, the Soviet agents most intimately involved with the design and execution of cooperation agreements retained their positions, or were moved to equally important roles after the war. In a service defined by mutual suspicion and regular purges, this is significant evidence that the Soviets found the relationship to have been useful. The same cannot be said of many of the British officers who were most deeply involved in liaison with communists. CSS Sinclair, who pushed through his plan for subverting the Nazi regime through the use of communist agents, and who stuck by Laurence Grand even as he faced allegations of operational incompetence and financial irresponsibility, has largely been forgotten for his role in driving the process, having been eclipsed by later figures such as SOE Chief Colin Gubbins. Grand, whose downfall was ultimately determined by the perfect storm of events that occurred in May 1940, became particularly vulnerable after Sinclair's death in November 1939. Despite the invective thrown his way, Grand developed from scratch early plans for

4 Paul Laity 'Marxism in the Home Counties', *The New Statesman* 17/827 (2004), pp. 53 – 54.

the use of sabotage techniques, and his staff developed prototypes of devices that went on to be used throughout the world by SOE operatives. Grand's singling out of former KPD member and double agent Karl Groehl as one of his premier agents in France was a significant and perhaps unprecedented example of cooperation between a British intelligence officer and a communist agent in the war against fascism. It should also be noted that Grand appointed a number of women to positions of responsibility at an early stage, personally recruiting intelligence operative Clara Holmes to manage Section D's German section and supporting Leslie Humphreys' recommendation of Vera Atkins, who went on to play a pivotal role in the life of female SOE agents.

In contrast to Sinclair's early direction to Grand that he consider all possibilities without fear of sanction, the ambiguity of political directives later given to SOE agents in France (SOE F) caused no small amount of confusion and irritation. As M.R.D. Foot would later acknowledge, some of SOE F section's most successful agents, however, maximised the profit from this leeway, in some cases creating powerful hybrid resistance movements that incorporated units of the communist-backed *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP) and *Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* (MOI). Many of these stories of cooperation, however, are buried in amongst wider narratives around SOE liaison with the resistance in France. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that the agents involved left little trace of their work, or are seen as unattractive or problematic subjects for biographers. From the French side, much of the silence around cooperation can be attributed to the FTP having directed members to avoid all possible contact with British agents and therefore any acknowledgement of cooperation being an admission of treachery, combined with the political imperative to support the communists' battle for supremacy in the story of national liberation. The

Gaullist narrative of France liberated by the French likewise contributed to a suppression (conscious or otherwise) of stories featuring co-operation. Stories of the British restricting arms drops to the French resistance, and to communists in particular, were instead used as a popular political football after the war by French communists and Gaullists alike to argue that they had been the victims of a British-backed conspiracy to clip the wings of the resistance in France. While there certainly were those within SOE and the British government who baulked at the idea of arming *résistants* – and particularly communists - in France, and Churchill voiced concerns about the successes of the Red Army and the public support for the Soviet Union in the UK and France, as this study shows the majority of the intelligence reaching the Prime Minister on the state of British and French politics from 1943 onwards pointed to Moscow's willingness to instruct national parties to support unity of action with Allied forces and engage in post-war democratic processes.

Although the various elements of engagement between British intelligence and communists in the UK and France ultimately disappointed all parties, it also gave those involved fascinating, if limited, opportunities to drive innovation, take advantage of each other's logistical superiority, to observe internal processes, and to witness what a 'real' capitalist or communist might look and sound like in a non-confrontational environment. SOE accounts of contact with NKVD agents and PCF representatives are particularly revealing in their description of the discombobulation experienced by British representatives who, having developed a clear idea of the ideal Soviet Citizen from reading Marxist-Leninist literature, found themselves confronted by individuals who, on the surface at least, experienced fear, enjoyed good wine, or ascribed to cultural and traditional arguments against collectivisation. Cooperation did also offer opportunities to

infiltrate each other's intelligence services although suspicions often fell on the wrong individuals. It is a well-established irony that, while objections were raised within SIS and MI5 to proposals to engage émigré communists, two of Section D's most senior British recruits, Guy Burgess and Kim Philby, were Soviet agents.

While it is difficult to quantify the benefits obtained from the various elements of cooperation with communists before and throughout the war, in addition to developing links with anti-Nazi groups in pre-war Germany, pushing for and securing an unprecedented Anglo-Soviet intelligence agreement, and ensuring access to certain communist resistance units in France, this thesis argues that the lines of communication between the two countries afforded by these links ensured the Soviet Union also played an unusually prominent role in stymieing communist successes both in France and beyond. Many have reported HMG's fear of 'India, Africa, and China as well as the East Midlands, one day being swept by a Communist whirlwind'[5] but few have acknowledged British hopes that SOE might persuade the NKVD to help suppress certain anti-colonial movements yet one of Britain's key hoped for 'wins' from the SOE relationship with the Soviet NKVD was the securing of NKVD cooperation in intriguing against the Indian National Congress. The dramatic changes in the global balance of power following the Second World War, however, ushered in a messy, complex period of proxy wars, insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, in which much of Britain's military response ended up being guided by a 1966 work by Sir Robert Thompson, entitled Defeating Communist Insurgency, which has remained in print ever since.

5 See, for example, Bradley F. Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin: How the Allies Traded Intelligence, 1941 – 1945* (Kansas, 1996), p. 2.

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at Kew, the Service Historique de la Défense (SHD) at Vincennes, the Archives Départementales of the Haute Garonne and the Rhône, the Lyon Municipal Archives, the Labour History Archives at Manchester, the Archives Sciences Po in Paris, the Churchill Archives in Cambridge, the archivists at the Imperial War Museum, and the Liddell Hart Military Archives at King's College London. Régis le Mer of the Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et la Déportation (CHRD) in Lyon offered valuable suggestions and leads that indicated possible needles to a researcher lost in a haystack. His excellent map of the resistance in Lyon merits close attention from researchers interested in the subject. Pierre Gastou at the Archives Municipales of Toulouse took the initiative to put me in touch with Elerika Leroy at the Conseil Départemental of the Haute Garonne, who herself is researching SOE networks in the region and who offered welcome advice and links to useful archival material held by the Musée de la Résistance in Toulouse. Chantal Pagès at the Archives Départementales of the Haute Garonne was equally conscientious in her recommendations, based on her extensive knowledge of the region's Resistance fonds. The archives of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) held at the Archives Départementales of Seine Saint Denis are a treasure trove, and most ably curated by Pierre Boichu who facilitated my several visits. A number of libraries have proved 'home from home' over the course of the past few years, including the Bodleian and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France – two buildings that could not be further removed from each other architecturally but within whose walls runs the same current of intellectual industry that acted as a balm in frenetic times. Other libraries, including the Bibliothèques Universitaires of Villetaneuse and Montpellier happily welcomed a stranger into their midst, for which I am most grateful. Closer to home, the librarians and archivists of Magdalen, St Anthony's and Balliol College Oxford have all answered last-minute requests for books and archival material with grace

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMGOT	Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories
AS	Armée Secrète
BCRA	Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action (Free French intelligence agency from 17 January 1942)
BCRAM	Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action Militaire (Free French intelligence agency 15 April 1941 – 17 January 1942)
CC	Central Committee (of communist party)
CD	Executive Director of SOE
CFLN	Comité français de Libération nationale
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CNR	Conseil National de Résistance
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
COMAC	Comité d'Action Militaire (du Conseil National de la Résistance)
COMINTERN	Communist International
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CSS	Chief of the Secret Service (British SIS, also known as MI6)
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff, the professional head of the British
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DDMI	Deputy Director of Military Intelligence
DFP	Deutsche Freiheits Partei
DGSS	Direction Générale des Services Spéciales
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DRC	Defence Requirements Committee
FFI	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur
F Section	SOE department responsible for France
FTP/FTPF	Francs Tireurs et Partisans (Français)
GE	Guerilleros Espagñols
GS(R)	War Office research department, later renamed MI(R)
HMG	His Majesty's Government
HOW	Home Office Warrant
ICA	Irish Citizen Army
IIC	Industrial Intelligence Centre
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IDD	Irish Department of Defence
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare

MI5	British counter-espionage service (also known as the Security Service)
MI6	British foreign intelligence service (also known as SIS)
MI(R)	War Office research department
MOI	Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée
MUR	Mouvements Unis de la Résistance
NCDA	National Council for Democratic Aid
NKVD	Narodny komissariat vnutrennikh del (Soviet police and political
OS	Organisation Spéciale
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PCI	Parti Communiste Internationaliste (Trotskyist - France)
PCI	Partito Communista Italiano
RF	Free French section within SOE
SFIO	Section française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service (also known as MI6)
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SR	Service de Renseignements (Free French intelligence agency to 15 April)
STO	Service de Travail Obligatoire
STS	Special Training School
W/T	Wireless Telegraphy

ARCHIVE ABBREVIATIONS

ADH	Archives Départementales de l'Hérault
ADHG	Archives Départementales de la Haute Garonne
AD SSD	Archives Départementales, Seine Saint Denis
AMT	Archives Municipales, Toulouse
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
ASP	Archives Sciences Po, Paris
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CA	Churchill Archives, Cambridge
CHRD	Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et la Déportation, Lyon
MC	Magdalen College, Oxford
HC	Hansard, Record of Commons Debates
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
LHA	Labour History Archives, Salford
LHCMS	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Studies, King's College London
PA	Parliamentary Archives
PPP	Préfecture de Police, Paris
SHD	Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

INTRODUCTION

This research was inspired by an observed contradiction between, on the one hand, comments in M.R.D. Foot's 1966 authorised history of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) in France in which the historian asserted that some of Britain's 'strongest' wartime sabotage and subversion agents had not only armed communists, but had been able to 'weld communist and anti-communist resisters into a single effective fighting force'[6] and, on the other, only rare, fleeting references in SOE memoirs and biographies to proactive contact between representatives of the British government and communists in France during the Second World War. Recollections such as SOE agent Jacque Poirier's account of the close working relationship forged with his wartime friend 'Charles the Bolshevik', or SOE courier Anne-Marie Walters' notes about the protection offered by a leader of the communist-led *Francs Tireurs et Partisans* stand out as anomalies within a narrative of mutual suspicion heavily influenced by the Cold War.[7] The incontrovertible evidence that between 1938 and 1944 the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), its small off-shoot focussed on subversion and sabotage named Section D, and Section D's successor organisation SOE repeatedly *initiated* pragmatic, short-term cooperation with communists in both Britain and France, including developing close working relations with former members of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) and the infiltration of several NKVD agents into France – missions which were deliberately kept a secret from General de

6 M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London, 1966), p.138.
7 Jacques R.E. Poirier, *The Giraffe Has a Long Neck* (London, 1995), p. 100 & Anne-Marie Walters *Moondrop to Gascony* (Wiltshire, 2009), pp. 64-65 & 248.

Gaulle until the end of 1942 – suggests that this aspect of British intelligence activity deserves greater attention.[8]

By examining the evolution of, or causal relationship between, pre-war British attitudes towards proactive engagement with communists and later wartime cooperation at home and abroad, this thesis sets out to do two things: the first is to examine how and why, in the face of considerable internal and external opposition, the idea of working with communists took such a hold within SIS, and why it was pursued even after various experiments failed, or produced uninspiring results. Secondly, this study explores what this engagement looked like in practice, by looking in depth at examples from the UK and France. In seeking to answer these questions, the narrative highlights the experience, determination and remarkable persuasiveness of a relatively small number of men and women from the UK, France, Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and Spain who, through their early embrace of a transnational and trans-ideological approach to anti-Nazi resistance, profoundly influenced attitudes towards allied intelligence cooperation and the conduct of irregular warfare in the 20th century. Building on studies describing the anti-Nazi resistance in France as a transnational movement, this thesis offers a collection of stories of unexpected conversations between ideologically dissonant individuals from a wide variety of countries operating both within, and outside of official organisations, and at all levels of seniority.[9] It is an account of unavowable cooperation, rejected by some as

8 TNA KV 2/2872/1 Notes on the Russian Section of SOE, p. 3 point 10. For correspondence around informing, or seeking prior approval from de Gaulle for infiltrations see also TNA HS 4/336 SOE Russia/Pickaxe project. Most Secret message (possibly from Head of SIS) of 9 December 1942 directed to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD).

9 Gildea & Tames, *Fighters across Frontiers*; Hilary Footitt, 'War and Culture Studies in 2016: Putting 'Translation' into the Transnational?, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 9/3 (2016), pp. 209–221; Charlotte Faucher and Laure Humbert, 'Introduction – Beyond de Gaulle and Beyond London: The French External Resistance and Its International Networks', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 25/2 (2018), pp. 195–221.

unthinkable, and considered by many (both at the time and subsequently) to have been inherently unworkable.

Historiography

In 2019 French historian and specialist of the French Resistance Laurent Douzou identified three main 'generations' of resistance studies. The first, dating from 1944 – 1980, he argued revolved around the collection of oral testimony and a prevailing view of the resister as historian. A second 'wave' of resistance studies, Douzou claimed, was stimulated by the the creation in 1980 of the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP) which, focussing as it did on conflicts of the twentieth century, encouraged the development of new methodologies, including a greater focus on anthropological approaches and comparative analysis.[10] This is present study is situated very much within what Douzou has referred to as the 'third generation' of resistance studies – one which derives not from personal experience of the events in question or from methodological approaches generated within and championed by the great resistance research centres established in France following the Second World War, but from a desire to address the silences that continue to exist between and within the political and the personal, and most particularly those pertaining to cooperation between ideologically dissonant groups. In order to tease out stories of cooperation from the politically or socially motivated 'absences' in recorded memory - in particular in relation to what former SOE agent Douglas Dodds Parker once referred to as the 'missing record' of the support side of special operations - it has been necessary to throw a wide net to capture cogent examples within texts covering themes

10 Laurent Douzou, 'A Perilous History: A Historiographical Essay on the French Resistance', *Contemporary European History* 28/1 (2019), pp. 96 – 106. For another substantive overview of the evolution of French Resistance narratives, see Robert Gilldea's introduction to *Fighters in the Shadows* (London, 2015).

and debates relating to exile studies, transnational resistance, irregular warfare, and allied intelligence cooperation.[11] As such, this study sits at the nexus between histories of grand strategy and memoirs of ground level operatives. While the research explores high level bilateral intelligence relations, it is mostly interested in questions around the impact of – and on – the individual. Similarly, this thesis offers insights into the transnational dimension of resistance that forced cooperation between imperialists and communist internationalists as part of a series of 'special operations' against Nazi Germany.

The story of Britain's involvement in special operations, and the relationship with communist resistance in France, has been contested from the very beginning. As the very first unsanctioned accounts of SOE penned by former officers and agents began to appear in the 1940s, the organisation was subjected to attacks across the Channel by both General de Gaulle and the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF).[12] While the former sought to privilege the story of France liberated by the French, the latter aimed to advance the image of communist sacrifice and suffering in the pursuit of peace. Both argued that a key tenet of British support for anti-Nazi resistance in France had been the deliberate restriction of arms to communist resistance groups in France in the run up to the Liberation. In March 1945 the Foreign Minister of the French Provisional Government, Georges Bidault, a Christian Democrat, made just such an obervation, prompting Alfred Duff Cooper, the British Ambassador to France, to respond that 'His Majesty's Government were not

11 MC P2/4/2C/94, Douglas Dodds Parker Papers. Letter dated 19 October 2001 from Dodds Parker to B.H. Bonnafous.

12 Jean Overton Fuller, *Madeleine* (London, 1952) and *Double Webs* (London, 1958) and Elizabeth Nicholas *Death Be Not Proud* (London, 1958). For a more substantive discussion of their influence on later SOE publications, see Christopher Murphy, 'The Origins of SOE in France', *The Historical Journal* 46/4 (2003), pp. 935–52.

influenced by political considerations in the distribution of arms to the various resistance groups in France, but solely by strategic and military considerations.'[13]

The arguments persisted, however. At an international conference on the resistance in France organised in Milan in 1961 by the French section of the International Committee for the History of the Second World War, Soviet Professor E Boltine of the Moscow Institute for Marxism-Leninism contended that it was the active role played communists in unifying the resistance movements which had prompted the Anglo-Americans to restrict their support to popular uprisings.[14] The British delegation to the conference attempted to thwart what it regarded as moves 'by East European historians to denigrate and distort the part played by Britain in supporting resistance movements and to exaggerate the contribution made by the Soviet Union' but it was clear that a more aggressive communications strategy was required.[15] With the aim of setting forth the official government position, and at the same time offering some form of response to repeated requests by historians for access to SOE files, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd took the decision in 1964 to authorise a single historian, M.R.D. Foot, to review and synthesise the relevant documentation as a pilot project. The primary stated aim of the research was to correct 'the impression being spread abroad at that time that the Communists alone

13 TNA FO 371/49146 Letter from Duff Cooper to M. Bidault, 12 March 1945; Franck Liaigre, *Les FTP: Nouvelle histoire d'une résistance* (Paris, 2015).
14 Conference paper, *European Resistance Movements 1939 – 1945 Vol. 2 Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of the Resistance Movements held at Milan, 26 – 29 March 1961* (Oxford, 1964), 663 pages.
15 TNA CAB 103/570 Study of the pros & cons of publication of further histories of SOE, p. 4 'Reasons for Choice of France'.

amongst the allies had given real support to the resistance movements in captured territories in Europe.'[16]

The resulting 1966 publication *SOE in France*, remains to this day the most expansive in its treatment of the role of British liaison with communists in France: thirty-eight of the 445 pages of the main text reference the PCF. It is thanks to Foot that we have a list of (in his opinion) the most prominent SOE agents who undertook to work with, or to actively supply communist resistance groups in France.[17] Unfortunately, subsequent well-researched accounts of the activity of some of these agents, of which Ray Jenkins' study of Francis Cammaerts and Nigel Perrin's record of Harry Peleuvé's extraordinary wartime experience are excellent examples, shed little light on either the practical or personal elements of interactions between British-backed networks and communist resistance groups.[18] Charles Glass' 2018 account of George Starr, the agent Foot singled out as having been the most effective at drawing disparate political resistance groups together during his time in France, differs not from the usual vein of SOE biographies in that Starr's antipathy towards communists is repeatedly referenced (a typical example being an unreferenced comment that the use of the 'cell' system had been 'the only good thing [Starr] ever got from the communists') but Glass fails to question how it was Starr was able to obtain valuable

16 TNA CAB 103/570 Study of the pros & cons of publication of further histories of SOE, p. 2. The other reasons cited were: to correct factual errors within and offer greater context to commercially published works on the subject; to pay adequate tribute to SOE Agents; and to respond to public and parliamentary pressure for an objective account of SOE's wartime activities. Analysis conducted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1969 found the efforts to have been largely successful, but the idea of Britain having been a driving force behind restricting support to the resistance in France for political reasons, persisted nonetheless. See also p. 28 'Examination of documents for this study', which notes that a number of communist histories of the resistance had references 'in part or in whole, highly classified SOE documents', but that they had 'often been given a totally false and politically slanted interpretation.' The Foreign and Commonwealth Office report does not name any particular work, however.

17 M.R.D. Foot, SOE in France, p.138. Foot identified in particular Pierre de Vomécourt of the SOE circuit codenamed AUTOGIRO, Francis Suttill of PROSPER, Harry Peulevé and Jacques Poirier of AUTHOR/DIGGER, Maurice Southgate of STATIONER, Francis Cammaerts of JOCKEY and George Starr of WHEELWRIGHT.

18 Ray Jenkins, *A Pacifist at War* (London, 2009); Nigel Perrin, *Spirit of Resistance* (Barnsley, 2008).

support from key local communists to advance sabotage in the local area.[19] Starr's courier Anne Marie Walters gave some indication of the closeness of SOE contacts with communists in the south west of France in her 1946 book *Moondrop to Gascony* but even her account stops short of providing much 'colour' to the relationships she established in her area of operation.[20] The SOE agent who appears to have been most effusive about friendships developed with communist resisters was Frenchman Jacques Poirier, who interestingly admitted to passing himself off as an 'Englishman' during his time working for SOE in wartime France specifically in order to avoid becoming embroiled in discussions about politics.[21]

Although Foot acknowledged Section D, the small Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) unit established in 1938 to focus on sabotage and subversion, as the forerunner of SOE, it is not unusual for political and military intelligence historians to point to May 1940 as the starting point for organised, official interest into the practice of irregular warfare during the Second World War, this being the time that the decision was taken under the new Prime Minister Winston Churchill to reorganise Section D, along with elements of Military Intelligence Research, MI(R) and a propaganda unit named after its headquarters Electra House in London, into a separate, new Special Operations Executive (SOE) overseen by the Labour Minister for Economic Warfare Hugh Dalton.[22] Historians of SOE tend to shift the date back

19 Charles Glass, *The Fought Alone: The True Story of the Starr Brothers, British Secret Agents in Nazi-Occupied France* (New York, 2018) is the first work dedicated to the wartime activity of George Starr and his brother John Starr. Unreferenced comment by Starr noted on page 78. The reference to communist provision of blueprints is made on page 156.
20 Walters, *Moondrop to Gascony*. The openness of Walters' account in relation to contacts with communists (however brief) can partly be attributed to the speed of its publication, which pre-dated government attempts to control SOE-related output.
21 Poirier, *Giraffe*, p. 6 & *passim*.
22 See, for example, Evan Mawdsley, 'Anti-German insurgency and Allied Grand Strategy', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31/5 (2008), p. 695 – 719.

to 1938 and the engagement of Laurence Grand by the head of the Secret Intelligence Service Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair to investigate possibilities using émigré communists and Jews to disrupt Nazi Germany, but emphasise instead the importance of the spring of 1939 when Colin Gubbins, who would go on to lead the organisation later in the war, was brought into the War Office to assist Major Laurence Grand (by then head of Section D) and Major Joe Holland of MI(R) by distilling various theories of irregular warfare and disparate accounts of its practical application into a set of accessible instructions for British-backed partisans. More recent popular and academic interest in Section D (building on a history of Section D written by Anthony Samuel in 1943, which makes reference to many files that are no longer available, as well as comments provided in the introduction to *SOE in France*) has emphasised the earlier role of Laurence Grand's unit.[23] This thesis sits within this latter group, suggesting that there is value in examining the background to and ramifications of Sinclair's original call to focus on émigré communists and communist intellectuals.

Most histories of British engagement in wartime sabotage and subversion refer at some point to MEW Minister Hugh Dalton's 1940 exhortation to his senior SOE staff to look to the examples of China and Spain and even the Gestapo for how to guides on the conduct of irregular warfare, yet there is a tendency to simply repeat Gubbins' later assertions that there was very little reference material available when he set about drafting pamphlets on the subject in 1939.[24] As Malcolm Atkin has shown, however, Section D's Laurence Grand

23 Malcolm Atkin, *Section D for Destruction: Forerunner of SOE* (Barnsley, 2018); Giles Milton, *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare: Churchill's Mavericks: Plotting Hitler's defeat* (London, 2016). Roderick Bailey also includes a useful overview of Section D's involvement in Italy in *Target Italy: The Secret War Against Mussolini, 1940 - 1943* (London, 2014), Chapters 1 and 2.

24 IWM Gubbins Papers 3/2/56. Gubbins' plentiful (almost daily) notes to the historian M.R.D. Foot offered during a review of the 1965 draft of SOE in France managed both to suggest that the War Office's own thinking was not very far advanced in 1939, and that Gubbins had been employed to bring some measure

had himself written a paper on irregular warfare in 1937.[25] Aaron Linderman, in his 2012 thesis on the origins of SOE and its later US equivalent, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), offers some suggestions of material which Gubbins may have had to hand although he admits that, in the absence of Gubbins' confirmation, the evidence for his having actually accessed these is minimal.[26] Gubbins himself alluded to secret fact finding visits to the continent but, generally taking Gubbins' assertions as gospel, no SOE historian has sought out detailed evidence of the influence of works by, or direct engagement with, communists (and British communists in particular) on official British strategy or tactical advice around the conduct of irregular warfare.

This thesis attempts to draw links between Sinclair's directive to Grand to reach out to émigré communists and communist intellectuals and its practical application, making claims as to actual connections made and offering suggestions as to others that remain to be proven. One example is the role played by War former CPGB member and ex-head of the British Battalion of the International Brigades in Spain Tom Wintringham. As Hugh Purcell has pointed out, at one point during the Second World War Wintringham 'found himself in the odd position of being consulted by very senior army personnel' precisely

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of order to the chaos created by Section D's muddled thinking. Gubbins rightfully has many admirers, but his biographers and commentators all tend to accept at face value his assertion that SOE's irregular warfare guides were generated internally, based on his own and other officers' expertise, with no real external support.

25 Atkin, *Section D*, p.5; Mark Seaman (ed), *Special Operations Executive: A new instrument of war* (Abingdon, 2006), p. 8. Another key example of a useful reference tool to which Gubbins would likely have had recourse is the list of 28 rules for the conduct of irregular warfare outlined by Robert Rogers in response to the British army's own employment of guerrilla tactics in raids on French towns in the New York region during the war of 1754 – 1763. For more on this and other reference material which may have been available to Gubbins, see: Max Boot, *Invisible Armies*: *An epic history of guerrilla warfare from ancient times to the present* (New York, 2013).

26 Aaron Linderman, 'Reclaiming the Ungentlemanly Arts: The Global Origins of SOE and OSS', (Texas A&M University, PhD Thesis 2012), pp. 162 – 163.

because of his experience of irregular warfare.[27] Purcell further notes that the Soviet NKVD later accused several members of the CPGB of having acted as secret advisers to the British Intelligence Services. However, he stops short of exploring who they were and the precise connections they might have had with SIS or SOE.[28] These linkages are also largely overlooked in other works that treat with Wintringham's activity in Spain.[29] Wintringham's *English Captain* (1939), *New Ways of War* (1940) and *Politics of Victory* (1941), which were themselves influenced by Wintringham's reading of works by the German General and military theorist Erich Ludendorff, were widely read by the British public while his training sessions at Osterley Park in West London - later taken over by the War Office and SOE - were attended by thousands of soldiers and civilians.[30] In 1943, Charles Graves' officially sanctioned book on the Home Guard recognised Wintringham's contribution to the development of guerrilla warfare training for the Local Defence Volunteers in 1940.[31] As of 1943, however, official commentary about British communists working *with* the establishment dwindled to nothing. In the 1980s, former SOE officer Douglas Dodds Parker offered some intriguing comments to the effect that certain British communists had set aside their political reservations to work with the British authorities between 1939 and 1941, but these have gone largely unremarked in both histories of British sabotage and subversion and of the CPGB.[32] This is particularly remarkable given Dodds Parker's own

27 Wintringham's contribution to the genesis of SOE training programmes is usually only mentioned in histories of the International Brigades as opposed to any SOE-specific studies. See, for example, Giles Tremlett, *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2020) and Hugh Purcell, *The Last English Revolutionary: Tom Wintringham 1898 – 1949* (Stroud, 2014), p. 170.
28 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 170 & passim.
29 For an excellent overview of the Spanish Civil War's broader impact on Britain, however, see Tom Buchanan, *Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss & Memory* (Sussex, 2006).
30 Gubbins would later suggest that SOE's own training establishments were the brainchild of MI(R), denying any precedent.
31 Charles Graves, *The Home Guard of Britain* (London, 1943), pp. 78 – 79.
32 Douglas Dodds-Parker, *Setting Europe Ablaze: Some account of ungentlemanly warfare* (Windlesham, 1984), p. 36

admission in the late 1990s to the historian M.R.D. Foot that a Senior officer charged with anti-USSR action once told him in Washington 'how glad he was that I had done what I cd [sic] to thwart the Communists.'[33]

While the British government will have had its own reasons for keeping quiet about any engagement of current or former members of the CPGB, the same is true in the reverse. It is unsurprising that few studies by or about senior British communists suggest any connection with British intelligence.[34] Francis Beckett has claimed that the communist former International Brigader Wilfred Macartney, who had been arrested by the British authorities for espionage in 1927, went on to help 'run a spy network against Germany during the Second World War' but offers no further corroborative evidence or suggestion that this was done at the behest of SIS, SOE or the Soviet Union.[35] Even those who decisively broke with the Party during or after the Second World War remained tight lipped about any such connections. Although willing to provide some insight into the motivations and wartime activity of many core members of the CPGB, former Communist Douglas Hyde's 1950s steered clear of any direct mention of cooperation between CPGB cadres and British intelligence in his autobiography *I Believed*. Likewise, David Dallin's 1955 exposé of the Soviet intelligence apparatus, allegedly based in part on the testimony from former leaders of a number of European communist parties, does not mention any direct connections between communists and British intelligence in the field of sabotage and

33 MC P2/4/2C/92 Letter from Dodds Parker to Professor Michael Foot, 29 May 1996.
34 An exception being Roderick Bailey's study of James Kluggman's role in SOE: 'Communist in SOE: Explaining James Klugmann's Recruitment and Retention', *Intelligence and National Security* 20/1 (2005), pp. 72 – 97.
35 Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 78 -81.

subversion.[36] The avoidance, or indeed ignorance, of any such connections persists to this day. In his 2020 comparative analysis of the British and French Communist parties from 1920 to 1991, for example, Gavin Bowd refers repeatedly to MI5 and SIS surveillance of suspected and known communists but fails to link these to any attempts by British intelligence or SOE to cultivate relations with anti-Nazi activists.[37] Even Beckett repeats the general – incorrect - refrain that MI5's antipathy towards communists 'deprived the army of the most battle-hardened anti-Nazis the country possessed'.[38]

Decades of silence on the part of both the British authorities and academics in relation either to engagement with individual Trotskyists, or later official cooperation with the NKVD, stems not only from the diplomatic dictates and archival restrictions of the Cold War or from a post-war political imperative to wrest control of the resistance narrative from the Soviet Union in general and, as far as France was concerned, the *Parti Communiste Français*. There was also a fear voiced in some circles of providing enemy countries or organisations and even disaffected British youth with a 'how to guide' on sabotage and subversion. After the war, the influential political and military commentator and Times military correspondent Basil Liddell Hart (with whom Wintringham regularly corresponded) retrospectively condemned Britain's support for resistance groups in Europe of any political persuasion on account not only of what he perceived to have been their relative strategic and tactical ineffectiveness but also because of their 'wider amoral effect on the younger generation as a whole [for teaching them] to defy authority and break the rules of

36 Douglas Hyde, *I believed: the autobiography of a former British communist* (London, 1950); David J. Dallin, *Soviet Espionage. The remarkable story, based on original stories, of the vast Soviet spy apparatus* (Yale, 1955).
37 Gavin Bowd, *Les communismes britanniques et francais, 1920 – 1992: Un conte de deux partis* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2020).
38 Beckett, *Enemy Within,* pp. 78 -81.

civic morality'. When former head of SOE Colin Gubbins considered writing an account of SOE's work in 1948 he received a letter from William Strang of the Foreign Office stating 'The conclusion is, I am sorry to say, that the publication even of such a sober and balanced review as you would write would be undesirable on security grounds. It is quite true that any amount of material has been published, particularly in other countries, but nothing which would carry the authority of a book by yourself. The technique of organising resistance movements does not alter greatly with the passage of time and we could not be sure that your book might not give valuable assistance to a future enemy….'[39] Despite the continued publication of further unauthorised volumes on SOE, similar sentiments continued to be expressed throughout the 1960s, as evidenced by former SOE officer Robin Brook's argument that the official government position in 1970 that 'revolting students, here or abroad' might find useful tactical or practical information in accounts of SOE by was misinformed as there was nothing in any SOE history that students could not 'think up for themselves'.[40]

If the British authorities were concerned about the spread of ideas in the 1960s and 1970s via the radio, television and print media, they were equally aware of the profound direct convergence of people and ideas inspired by the massive population displacement across Europe and between theatres of war that took place in the 1930s and 1940s across Europe

39 IWM Gubbins Papers 3/2/1-55 Letter from William Strang of Foreign Office to Gubbins dated 10 December 1949.

40 Basil Liddell-Hart, *Defence of the West* (New York, 1950), pp. 53 – 57 and IWM Gubbins Papers, Box No: 04/29/2, File 3/2/56 Note from Robin Brook: date circa 2 November 1970 and apparently intended for review by the Foreign Office. For more on British and American approaches to guerrilla warfare, see Benjamin Jones, *Eisenhower's guerrillas* (New York, 2016); Ben McIntyre, *SAS Rogue Heroes* (London, 2017) and Max Boot, *Invisible Armies*: *An epic history of guerrilla warfare from ancient times to the present* (New York, 2013).

and between theatres of conflict.[41] A renewed focus on the transnational aspects of the Second World War has given rise to various oral history projects and international academic collaborations. Of particular interest to this study are those which have focussed on the communist resistance in France as a mutli- and transnational movement, as well as recent works examining the lives of political émigrés in the UK.[42] Charmian Brinson and Richard Dove's excellent account of MI5's monitoring of the German and Austrian émigré communities in London, for example, has opened a window onto the UK-based activity of a number of communists and other politically active émigrés.[43] However, based as it is on recently released MI5 records, Dove's research focusses on the State's perception of these individuals as potential threats to national security, thereby missing the angle of anti-fascist cooperation pursued by SIS from the late 1930s. Cooperation between certain *socialist* exiles and Allied intelligence has been addressed, for example, in L. Eiber's 1997 *Verschwiegene Bündnispartner: Die Union Deutsche sozialistischer Organisationen in*

41 Sandrine Kott, 'Internationalism in Wartime. Introduction', *Journal of Modern European History* 12/3 (August 2014), pp. 317 – 322; Simone Lässig, 'Strategies and Mechanisms of Scholar Rescue: The Intellectual Migration of the 1930s reconsidered', *Social Research* 84/4 (2017), pp. 769 – 807; Ludovic Tournès & Giles Scott-Smith (eds), *Global Exchanges: Scholarships and transnational Circulations in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2018). A number of monographs and edited collections have recently taken as their theme the circulation of people and ideas within the European and Soviet space during the Second World War. See, for example: 'Guerres et expériences européennes: convergences, circulations et transferts (1900–1950)', a conference organized by Barbara Lambauer and Christian Wenkel (12–13 November 2015) at the Institut historique allemande à Paris. See also 'War and population movements. A cross-examination of Europe in the 19th and 20th century', a conference organised in April 2015 by the German Historical Institute Paris in cooperation with LabEx EHNE. For an examination of the movement of intellectuals during the Second World War, see Isabelle Gouarné, Marie-Cécile Bouju & Rachel Mazuy, 'Les circulations intellectuelles à l'épreuve de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Espace européen et Union soviétique', Introduction to Conference 17 & 18 June 2015.

42 Gildea & Tames, *Fighters across Frontiers*, and Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows* (London, 2015) are two significant contributions to this new way of thinking about wartime resistance in France. See also Thomas Beaumont, 'International Communism in Interwar France, 1919 – 1936', in Alison Carroll & Ludovine Broch, *France in an era of Global War, 1914 – 1945: Occupation, Politics, Empire and Entanglements* (London, 2014), pp. 92 – 110.

43 Charmian Brinson & Richard Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence* (Manchester, 2014), and also Brinson and Dove's collaboration with Jennifer Taylor, 'Immortal Austria? Austrians in exile in Britain', in The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austria Exile Studies (New York, 2007). See also Bailey, *Target: Italy*, Chapters 1 and 2 for the important and relevant parallel story about Section D's efforts with Italian émigrés and anti-fascists in 1938- 40 and its employment of an Austrian (Strauss) in London and Switzerland (p.39).

GroßBritannien und die britischen Nachrichtendienst and Lawrence Stokes' 2006 article on Secret Intelligence and the anti-Nazi Resistance.[44] Peter Pirker, meanwhile, has researched important aspects of the relationships established between SOE and the Austria Office and London Office of the Austrian Socialists, although he broadly (and incorrectly) dismisses the possibility that connections were made with any communists (as opposed to socialists) during the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact or 1939 to 1941.[45] These studies aside, interest in German émigré activity and cooperation with intelligence agencies has largely been confined to America and relations with the US Office of Strategic Services.[46]

John Green's political biography of the German Communist Kuczynski family offers descriptions of how the patriarch of this prominent communist intellectual family was protected and championed by close friends and colleagues in wartime England but has arguably attracted more interest for the background it provides on one of the Soviet Union's most prolific spy networks.[47] Academic papers follow this trend, an example being Daniel Münzner's examination of how 'friendly aliens' were recruited by MI5 to help 'hunt' down communists.[48] To date, therefore, the most direct source of information from a communist involved in the active cooperation with British intelligence comes from former

44 L. Eiber, 'Verschwiegene Bündnispartner: Die Union Deutsche sozialistischer Organisationen in GroßBritannien und die britischen Nachrichtendienst', in Claus-Dieter Krohn, Erwin Rothermund, Lutz Winckler, Wulf Koepke, *Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch 15* (Edition Text + Kritik, 1997); Lawrence D. Stokes, 'Secret Intelligence and anti-Nazi Resistance: The Mysterious Exile of Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus', *The International History Review* 28/1 (2006), pp. 42-93.
45 Peter Pirker, 'Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen dem britischen Kriegsgeheimdienst SOE, dem österreichischen Exil und dem Foreign Office', in Anthony Grenville & Andrea Reiter (eds), *Political Exile and Exile Politics in Britain after 1933* (The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austria Exile Studies, 2011)
46 Christof Mauch, *The Shadow War against Hitler: the Covert Operations of America's Wartime Secret Intelligence Service* (New York, 2003).
47 John Green, *A Political Family: The Kuczynskis, Fascism, Espionage and the Cold War* (Abingdon, 2017).
48 Daniel Münzner, 'The surveillance of friends: MI5 and friendly aliens during the Second World War', *Journal of Intelligence History,* 13/2 (2014), pp. 131 – 143. Münzner's 2014 PhD thesis was based on German émigré Kurt Hiller who was a prolific informer for MI5.

KPD member, Trotskyist and British/French agent Karl Groehl. His fulsome, but perhaps not entirely reliable, account of his life, *Spartakus*, includes a number of oblique references to his work with Section D dating from 1939. As an account by someone who was most intimately associated with the SIS anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion project in its early stages its significant lacunae are disappointing and, given the difficulties with corroborating Groehl's information, his record must be treated with an abundance of caution. Groehl's reputed network of 50,000 – 60,000 communists (which his British contacts were told were ready and willing to carry out sabotage in 1938), for example, is not mentioned at all in Peter Hoffmann's *History of* the *German Resistance*[49] and no references are made to the subversive, revolutionary activity of Karl Groehl or Karl Otten in biographies of their supposed close associate and likely SIS informant Willi Münzenberg, or in accounts of key Spartakists and early KPD leaders.[50] While some of this can be put down to Groehl's dubious claims, it is true that information on the influence of German émigré resistance on anti-Nazi activity is generally limited. Michael Balfour, for example, admits in his preface to *Withstanding Hitler* that he included 'little or nothing about anti-Nazi activity by Germans outside of Germany or in the prison camps…not because of any lack of interest but because of concern about the length of the book.'[51]

49 Peter Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance 1933 -1945* (Montreal, 1996). For Groehl's undoubtedly outlandish claim see TNA KV 2/2171/2 Report on Otten Group, 21 September 1938.
50 Karl Retzlaw, *Spartakus: Aufstieg und Niedergang. Erinnerungen eines Parteiarbeiters* (Frankfurt, 1976). Groehl published under the name Retzlaw, which he took when escaping from France in 1940. A review of multiple studies of the Spartakus movement and the lives of Münzenbeg, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and others has revealed only one reference to Groehl. In Reiner Tosstorff (ed), *In the Radical Camp: A Political Autobiography 1890 - 1921* (Leiden, 2020), p. 157 Groehl is referred to as having been an emissary of the leadership of the Bavarian Republic tasked with reporting on the situation to the KPD central committee in April 1919.
51 Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany 1933 – 1945* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Preface.

The second of the areas of cooperation about which Foot had little to say in 1966, was the secret SOE-NKVD relationship, signed in August 1941, which resulted in SOE infiltrating eleven NKVD (or Comintern) agents into France, and several others into other countries in occupied Europe. Foot was at pains to point out in *SOE in France* that the activities of the NKVD in France in particular were 'a closed book' to him.[52] The fact that he chose to emphasise this fact – as opposed to leaving it out entirely - rather suggests that British engagement with the NKVD in France was not as opaque to him (or to others) as he claimed. Yet, despite the release of material into publicly available British and Soviet archives, the cooperation agreement has received little attention from historians. Those who have chosen to investigate the arrangement have largely stopped short of analysing the profile and intended purpose of the agents deployed. Peter Wilkinson and Joan Bright Astley's account of *Gubbins and SOE* writes off the sketchily described 'working relationship with the NKVD' in a matter of a couple of sentences as merely 'one of the most futile essays in Allied cooperation of the whole war'.[53] William Mackenzie's *Secret History of SOE*, originally written for internal use only in 1948 but decades later reworked for wider publication, offers a broad brushstrokes (and in some cases factually incorrect) account that dispenses with the agreement in six of the book's 762 pages: the information contained therein is high level and unsurprisingly misses much of the operational detail.[54] Former SOE officer Douglas Dodds Parker, seemingly arguing that the history of SOE was

52 M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London, 1960), p. 451. While the agents were recruited under the auspices of the NKVD-SOE agreement, it would appear that senior officials within the Comintern played a central role in their identification and management.
53 Peter Wilkinson & Joan Bright Astley *Gubbins & SOE* (Barnsley, 2010), pp. 94 – 95.
54 William Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: Special Operations Executive 1940 – 1945* (London, 2002), pp. 393 – 399. See also CAB 103/570 Study of the pros and cons of publication of further histories of SOE, and pp. 21 – 22 'ordering of the surviving records' for confidential discussions regarding the potential consequences of wider publication of Mackenzie's Secret History, originally written in 1948 for limited circulation within government only. At the time, it was admitted that the 'absolute truth' would inevitably suffer from a project to prepare the document for publication.

deliberately suppressed by British communists, later argued that 'the best pieces in [Mackenzie's Secret History] are Michael Foot's introduction and the conclusions. The rest is often a travesty'.[55] David Stafford, meanwhile, in his excellent account of 'how SOE and its activities related to the strategic and diplomatic objectives of the British government' has claimed, in contradiction to the SOE archival record, to which he did not have access at the time of writing, that it was Moscow who 'made the formal initiative for worldwide cooperation with SOE'.[56]

Ten years after the publication of Stafford's survey of SOE, F.H. Hinsley's 1993 'official history' of British Intelligence in the Second World War failed to include a single mention of the NKVD-SOE arrangement.[57] Writing in the second half of the 1990s, Bradley F. Smith argued that the *Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* and *Intelligence and National Security* continued to overlook sharing of intelligence between the Soviet Union, Britain and the US (as opposed to active cooperation in the field of sabotage and subversion) in part because the newly democratic Russian authorities were unenthusiastic 'about permitting Western specialists to examine original Russian intelligence documents from the World War II period', with cooperation limited to allowing selected Western researchers access to carefully curated NKVD materials and military 'studies'.[58] Although Smith's work focuses on the sharing of signals intelligence, he did mention the SOE-NKVD

55 MC P2/4/2MS/12 Comments on the Secret History of SOE by W MacKenzie.
56 David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940 – 1945: A survey of the Special Operations Executive, with documents* (London, 1983) p. 69. As this study shows, Moscow did approach the British government with a request to infiltrate members of the PCF into France in June 1940, but this was not the initiation of formal cooperation, which had in fact been spearheaded by SOE with the dual purpose of saving its reputation and bolstering the overall HMG strategy of bringing the Soviets into the war on the side of the Allies and keeping them there.
57 F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London, 1993).
58 Bradley F Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin: How the Allies Traded Intelligence, 1941 – 1945* (Kansas, 1996), pp. xi – xiii.

arrangement, calling it 'one of the most improbable events in the history of twentieth-century international relations' and citing several of the areas in which Stalin and Churchill envisaged cooperation developing.[59] A year later, Martin Kitchen, writing in *Intelligence and National Security* responded with an overview of the SOE-NKVD relationship, approaching it from the angle of assessing the contribution of a single man - George Hill, SOE's head of mission in Moscow.[60] Fifteen years later, however, this 'unique attempt at Anglo-Soviet cooperation', as Kitchen referred to the agreement, was once more dispensed with in a few short sentences in Keith Jeffery's 2011 history of SIS.[61]

More recently still, Michael Folly, Geoffrey Roberts and Oleg Rzheshevsky in their 2019 book C*hurchill and Stalin: Comrades in Arms During the Second World War* note that the NKVD set up their own sabotage operations in June 1941 'to prevent German saboteurs from conducting provocations in the area of the Soviet border' yet their detailed examination of Anglo-Soviet wartime cooperation ignores entirely the Anglo-Soviet intelligence negotiations conducted in parallel with high-level discussions about mutual military assistance.[62] The most fulsome overarching accounts of the arrangement are therefore restricted to Donal O'Sullivan's 2010 account of SOE-NKVD collaboration between 1941 and 1944 and local historian Bernard O'Connor's 2015 record of the PICKAXE operations, as the NKVD infiltrations were called.[63] O'Sullivan's findings, which have been

59 Smith, *Sharing Secrets*, pp. 1, 16 – 20 *& passim*. For more on Soviet military intelligence, see: David Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (London, 1989).
60 Martin Kitchen, 'SOE's Man in Moscow', *Intelligence and National Security* 12/3 (1997), pp. 95 – 109.
61 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 564. Jeffery does note, however, that 'an unavowed SIS representative' formed part of this mission, with a remit to develop contacts with parallel Polish and Czech mission in Moscow.
62 Martin Folly, Geoffrey Roberts and Oleg Rzheshevsky, *Churchill and Stalin: Comrades in Arms during the Second World War* (Barnsley, 2019), pp. 6- 7.
63 O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil: Anglo-Soviet Intelligence Cooperation during the Second World War* (New York, 2010). See also Bernard O'Connor, *Churchill's and Stalin's Secret Agents: Operation Pickaxe at RAF Tempsford* (Stroud, 2015) which generated some interest in the Russian media, with state television emphasising the agents' role as 'saboteurs' as opposed to their primary function, which was to operate

criticised for lacking in recourse to Russian records, have been enhanced by subsequent research by Guillaume Bourgeois, who in 2015 published a detailed account of the Polish NKVD (Comintern) agent Sonia Lypszyc, tracing her movements in the 1930s and 1940s through British and Soviet archives.[64] The names and biographical details of many of the other Soviet-sponsored agents hosted in the UK before onward infiltration into France nonetheless remain a mystery, although this thesis draws some tentative conclusions as to their identities. Additional details which add a valuable dimension to an emerging understanding of this unusual transnational dimension of anti-Nazi resistance narratives continue to emerge, such as the story of Guy Burgess' aborted mission to Moscow on behalf of Section D in the summer of 1940, as reported in Andrew Lownie's 2016 biography of Burgess, and which this thesis examines in detail by referring back to the original archives.[65]

The surviving Soviet-backed agents sent to France by SOE between 1942 and 1944 have been evasive in post-war accounts of their activity. PCF member and NKVD agent Raymond Guyot, who was parachuted into France by the British in March 1942 remained silent about much of his wartime activity, a fact which has frustrated researchers looking to piece together his movements between 1942 and 1945.[66] Daniel Georges, who accompanied Guyot to the UK and thence to France, gave only one known post-war interview in which he alluded to his time hosted by SOE in the UK. In this, he brushes over his experience in a

political intelligence and propaganda networks in Western Europe. For an example of Russian media report, see Генерал Фитин возвращается в историю, 7 October 2017 https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2940745 (information courtesy of Bernard O'Connor).

64 Guillaume Bourgeois, *La Véritable Histoire de l'Orchestre Rouge* (Paris, 2015), pp. 442 – 443 *& passim*.

65 Andrew Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman* (London, 2016), pp. 108- 109. As David Dallin notes in *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven, 1955), p. 9, it was a criminal act for a Soviet agent to keep a diary.

66 Private conversation with Marc Giovaninetti, February 2020.

mere couple of sentences.[67] The intense politicisation of resistance narratives fuelled by ongoing post-war divisions between Gaullists and communists in France ensured their silence. In fact, the PCF spent much of the post-war period embroiled in attempts to explain away the awkward period of semi-collaboration between the Soviet Union and Germany between 1939 and 1941.[68] One prominent example of a communist maquisard who did acknowledge his association with SOE during this period was Georges Guingouin, although in his 1974 account he was careful to stress that he was only in indirect contact with the British prior to the allied landings. Fabrice Grenard's 2014 study of Guingouin rarely references the role of SOE agents in supporting Guingouin's activities, although he does include at the very end of the book a couple of pages entitled '*Des officiers Anglais dans le maquis communiste*' in which he cites SOE agent Bob Maloubier's claim that, for their part, British agents were very much aware of Guingouin's politics when they agreed to supply him.[69] Of other communist resistance fighters in France – both French and non-French, and their links to British representatives, we know only the scantest details.[70]

Certain striking and influential accounts of cooperation between communists and the British authorities in France do, however, occur in memoirs and diaries, including PCF representative Fernand Grenier's account of the myriad attempts by the PCF to gain

67 AD SSD 283 J 69 Raymond GUYOT Daniel Georges' Mémoires de Guerre, 28 September 1987.
68 Charlotte Faucher & Laure Humbert, 'Introduction – Beyond de Gaulle and beyond London: The French external resistance and its international networks', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25/2 (2018), pp. 195-221. See also, for example, Charles Tillon, *Les FTP* (Paris, 1962), pp. 18 – 20. As recently as 2012 Roger Bourderon in *Le PCF à l'épreuve de la guerre, 1940 – 1943: De La guerre impérialiste à la lutte armée* (Paris, 2012), stated that his work was a riposte to Frank Liaigre and Jean-Marc Berlière's *L'Affaire Moquet. Enquete sur une mystification officielle* (Larousse, 2009), in which the authors claimed that there had been no communist resistance before June 1941. For a detailed examination of the the Party's evolving resistance narrative, see Stephane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre* (Paris, 1980).
69 Georges Guingouin, *Quattre ans de lutte sur le sol Limousin* (Paris, 1974); Fabrice Grenard, *Une légende de maquis: Georges Guingouin du mythe à l'histore* (Paris, 2014).
70 Poirier, *Giraffe*, pp. 99 – 101.

funding and support from the British – attempts which were allegedly frustrated by both the British and de Gaulle's Free French administration.[71] With the key players unwilling or unable to provide a detailed account of their activity, it is perhaps unsurprising that the role of the British in supporting communist anti-Nazi resistance on the ground in France was ignored by French historians for much of the second half of the twentieth century. But this was no different to French treatment of SOE (or SIS) in general. In his 2012 study of British Secret agents in the Hautes Pyrénées from 1940 to 1944, Yazid Alili concluded that even seventy years after the war: '*D'une point de vue historiographique, l'étude de l'activité des services secrets britanniques au cours de la Second Guerre mondiale reste encore peu traité en France*.'[72] Although former Free French intelligence officers André Dewavrin (wartime alias Colonel Passy), and Captain Paul Paillole offered insights into the motives and actions, the successes and failures, the loyalties and disloyalties of British and French agents who navigated the political minefield of resistance movements in France as early as 1947 and 1975 respectively, in-depth academic interest in SOE in France dates only from the 2000s, when historians including Olivier Wieviorka and Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac began to illuminate the links between the Allies and the French in relation to wartime resistance, supported by the publication of the French translation of *SOE in France*. Unfortunately, this translation followed the tendency to translate British as *Anglais*, thereby giving the impression that SOE (F) agents were all English, which they demonstrably were not.[73] Sébastien Albertelli added substantially to the body of work on

71 A member of the pre-war PCF Central Committee, following his escape from a German prison Grenier was tasked by the underground party with assuring contact between the FTP and non-communist resistance movements. Fernand Grenier, *C'est Ainsi…(souvenirs)* (Paris, 1959), p. 137, pp. 147 – 148 *& passim.* See also Tillon, *Les FTP*, pp. 669 – 672.

72 Yazid Alili, *Agents secrets britanniques dans les Hautes-Pyrénées: Les services secrets britanniques et la Résistance francaise dans les Hautes-Pyrénées 1940 – 1944* (Editions Solitaire, 2012), p. 12.

73 In fact, many were not only not-English but were not British. Olivier Wieviorka, 'La Résistance a-t-elle, à l'Ouest, été un phénomène Européen?', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 37/1 (2019), pp. 32 – 47; Olivier

Anglo-French intelligence cooperation in 2009 through his deft exploration and explanation of the functions of the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA, Free French intelligence agency from 17 January 1942 initially called BCRAM from its inception in April 1941).[74] Providing a valuable foil to various studies of the BCRA, Simon Kitson's exploration of espionage in Vichy France addresses the activity of resolutely anti-communist senior Vichy intelligence officers, some of whom appear to have sought to influence British intelligence by leaking Vichy reports of planned communist insurrections in France.[75] Although written more than a decade before Kitson and Albertelli's works, Douglas Porch's history of French intelligence helps to set the work of the *Deuxième Bureau*, Vichy intelligence and the BCRA in its context, delivering as it does a valuable overview of the political and military framework within which these (predominantly) men sought to influence anti-Nazi resistance in France.[76]

Increasingly, historians of sabotage and subversion can avail of extensive online resources on the subject. While many of these sites should be treated with caution, the *Maitron des Fusillés*, an ongoing online project overseen by CNRS and *l'Université de Paris 1*, constitutes an increasingly valuable biographical resource. However, while the *Maitron* does address transnational cooperation, collaboration across political divides arguably remains underemphasised.[77] All the aforementioned works would have been greatly enhanced by as yet unwritten studies of Chief of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service Sir Hugh Sinclair,

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Wievieorka, *Histoire de la Résistance 1940 – 1945* (Paris, 2013); M.R.D. Foot, *Des Anglais dans la Résistance: Le SOE en France* (Paris, 2008). See also Marcel Ruby, *La guerre secrète: Les réseaux Buckmaster* (Paris, 1985).

74 Colonel Passy, *2e Bureau Londres* (Paris, 1947); Paul Paillole, *Services Spéciaux, 1935 – 1945* (Paris, 1975); Sébastien Albertelli, *Les Services Secrets du Général de Gaulle: Le BCRA 1940 – 1944* (Paris, 2009).

75 Simon Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies: Fighting Espionage in Vichy France* (Chicago, 2008).

76 Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: From the Dreyfus Affair to the Gulf War* (London, 1996).

77 *Dictionnaire Biographique: Fusillés, Guillotinés, Exécutés, Masacrés, 1940 – 1944* http://fusilles-40-44.maitron.fr

Section D and SOE officer Major Leslie Humphreys, and intelligence officers Clara Holmes and Ms Stamper - all of whom played a significant part in reaching out to and working with communist propagandists and would-be saboteurs.[78] Unlike female SOE agents, who have deservedly been the subject of much public interest, Clara Holmes and Ms Stamper have been left largely untouched in histories of the intelligence service, and indeed of SOE.[79] Both women have been acknowledged in the small number of histories dedicated solely to Section D, but their prior association with SIS, extremely limited publicly available files, and their decision to maintain a low profile following the war means that their contribution has been vastly overshadowed by that of their male colleagues.[80] Likewise, the role of female MI5 officers such as Millicent Bagot, whose repeated attempts to uncover information about NKVD agents infiltrated into France by SOE were stymied by her primary correspondent in SIS, Kim Philby, has yet to be afforded due attention.[81]

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78 Des Turner *Secret Weapons Centre Station 12* (Stroud, 2011)

79 Illustrating just how important Clara Holmes was to the work of the SOE German section, a note in her slim personal file (TNA HS 9/733/4) dated 7 June 1943 states that it was an 'evil day' when she had to take temporary leave to look after her family, and that the section remained 'very badly in need of [her] services which are most valuable.' Works focussing on female SOE agents include: Sarah Helm, *A Life in Secrets: the story of Vera Atkins and the lost agents of SOE* (London, 2005); Shrabani Basu, *Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan* (London, 2008); Claire Mulley, *The Spy Who Loved: The Secrets and Lives of Christine Granville* (London, 2012); Squadron Leader Beryl E. Escott, *The Heroines of SOE: Britain's Secret Women in France F Section* (London, 2012); Carole Seymour-Jones, *She Landed by Moonlight: the story of secret agent Pearl Witherington* (London, 2013); Susan Ottaway, *Violet Szabo: The Life that I have* (London, 2014); Sonia Purnell, *A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of Virginia Hall, WWII's Most Dangerous Spy* (London, 2019).

80 Atkin, *Section D*, and Malcolm Atkin, *Fighting Nazi Occupation* (Barnsley, 2015). In contrast, Holmes and Stamper are generally reduced to a sentence or two in histories of Section D. Peter Pirker has provided some indication of their work for the Austria section in the afterword of Eric Sanders' memoir *Emigration ins LebenL Wien – London und nicht mehr retour* (Wien, 2008), pp. 356 – 258. For a study of the gender dimension of SOE recruitment, training and deployment see Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Clara Holmes' personal file: TNA HS 9.733/4, contains precious little information, although it does note that she worked for the Vienna Section of SIS for a total of twelve years between 1917 and 1940.

81 Millicent Bagot is recorded on the official MI5 website as an Oxford classics graduate who by 1949 had become 'a leading expert on Soviet Communism with an encyclopaedic knowledge that impressed even J Edgar Hoover'. In 1953 Bagot became the first female intelligence officer in MI5 to gain the rank of Assistant Director. www.mi5.gov.uk/news/celebrating-vote-100. See Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev *The Crown Jewels* (London, 1996), p. 152 for claims that Ms Bagot 'cultivated a GRU spy ring' ring known as the Robson-Gibbons group.

Methodology

Adopting a chronological structure, this study presents three discrete, but intimately and sequentially connected periods of British government interaction with communists, dating from 1938 through to 1945. Throughout, the personal and political drivers of engagement are examined closely - from early liaison between Section D and individual Trotskyists in 1938, to ad hoc contact between officers of the Special Operations Executive and local communist *maquisards and guerrilleros* from 1942, via high-level contact between the NKVD and SOE officers that had its origins in Section D scoping exercises mooted prior to the German invasion of Soviet Russia. To assess the relative importance of these driving forces, the text incorporates views of those operating at ground level as well as those taking high level decisions, offering simultaneously a 'bottom up' and 'top down' history that is transnational in scope but ultimately anchored in the world of British intelligence and foreign policy.

Being ultimately concerned with untold stories or cooperation, early research in a variety of archives across the UK was followed by an extensive period dedicated to corroborating UK-based material with files held across myriad local and national archives across France. From London to Paris, from Oxford to Montpellier, from Salford to Toulouse, close study of secret service, police, and privately deposited files offered up rare cross-references to the same individuals and events related to the theme of this research. Acknowledging, however, the dangers of assuming archives offer up only 'incontrovertible truths', the journey of this research was driven by a determination to rigorously triangulate 'asides' and 'throwaway comments'. Names and details of circumstances were therefore checked

against a broad range of secondary sources in order to ascertain their likely historical validity and genuine relevance to the historiography. By letting the primary sources breathe in this way, a small number of individuals, heretofore generally ignored in the military and political record, rose to the surface: individuals who had been both the subject of, and had exercised a not insignificant influence over, critical aspects of government policy but who - for predominantly national security reasons - have largely been either deliberately or inadvertently overlooked.

Although this study did not set out to restore women to the history of intelligence operations, driven as it was by the mandates of the archives, the names of previously 'hidden' women emerged as important figures: not the female agents of SOE about whom so much has been written over the past two decades, but officers of MI5 and SIS whose names recur time and again as the key figures responsible for running - and uncovering – potential revolutionaries.

The process was not without its challenges. As noted in the subsequent section, 'Sources', participants in historical events do not all choose to record the same events at, with the same focus, or even at all. Recollections diverge. Mistakes happen. Redactions abound. Some may be tempted for personal or political reasons to overemphasise their importance in the development or delivery of a particular project, while others choose to remain silent, or downplay the significance of the event itself or the part they and others played in it. Where the available evidence points to, but does not categorically confirm, a particular version of events, this is highlighted in the text.

The stories laid out in the following pages are also instructive in their description of how individual trajectories were affected by the 'collisions of cultures' within the global

communist movement and how varying appreciation of communist ideology was influenced by the 'two-way traffic between the USSR and the capitalist world' that took place after the Soviet Union joined the war on the side of the Allies.[82] Examining the impressions of those one both sides of these arrangements allows new perspectives to emerge, challenging perceptions of how individuals from very different backgrounds and with wildly diverse worldviews collided, collaborated and attempted to manoeuvre within a dynamic geographical and political space towards converging, and then rapidly diverging goals.[83]

Sources

Robert Cecil, who had been assistant to the Head of SIS during the war, claimed in 1980 that only young academics who had worked in intelligence during Second World War and had scores to settle, and journalists who fed on speculation were interested in writing about the influence of the intelligence apparatus on political and military history.[84] Although the 1970s and 1980s saw an increase in academic studies, it was not until the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent opening and transfer of relevant archives that historians began to move beyond 'institutional' projects to examine intelligence as an integral part of international history.[85] While triages, culls, censorship and accidental loss have prevented much valuable material from reaching the public

82 Brigitte Studer, *The transnational world of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 5 – 7 referencing Robert Frank, 'Emotions mondiales, internationales et transnationales, 1822 – 1932', *Monde(s)* 1/1 (2012), pp. 47 – 70. For a study of transfers within the global communist movement, see Brigitte Studer, 'Stalinization: Balance sheet of a complex notion', in Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (eds), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 45 – 66.
83 See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45/1 (2006), pp. 30 – 50 and also 'Resistance and Collaboration in the Second World War as a Transnational Phenomena', *Journal of Modern European History* 16/2 (2018), p. 180.
84 Robert Cecil, 'C''s war', *Intelligence and National Security* 1/2 (1986), p. 170.
85 Martin S. Alexander (ed), *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (London, 1998), pp. 1 – 2.

domain, a wealth of material is now openly available for consultation across a wide variety of national, departmental and private archives, including numerous intelligence reports held in both the UK and France.[86]

The gradual release of files to various local and national archives across the UK from the 1990s, including notably SOE, Government Code and Cypher School (GCCS) and MI5 files (the latter gradually released from 2000 onwards) has inspired numerous works on SOE as well as specific papers on, for example, the Venona decrypts of Soviet intelligence signals.[87] The extensive nature of the releases prompted the Imperial War Museum, in association with the Gerry Holdsworth Special Forces Charitable Trust, to convene an academic conference in 1998 dedicated soley to SOE.[88] At the same time, the repatriation between 1994 and 2000 of French intelligence files seized by the Red Army from the headquarters of the Gestapo-run *Auswertungsstelle Frankreich* (many of which had subsequently been hidden in the Czech castle of Horni Libchava), combined with improvements in the cataloguing of archives at the *Service Historique de la Défense* (SHD) and the *Préfecture de Police* in Paris, gave rise to several detailed works on French intelligence during the Second World War.[89] Although SIS files remain closed, a steady stream of MI5 files (albeit sometimes heavily redacted) continues to be released to the National Archives at Kew, some of which contain examples of, and references to, correspondence between the two

86 Robert Young, 'French military intelligence and Nazi Germany 1938 – 1939', in Ernest May (ed), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence assessment before the Two World Wars* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 271 – 309. has suggested that anyone wishing to research intelligence history would find themselves confronted not with a paucity of sources but rather an over-abundance of potentially relevant archival material.
87 Gerald Hughes, Peter Jackson & Len Scott (eds), *Exploring Intelligence Archives: Enquiries into the secret state* (Abingdon, 2008), p. 6.
88 Seaman, *Special Operations Executive*, p. 2. The Conference took place between 27- 29 October 1998. For more on the SOE archive, see Duncan Stuart's chapter in the same volume: 'Of Historical Interest Only: The origins and vicissitudes of the SOE archive', pp. 217 – 229.
89 Ines Rotermund-Reynard (ed), *Echoes of Exile: Moscow Archives and the Arts in Paris 1933-1945* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 52 – 53.

services. There are, however, worrying signs that France has begun to row back on its commitment to allow access to primary sources, with some researchers recently finding that important archival material once openly available at the SHD is now subject to an interministerial decree renewing restrictions on access.[90]

Given the paucity of information available about the activity of certain communists during the period the *Archives Nationales* (AN) in Paris and repatriated French police reports now archived across the AN and the *Préfecture de Police* have been of particular use to this study. SOE material relating to the PICKAXE missions, although in places substantially redacted, offers a rich variety of often darkly humorous and regularly condescending accounts of communist agents who transited through the UK between 1941 and 1944 - although the researcher must also be mindful of the possibility that certain 'source material' has been fabricated. As SOE officer Douglas Dodds Parker wrote after the war the Secret Services are capable of producing fabricated 'evidence' as he himself had done 'to protect an early operation'.[91]

While papers of senior PCF cadres such as Guyot and Georges are available to view at the *Archives Départementales de la Seine Saint Denis,* the information contained therein is heavily party-focussed, with nary a reference to the personal, or to contacts with anyone beyond the communist party. Many personal archives of former FTP members were donated to official communist archives following an initiative launched by the PCF in 2005, and again in 2020 to mark the Party's 100th anniversary and it is to be hoped that many of

90 Open letter from the American Historical Association (AHA) to President Emmanuel Macron, 11 February 2020.
91 MC P2/4/2C/92. Letter 29 May 1996 to Professor Michael Foot.

these files - Louis Aragon's '*pages perdus de l'histoire*'[92] - will be catalogued and made publicly available.[93] However, with a standardised approach to the deposit of, and access rights to official and private PCF members' records still the subject of debate, the discovery of personal accounts from communists that discuss the Second World War is more often than not a case of extraordinary luck as opposed to the fruit of a systematic search and, even then, may consist only of further fleeting references, an echo of some bigger story - another shadow to chase.

Departmental and municipal archives across France are the guardians not only of useful Préfecture and local police reports that can be cross-referenced, for example, against RAF logs of parachute drops and SOE reports of the arrest of agents. They can also on occasion be found to contain detailed studies of local resistance groups that add much to an understanding of the functions of broader SOE or FTP networks.[94] In addition to these written archives, oral history projects - some led by universities, others by local and departmental historians - have created invaluable repositories for the voices of both SOE members and members of the communist resistance in France. One such example is the *Mémoire de Résistances de la Dordogne: Une collecte de mémoire orale*, created in collaboration with the *Centre départemental de la Mémoire*.[95] In the UK, the Imperial War Museum and The Keep at the University of Sussex are both important archives of oral

92 Louis Aragon, inaugural speech to the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), 4 May 1977.
93 Conference, 'Le PCF à travers ses archives locales (1944 – 2000)', held 4 February 2020 at the *Archives Nationales* in Paris provided a forum for regional archivists, PCF members and academics to discuss the obstacles to the access and categorisation of PCF archives. One of the speakers, Magali Lacousse of France Archives, has been a powerful force in trying to make the organisation's website a centralised search engine for political archives across France.
94 For example, the Archives Départementales de l'Hérault holds a copy of Gérard Bouladou's *La résistance dans l'Hérault.*
95 See oral history pages Mémoires, Résistances Dordogne https://memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/1000-memoires-de-resistances-de-la-dordogne.html and the Centre Départemental de la Mémoire Résistance et Déportation de la Dordogne: https://cdm24.fr/.

testimony of SOE members who served in France as well as fascinating accounts of public perception of domestic and foreign affairs, such as are indicated in records of Mass Observation.[96] Many important records, however, remain scattered, ad hoc, and dependent upon local interest and enthusiasm, and official archival strategies.

Had the Covid-19 pandemic allowed, this thesis would have made far greater use of German, Spanish and Soviet sources including records of the Spanish children who were sent to the Soviet Union during the Spanish Civil War and the archives of Comintern successor agencies such as Scientific Institute 205, which managed international radio communications from the middle of 1943, and which have received little attention in academic literature. This thesis posits that these files may well contain further clues as to the identities of some of the PICKAXE agents as well as indications as to the importance the Comintern and NKVD placed on continued communication with those of their agents who were infilitrated by the British into France. Given travel restrictions imposed during 2020 and 2021, however, it has been necessary to rely on sources cited by others, who were able to visit key archives, including the Russian Government Archive of Social-Political History (RGASPI, formerly RTsKhiDNI) and the Comintern archive in earlier years.

Despite the superior availability of documentation compared to even ten years ago, a diminution in the demands for *derogations,* and greater ease of access afforded by improved online resources, research into the influence of SIS and MI5 on military policy and intelligence cooperation is necessarily obstructed by the permanent closure of SIS files. Keith Jeffery, commissioned by SIS to write an account of the Service between 1909 and 1949, has claimed that 'very few SIS reports from the period, let alone internal commentary

96 Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, http://www.massobs.org.uk/.

on them, have survived in either closed or open archives'[97] but as his study provides no recorded references to internal files this is naturally impossible for the independent researcher to corroborate. Furthermore, some MI5 files which, given the pervasiveness of MI5 pre and post-war monitoring of communists and suspected communists, ought reasonably to exist (such as, for example, a personal file on Tom Wintringham), are not mentioned in archival lists.[98] Very occasionally, a pertinent document can crop up in unexpected places, such as the copy of a Section D proposal found in the French military archives at Vincennes during the course of this research, which offers an opportunity not only to corroborate earlier finds, but provides firm evidence of international cooperation. This is important as, even in 2021, one file on the history of Section D is still retained by the British government 'for reasons of national security'.[99] The value of restricted documents is difficult to determine, but as several relate to key individuals whose activity in the UK may well have some bearing on this story it is to be hoped that some of these will shortly be released.[100]

97 Jeffery, *MI6,* p. 302.

98 In the 1930s, although conscious of the threat from unknown foreign agents, MI5 was fairly confident of the strength of its monitoring of known communists or prominent sympathisers through a combination of Home Office Warrants, Special Branch surveillance, bugging, and the employment of semi-private intelligence organisations. As releases to the National Archives in Kew since the 1990s attest, files were held on a large number of active members of the CPGB as well as prominent British and international communist sympathisers including George Orwell, Arathil Nambiar, Jomo Kenyatta and Francis Nkrumah. Access to over 1,000 records dating between 1925 and 1949 are available in the KV2 series at the National Archives. It is quite probable that many more files exist, but the principle of neither confirm nor deny that governs certain government records means it is impossible at this point in time to establish the total number of records held on individuals for this period. Following a dip in monitoring due to excessive wartime workload and an accommodation with the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944 checks were re-established towards the end of the war with comprehensive and pervasive monitoring of communists firmly in place by 1955.

99 TNA HS 7/6 retained by the department under section 3.4 of the Public Records Act 1958 (i.e., for reasons of national security).

100 Some, however, are not slated for disclosure before 2064. See, for example, the file of Stanislas Szymonczyk, covering the years 1940-1963 (TNA HO 405/50880) is closed due to the personal information contained therein, and the distress it may cause to living relatives.

A further issue researchers in the field of intelligence history must contend with relates to redaction: even when an official file is opened, it is not uncommon to discover that significant sections have been blacked out. This is particularly the case for the SOE records within the UK National Archives HS/4, HS/7 and HS/9 subseries. These remain, however, some of the most useful sources of information for certain communists, who left very few other paper trails for the period.[101] The gaps are all the more frustrating given the burning of SOE files prior to the evacuation from France in 1940 – a necessary destruction of archives which was unfortunately later compounded by the rather haphazard filing systems employed by Section D and SOE in later years, and the regular weeding of the archives to make space for new documentation.

Terminology

Communism & Communists – 'big C or small c?'

The term communist is used throughout the text to refer to individuals who were, or were at the very least perceived by their British interlocutors to be, supportive of a political ideology deriving from the key tenets of the Communist Manifesto and later Marxist-Leninist thought, and who could reasonably be considered proponents of a socialist revolution designed to bring about an abrupt end to the capitalist state. Thus, individuals approached following Grand's 1939 recommendation that SIS reach out to 'communists' to perform clandestine strikes against fascist Germany ultimately included Trotskyists, NKVD officers and Comintern officials as well as current and former members of national communist parties. The crux of this thesis' argument is that very nature of the communists approached fluctuated in response to prevailing or anticipated British geo-political

101 An exception being in Soviet files.

considerations. As such, a suitable relationship developed in 1938 may not have been tenable (or avowable) in 1941. Likewise, contacts made in 1941 became once more unthinkable as the Second World War transited towards the Cold War.

Whether individuals were guarded or discarded depended also on their personal political evolution. Certain of the individuals central to this narrative may have at various times been paid-up communist party members, members of the Third Communist International (Trotskyists), or independent 'revolutionary socialists' – the latter being a term which British officials differentiated from, but nonetheless remained wary of its closeness to, Communism. That myriad distinctions between 'socialists' and 'communists' have been, and continue to be, debated within and without the communist movement (Marx himself used the terms interchangeably), goes some way to explain why official British representatives often felt at sea during discussions with those who described themselves as communists, but whose apparent political programme differed from a strict interpretation of Marxist-Leninist literature. Demonstrations of supposed disloyalty to the Soviet line, admissions of self-doubt, self-censorship and accusations of deviationism made by or towards various individuals denominated 'communists' render the blanket use of the term problematic. However, its employment in this sense provides a framework within which to assess the development of the key relationships described.

British Intelligence (SIS) & the Special Operations Executive (SOE)

Former SOE officer Douglas Dodds Parker commented after the war that, 'with hindsight' SOE and SIS were 'sometimes impossible to separate'.[102] As Ben Wheatley recognised in

102 MC P2/2/2MS/24 Notes on the difficulties between SOE and SIS.

his introduction to *British Intelligence and Hitler's Empire* (2017) 'Britain relied on SIS, and to a certain extent, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to provide its intelligence from the western, northern and southern parts of German-occupied Europe'.[103] While Section D originated within SIS, being both sponsored and directly overseen by the CSS, its successor SOE was overseen by the Ministry of Economic Warfare. However, one Section D file, somewhat grandiosely entitled 'Great Britain's only successful experiment in total warfare' contains the following statement:

> 'The Section was conceived as an integral though distinct branch of SIS and so it has remained. To the SIS this Section is indebted for patient guidance and for co-operation. In its turn, the Section, incidentally to its main purposes, has been able to maintain a regular flow of valuable information derived from four main sources: 1. From the constant expeditions of Secton Officers or Agents into all the countries of Europe. 2. From the intimate relations which the Section has established with virtually every anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist organisation in Europe. 3. From the development and exploitations of the Secret Censorship [readacted]. 4. From the Section's contacts, albeit at second-hand, with its sabotage and propaganda sub-Agents atually resident in enemy or enemy-occupied countries.'[104]

While contemporaries saw synergies, for the sake of clarity distinctions are emphasised in the text.

Officers and agents

The terms ‘officer’ and ‘agent’ are applied here in the SOE sense: i.e., an officer is an employee who holds an official position within an organisation, and whose work is focussed predominantly on management and administration. The descriptive ‘agent’, on the other hand, is applied to individuals who operated covertly on behalf of a particular

103 Ben Wheatley, *British Intelligence and Hitler's Empire* (London, 2017), Introduction.
104 TNA HS 7/5, Report entitled ‘Great Britain's only successful experiment in total warfare’, p.3.

organisation, often in occupied territory under the direction (loose or otherwise) of officers.

The term 'NKVD agent' has been applied to those individuals selected by the NKVD and/or Comintern officials for missions in occupied territory. British files often refer to these individuals as 'Soviet agents'. However, as none of those studied as part of this thesis were in fact Soviet citizens, the term NKVD agent has been chosen. It is recognised that this terminology is not without its difficulties, as Comintern representatives in Moscow clearly played a significant role on the agents' despatch and later direction and monitoring.

Britain, British

Regrettably for a thesis that seeks to challenge the equivalence of state memory with national and individual histories, for the sake of brevity the terms 'British' or 'Britain' are applied when describing actions or associations that treat with the state, whether the individuals involved were themselves British or not (as in the case of several SOE agents). Where possible, and appropriate, however, this is often clarified by using the terms British government, British public etc.

Chapter Plan

The chapters that follow can be loosely grouped into three sections. Chapters one to three explore the context and rationale behind British contacts with certain communists in France and the UK. Chapters four to six focus on the period during which the British, keen to draw the Soviets into the war on the side of the Allies and keep them there, drew up a secret arrangement with the Soviet NKVD. Chapters seven and eight analyse the oscillating and often contradictory attitudes within the British government towards the Anglo-Soviet

intelligence agreement, along with parallel concerns about communist reach in Western Europe and the influence of the PCF on independence movements in the British colonies. These sections are outlined in more detail below.

I

Chapter one takes as its focus the divisions both within and between MI5 and SIS over the development of plans to use communists for sabotage and subversion missions in Nazi-occupied territory, arguing that much of the credit for the survival of the project should go to the Chief of the Secret Service (CSS), the 'terrific anti-Bolshevik' and 'convinced appeaser' Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair.[105] Chapter two builds on this background by showcasing Section D's attempts to reach out to the émigré communist community in the UK and France.[106] This chapter also investigates the rationale behind the *Deuxième Bureau's* refusal to cooperate with Section D in forming an association with communists on French soil, and the impact on Anglo-French intelligence relations of British engagement with Paris resident and former member of the revolutionary *Spartakusbund* and *Kommunistische Partei Deutschland* (KPD) Karl Groehl. The third chapter shows how, by the beginning of 1940, Major Laurence Grand, who had enjoyed over a year of fairly free rein under Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, became the subject of an internal investigation, which effectively led to his dismissal by the new SIS chief, Sir Stewart Menzies. This chapter also addresses the role of Soviet agent Guy Burgess, including his ill-fated attempt to reach Moscow on behalf of Section D in 1940, the purpose of which has been the subject of much debate but which ultimately sealed the fate of Grand's department. A third aspect of this

105 Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service, the making of the British intelligence community* (New York: Penguin, 1987), pp. 422 & 593.
106 MI(R), like Section D at its own inception, had only one member of staff at this point.

chapter deals with British communist Tom Wintringham and his contribution to SOE's putative understanding of guerrilla warfare not only through his published articles and books, but also through his school for irregular warfare, which he established at Osterley Park in 1940.

II

Chapter four marks a shift away from direct engagement with individual communists, the most prominent of whom could be regarded as enemies of Soviet communism, to the development of a separate, formal Anglo-Soviet intelligence arrangement between SOE and the Soviet NKVD in September 1941, the seeds of which had been sown by Section D. There were many sound arguments for approaching the Soviet Union at this stage, yet the idea that either British Intelligence or the SOE should offer logistical support to the NKVD stands out as an extraordinary aberration of British intelligence policy, even if one accepts the view that 1941 to 1945 represented a pragmatic lull in Churchill's 'relentless struggle' against Communism.[107] Chapter five opens with the first PICKAXE mission, which took place in the first week of 1942, and the aim of which was to re-establish wireless communication between Occupied France and the USSR.[108] A second, SOE-supported NKVD mission (codename RUM), involved dropping three French communists over Montpellier in March 1942. Both the Paris and RUM missions are set against a backdrop of increasing SOE and BCRA support to the communist resistance in France. It is generally accepted that the SOE-NKVD agreement began to founder in 1943 - the result of a combination of limited successful infiltrations and a marked improvement in Moscow's oversight of communist

107 Antoine Capet, 'The Creeds of the Devil: Churchill between the two Totalitarianisms, 1917 – 1945', online article published on www.winstonchurchill.org.
108 TNA KV 2/2827/2 'Recent analysis of services known to have operated or be operating to France', an eleven-page report prepared on 8 March 1946 and sent to MI5 by H.A.R. Philby of SIS, 17 March..

networks in France. It might reasonably be assumed, therefore, that given the perceived failings of the SOE-facilitated NKVD missions into France, all cooperation ground to a halt. Chapter six reveals, however, that despite misgivings on both sides, infiltrations continued. The British, sensing they were on the losing side of the arrangement, attempted to involve the Free French in granting approvals for further drops in the hope that a veto by de Gaulle would absolve the British of responsibility for scuppering the deal. A review of the to and fro between Britain, Algiers and Moscow in relation to these operations draws conclusions as to the effect it had on British relations with General de Gaulle and the BCRA.

III

The year 1944, covered predominantly in chapter seven, marked a transition from a British fixation with Anglo-Soviet intelligence cooperation to a determination to a determination to reinvigorate counter-espionage activity. The Soviets, now assured of a Second Front, and with operational intelligence networks re-established across Europe, were likewise becoming decreasingly invested in the arrangement. While the SOE-NKVD agreement foundered, SOE – spurred on by Churchill - began dropping increasing numbers of weapons to the French resistance, some of which were knowingly passed to, or sequestered by the communist FTP, the MOI and the Spanish guerrilleros, although in insufficient quantities to quash rumours that the British were deliberately restricting arms drops to communists for fear of facilitating a post-liberation communist uprising. While political tensions were immediately apparent to the tripartite teams of British, American and Free French military personnel parachuted in to France to ensure effective coordination between the resistance and Allied forces following the Allied landings, an SOE memorandum from October 1944 concluded that too much was being made by observers of the communist danger in

Southern France.[109] The final chapter of the thesis will look at why the PCF, which emerged as the largest post-war political party in France, was instructed by Stalin to ensure any post-Liberation communist fervour was steered through purely democratic channels. Its main focus, however, is the trajectory of those individuals most closely involved in the story of cooperation, asking if any parallels can be drawn between their experience and the shifting priorities of British, French and Soviet foreign and domestic policy.

109 These tripartite teams were called JEDBURGHS. TNA FO 371/41907 SOE in France: memorandum dated 7 October 1944.

PART ONE

Chapter I: What should we do?

In his authorised history of SIS, Keith Jeffery suggested that, from the time of the Red Army's attack on the British embassy in Petrograd in August 1918, 'the perceived threat of Soviet Communism powerfully coloured the attitudes of Britain's policy makers in general and its intelligence community in particular'.[1] The idea that the British government and its intelligence community were obsessed with the threat of Soviet penetration, or of the spread of communist revolution, has influenced both academic and popular histories of the period. As this chapter shows, the story is in fact more nuanced, with key characters within SIS and the Foreign Office playing a central role in steering the government towards the use of émigré communists for subversive action against Germany. Outreach was not uni-directional, however: émigré communist groups actively sought out British government funding for their own intelligence activities as well as access to senior British politicians.

During the months leading up to the German advance on Austria the British Prime Minister argued for the containment or even accommodation of German ambitions through diplomatic means. In January 1938 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain engineered the removal of one of his most senior civil servants, Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office Sir Robert Vansittart, whose repeated warnings that an ingrained anti-communism was blinding the government to the growing threat of fascism had failed to move the staunchly anti-Bolshevik Prime Minister to genuinely consider an alliance with the Soviet Union. Vansittart's multiple personal and professional intelligence sources in Germany had for years persuaded him that moderate German politicians would restrain Hitler's domestic and foreign policy ambitions. By late 1937, however, the most senior civil servant in the Foreign Office

1 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 138.

had become convinced that internal German opposition stood little chance of reining in the Führer und Reichskanzler and that more forthright action was required by Britain and her allies to avoid war on the continent. While he may have found a sympathetic ear in Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (CSS, or 'C'), Vansittart was unable to persuade the Prime Minister to take a firmer line against Germany and in January 1938 he was effectively pushed aside by means of a sideways 'promotion' to Foreign Affairs adviser, a newly created post with very little meaning and no teeth. Newly instated Permanent Under Secretary Alexander Cadogan did his best to eclipse his predecessor, but Vansittart retained an audience. His close working relationship with Sinclair was recognised and to a large extent accepted by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, who acknowledged that SIS had effectively been under Vansittart's exclusive direction.[2] The close relationship between Sinclair and the Foreign Office somewhat conflicts with General Sir Kenneth Strong's recollections, as reported by Douglas Porch, which suggested that 'officers in the pre-war British military intelligence devoted much time to political reporting because they felt the Foreign Office incapable of interpreting political intelligence in terms of military need.'[3] Within a month, however, Eden - the most forthright anti-appeaser within the Cabinet - was also gone, having resigned over the timing of Chamberlain's concessions to Mussolini.

The new team at the Foreign Office, comprising Lord Halifax as Foreign Secretary and Cadogan, may have been more amenable to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement but, when Germany moved to annex Austria on 12 March 1938, it became abundantly clear that

2 John R. Ferris, ''Indulged in all too little'? Vansittart, intelligence and appeasement', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 6/1 (1995), pp. 122 – 175; Peter Neville, 'Rival Foreign Office Perceptions of Germany, 1936-39', *Diplomacy and Statecraft,* 13/3 (2002), pp. 137-152.
3 Porch, *French Secret Services*, p. 32 citing General Sir Kenneth Strong, Intelligence at the Top: The recollection of an intelligence officer (London, 1968), p. 16.

intelligence operations against Germany would have to be urgently adapted to make use of alternative sources of information as well as possibly carrying out subversive action. As it happened, Sinclair had for some time been ruminating on the possibilities of developing additional, innovative means not only for accessing the most recent and relevant information on political, industrial and military developments in Germany, but also ways of subverting them. In fact, according to former Cabinet Office historian Mark Seaman, Sinclair likely discussed options for SIS engagement in sabotage and subversion against Nazi Germany with Vansittart as early as 1935 – perhaps spurred on by a raft of government intelligence committee reports, which all pointed to an urgent need to develop innovative ways to prepare for, or mitigate against, German expansionism. Yet financial pressures coupled with diplomatic concerns continued to prevent SIS from exploring anything but the more traditional methods of gathering intelligence on Germany until 1938.[4]

While Foreign Office officials in the Northern Department made it clear that they were in favour of more aggressive action to warn Hitler off his programme of expansionism, Cadogan's briefing papers from early in that year reveal not only the extent to which he was not only resigned to the diminution of Britain's role in Western Europe, but also just how hard he lobbied for some form of international security arrangement in opposition to Soviet Russia. A lengthy paper from 1938 entitled 'What should we do?' discussed myriad options regarding future international alliances but within this detailed examination Soviet Russia is only mentioned once in an ambivalent, single sentence post script: 'p.s. Russia: We can never bank

4 Most notably, 1934 Joint Chiefs of Staff report followed by reports of the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC), the Industrial Intelligence Committee (IIC), and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).

on this country but, to keep on the right side of this devil, we must sup with him to some extent, adapting the length of our spoon to circumstances at any given moment.'[5]

Searching for alternative sources of information that might persuade the Prime Minister of the urgent need to engage in more direct action against Nazi Germany, Sinclair explored the possibility of bolstering the trade in information between British and French intelligence by passing to the French *Deuxième Bureau* information gathered by SIS and MI5 on communist subversion and the movements of French communists in exchange for French intelligence on Germany.[6] Up until the spring of 1938, Sinclair also oversaw the practice of sharing information gathered as a result of infiltrating and monitoring communist groups with the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt Amt IV* (Gestapo).[7] Following the German invasion of Austria, however, Sinclair ordered his officers to end all such contact, arguing that SIS should no longer seek to satisfy 'the Gestapo lust for information on the subject of anti-Nazi Germans in England on the false grounds that they are 'Communists'', implying that British intelligence had been passing on information about a wide variety of anti-Nazi German political émigrés, not only communists residing in the UK.[8]

The abrupt about-turn which led to SIS delving into the wealth of material once shared with the Gestapo in order to identify potential communist agents who might be willing to work *for* the British *against* Germany may have been inspired by the depth of discomfort felt by some communists about the Moscow Show Trials, and the recent assassination of high profile Soviet defector Ignace Reiss. Could Britian making use of those communists who were fiercely

5 TNA FO 371/21659 *What Should We Do?* Foreign Office paper 18 September 1938
6 Peter Jackson & Joseph Maiolo, 'Strategic Intelligence, Counter-Intelligence and Alliance Diplomacy in Anglo-French relations before the Second World War', *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 65/2 (2006), p. 460.
7 These practices were carried out by MI5, Special Branch and affiliated services including Maxwell Knight's 'M' group. For more on this, see: Henry Hemming, *Maxwell Knight, MI5's Greatest Spymaster* (London, 2017).
8 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 302.

anti-Nazi but who had found it increasingly difficult to support the Stalinist regime?[9] The emerging idea of approaching communists alienated from Stalin's régime to undertake intelligence and sabotage work against Germany was likely facilitated by the increasingly generous funds that began to flow into SIS from the Treasury immediately after the German invasion of Austria. After years of working to tight budgets, Sinclair suddenly found he had access to 'ample funds with which to take advantage of an opportunity which offers…in which money might help'.[10] The absence of firm documentary evidence that Chamberlain directly approved this new strain of SIS research does not necessarily point to Sinclair having overstepped the mark. It is instead likely that Chamberlain was apprised of Sinclair's plans but kept out of the paperwork in order to avoid a diplomatic incident: a core tenet of the principle of deniability. In any case, the use of such unlikely collaborators as communist agents would add to the plausibility of any future government denials, should the German Reich seek to link the British government to sabotage attacks or subversive messaging. To support this theory is the fact that, around the same time as Sinclair began promoting research into communist émigrés and other communist intellectuals, the Prime Minister personally requested that Canadian propaganda specialist Sir Campbell Stuart prepare a document outlining the possibilities for infiltrating anti-Nazi propaganda to Germany. However, while Campbell Stuart's spring report on 'the steps necessary for the creation of a new Propaganda to the Enemy Department',[11] were considered by subsequent wartime propaganda experts to be 'so

9 A series of trials held publicly and behind closed doors between 1936 and 1938 at Stalin's behest, and during which senior party officials, military leaders and officers of the secret police were accused of anti-Communist conspiracy, sometimes on behalf of foreign governments. Confessions and denunciations were often extracted through physical and psychological torture. Guilty verdicts resulted in death or lengthy prison sentences.
10 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 295, citing a conversation between Sinclair to the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff.
11 Ellic Howe, *The Black Game: British Subversive Operations against the Germans during the Second World War* (London, 1988), p. 22.

rudimentary as to be almost worthless', Sinclair's initiative quickly evolved into one of the most widely publicised elements of Britain's wartime intelligence work.[12]

A significant difference between SIS plans for anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion and Campbell Stuart's scoping exercise was that, while much of the official thinking behind propaganda to the enemy had barely advanced in the inter war years, Sinclair and his senior team had for some time been observing trends in irregular warfare and had clear thoughts about the research required into the subject.[13] There is no consensus as to how he identified Royal Engineer Major Laurence Grand as the preferred candidate. Malcolm Atkin has argued that Grand's name came up during internal discussions between Sinclair and his deputy Sir Stewart Menzies, during which the latter recalled a report he had read on the subject of irregular warfare that Grand had written the previous year.[14] A colleague of Grand's supported this theory when he suggested that it was reports of Grand's exploits on the North-West Frontier during the third colonial Afghan War that had convinced Sinclair he had found the right man.[15] Colonel Wood, a fellow Royal Engineer, recalled how Major Grand had dealt with raids by Pathan tribesmen by

> '…letting them steal ammunition of which about one in ten rounds would be loaded with high explosive instead of ordinary cordite, so that when they fired their bundook that would be that! It was a brilliant idea but to the dear old boys out there – 'By God, sir, the man's a cad! God! I've never heard anything like it!' and he was absolutely deplored, they couldn't stand the fellow – 'You know, the Pathan's a gentleman!'…[Grand] was cursed for this, but they remembered it.'[16]

12 Howe, *Black Game*, p. 26.
13 Two years earlier, in February 1936, Commandant Air Vice Marshal A.S. Barratt had spoken openly about failure in war being often caused by 'over-conservatism of thought'. Barratt identified in particular the emergence of total war, which would require the entire resources of the nation. For more on this see Alaric Searle, 'Inter-Service Debate and the Origins of Strategic Culture: The Principles of War in the British Armed Forces, 1919 – 1939', *War in History*, 21:1 (2014), pp. 4 – 32. Doubtless Sinclair was also aware of former Royal Engineer Major-General Sir Charles' Gwynn's study of insurgency *Imperial Policing* (London, 1934).
14 Atkin, *Section D*, p. 6, citing information from Grand's daughter, Lady Bessborough.
15 Grand has also served with the Royal Engineers in France, Russia and the Middle East.
16 Turner, *SOE's Secret Weapons Centre*, p. 40.

A former chief historian of the British Foreign Office has claimed instead that Grand was recommended to SIS by Desmond Morton, head of the respected Industrial Intelligence Committee (IIC) and a personal acquaintance of Grand.[17] According to Bennett, Sinclair was persuaded – possibly by Morton - that planning for sabotage in enemy occupied territory should be closely linked up with industrial intelligence but that, as the Economic Section in SIS refused to absorb sabotage within their remit, it was agreed a separate unit was required, triggering Sinclair's recruitment of Grand.[18]

Whichever way he came to the attention of the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, in April 1938 the 40-year-old Grand received an invitation to SIS headquarters at Caxton Street, London where Sinclair encouraged him to 'cogitate upon the possibilities of sabotage.'[19] Acknowledging the prevailing British government policy of appeasement, Sinclair reportedly warned his new recruit, who had worked in Imperial Chemical War Research and established a reputation as an officer untroubled by moral boundaries, that everything he was about to do was 'going to be disliked by a lot of people in Whitehall – some in this building.' Sinclair's warning was prescient, as Grand recalled when many months later he found himself facing attempts to oust him by those individuals within SIS who had profoundly taken against his activities and his approach.[20] Undeterred, Grand's initial response was to ask "Is anything banned?" to which Sinclair reportedly replied, "Nothing at all".[21] The man who been derided by his fellow soldiers for doctoring the enemy's ammunition so that it would blow up in their

17 Gill Bennett, *Churchill's Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the world of Intelligence* (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 194-195. Unfortunately, as Bennett does not include many references to original source documents, it is difficult to verify these claims.
18 Bennett, *Man of Mystery*, pp. 194 – 195.
19 TNA HS 7/3 SOE Early History to September 1940, p. 1.
20 TNA HS 7/5 Handwritten notes by Grand covering 1938, marked p. 3.
21 Atkin, *Fighting Nazi Occupation*, pp. 9-10, citing as source TNA HS 7/5 SOE History.

faces, had just been given carte blanche to plan to wreak havoc in Nazi occupied territory, potentially with the help of communist agents.

Originally appointed for only two months and with no money for staff, Grand concentrated his energy on researching the various ways in which sabotage could be incorporated into a new British way of war against Nazi Germany. As Malcolm Atkin has noted, the ultimate aim of Grand's organisation 'not only challenged the accepted concepts of neutrality and diplomatic process but also raised concerns in official circles regarding the moral consequences of guerrilla warfare fought by civilians with no visible chain of command, which was illegal under The Hague Convention.'[22] Grand's final report covered, among other topics: interference with electrical supplies and telephone communications; the adulteration of food; sabotage of industrial installations and railways; the introduction of diseases into crops and animals; setting fire to dockyards; and the distribution of rumours and false ration cards. The proposed work was divided into three classes. The first of these, general sabotage, Grand suggested would be best carried out by communists in Germany. The others – 'special sabotage', and 'moral sabotage' would be assigned to 'lone workers' and Jewish agents respectively.[23] Despite its pre-eminent position in the proposal, the early involvement of communist agents in the first – and broadest - of Grand's 'classes' of guerrilla war against Germany has been generally overlooked in studies of Britain's wartime work in sabotage and subversion. Similarly little attention has been paid to Grand's additional suggestion that a card

22 Atkin, *Section D*, p. 9.
23 TNA HS 7/3 SOE Early History to September 1940, pp. 1 – 3. See also Basil Henry Liddell Hart *The British Way in Warfare* (London, 1932). An enlarged edition of this work, entitled *When Britain Goes to War*, was published in 1935.

index be created of key influential figures including 'the Vatican, the intellectual section of the Communist Party, the Trade Union movement etc'.[24]

Engaging with ideologically dissonant groups in order to strike a blow at a third party was not uncharted territory for British intelligence: SIS had allegedly also reached out to German communists in the First World War in the hope of instigating a socialist revolution in Germany.[25] In his biography of the Comintern leader Willi Münzenberg, Sean McMeekin suggests that the then young but highly experienced German communist activist, who was already running courier services smuggling communist anti-war propaganda into France, Germany and Italy, was invited to Stockholm 'under the auspices of a highly secret plan concocted by the British Foreign Office to coordinate strikes and anti-war propaganda on the fronts in Germany.'[26] The British, McMeekin alleges, had been prepared to offer Münzenberg 'unlimited funding' for the production and dissemination of defeatist propaganda. Whether or not this led to anything is unclear. Münzenberg's usefulness, however, was not forgotten: Twenty years later, by which time he had been expelled from the KPD, his name featured at the centre of an SIS chart illustrating an international web of of émigré networks reaching across Germany and Austria to Paris, London and Zurich.[27]

Among the small group of senior SIS officers that were privy to Grand's early ideas a key complaint was that, should any British involvement in sabotage and subversion against the Third Reich be discovered, it would almost certainly provoke a diplomatic crisis, if not a

24 TNA HS 7/3 SOE: Early History to 1940, pp. 2 & 3.
25 Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire: A political biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's secret propaganda star in the West, 1917 - 1940* (Yale, 2003), p. 48.
26 McMeekin, *Red Millionaire*, pp. 48 – 49 citing a letter in BB, E 21 11326 Author: Jakob FELDNER, in which Feldner claims to have 'negotiated British support for the instigation of a 'German Revolution; while in London early in 1917'.
27 TNA KV 2/1121 Karl OTTEN Chart of Émigré intelligence networks Cross reference: TNA KV 2/2171/1. Correspondence between SIS and MI5 on German émigré networks in May 1939.

descent into the very international conflict that Chamberlain was actively seeking to avoid.[28] Grand's focus on harnessing communist resistance provoked a particularly negative reaction, with one unnamed officer claiming Grand's proposals were ill-founded as 'there were no Communists or anti-Nazi organisations in Germany' and that information sourced from émigré networks in France and the UK claiming to have links to such organisations was therefore of doubtful provenance and limited value.[29] Others argued that, even if willing saboteurs could be found with links into German occupied territory, these were not the sort of people SIS should be doing business with. As Grand would quickly discover, the first objection could be disproven and the second overcome. While communists and trade unionists had been systematically persecuted in Germany since 1933, and the KPD leadership had scattered across Europe, many communists or communist sympathisers had been able to sustain a covert existence in Germany and Austria, passing messages via a system of couriers and 'letter boxes' to contacts internally, and internationally.[30] In his study of German wartime resistance, Peter Hoffman notes that, while the German secret police arrested many communist activists and successfully displaced the leadership of the KPD in the 1930s, the underground struggle was taken up by 'subordinate officials and members'.[31] Among the most successful was the well-connected communist Dr Josef (Beppo) Romer who developed what 'was perhaps the largest and best-organized of any [organisation] operating in Germany under communist auspices' until his arrest in February 1942.[32] Other groups operating in Germany, led by the likes of Anton Saefkow, Franz Jacob and Bernhard Bastlein as well as

28 To some extent this fear was borne out when the Nazis linked the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler at the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich in November 1939 to Grand's agents who had been captured in the Netherlands, and used this as part of their justification for invading that country in May 1940.
29 TNA HS 7/3 SOE: Early History to 1940, pp. 2 -3.
30 Bourgeois, *Véritable Histoire*; V.E. Tarrant, *The Red Orchestra: The Soviet Spy Network Inside Nazi Europe* (London, 1995).
31 Hoffman, *History of the German Resistance*, p. 6.
32 Ibid, p. 23.

Harro Shulz-Boysen, although far from being uniquely communist, all received directions from the Soviet Union for a significant portion of the war.

The slew of objections from fellow SIS officers notwithstanding, Grand's first official report was approved and in June 1938 he was placed at the head of a new section reporting directly to Sinclair. Known variously as Section IX, the 'Sabotage Service', and the 'Statistical Research Department of the War Office', the department was most commonly referred to as Section D.[33] Over the next few months Grand recruited Leslie John Cardew Wood, a former Royal Engineer trained in intelligence work who was also a successful inventor, Lieutenant-Commander Langley of the Royal Navy who went on to develop explosive devices, often in collaboration the French *Deuxième Bureau,* and a civilian telecoms expert by the name of Edward Schröter.[34] With this small group of technical experts busy working on the means to carry out sabotage attacks, Grand turned his attention to recruiting agents willing to export or use these devices as well as contacts interested in the production and dissemination of anti-Nazi propaganda.

Grand appears to have initially approached Claude Dansey, a former deputy head of SIS and head of a shadow secret service designed to spring into action in the event that existing SIS networks were compromised, to request contacts in major industries including oil, rubber, aluminium, and railways with a view to providing them with sabotage materials and using them for whispering campaigns. Although he is one of the individuals thought to have suggested SIS create a separate sabotage section, Dansey later maintained he had been deeply concerned that Grand's 'mafia like' organisation risked torpedoing government

33 Atkin, *Fighting Nazi Occupation*, p. 8.
34 Turner, *SOE's Secret Weapons Centre*, pp. 38 – 40.

attempts at appeasement. Although he might have had concerns about engaging with communists, Dansey was ultimately unable to quarrel with Grand's suggestion of employing political émigrés in Britain and France: Robert Cecil, an assistant to the head of SIS, later claimed that Dansey's own networks relied heavily on untrained agents and on 'refugees from Nazi Germany some of whom, understandably enough, were prepared to sell anything to anybody'.[35] In fact, Dansey was not so much concerned about the illegality of the action itself, but rather its potential to undermine or inadvertently blow open his own operations, some of which were deeply involved in sourcing information from Germany.[36]

There is no evidence that – at this very early stage at least - any overtures were made either to the leaders, or indeed any paid-up members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Even though the CPGB had struggled to garner much support among the general public since its inception in 1920 (the Party had a single MP), communist influence was feared across the political spectrum.[37] Moscow might have disdainfully regarded the British communist party as a political entity run by a group of friends rather than a dedicated revolutionary force, but the CPGB loyally followed Stalin's directives and as such even the most tentative approach by SIS risked information leaking to Moscow, or even facilitating Soviet penetration of British intelligence.[38] Likewise, Section D would have been advised by

35 Robert Cecil, 'C''s war', p. 174. For a significant crossover among Dansey's recruits and Grand's, see the case of Max Salvadori in Roderick Bailey, *Target Italy*, Chapter 1. TNA HS 7/3 SOE Early History to September 1940, p.4 records that Grand asked Col. Dansey at a very early stage whether he had any contacts in a vast range of industries. See also Bob Maloubier, *La vie secrète de Sir Dansey, maitre-espion* (Paris, 2015), p. 118.

36 Claude Dansey's influence was such that Noreen Riols (mistakenly) referred to him as 'C' in her book about her work for SOE headquarters *The Secret Ministry of Ag and Fish: My life in Churchill's School for Spies* (London, 2013), p. 201. For more on Dansey, see Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service,* pp. 536-7.

37 The CPGB MP was Willie Gallacher, MP for Fife West. The Labour Party, with a membership of approximately 400,000, remained by far the most dominant force on the political left (the total number of paid CPGB subscriptions in 1938 amounted to a comparatively modest 18,000) but fear of growing influence of communists in certain trade unions prompted frequent vitriolic Labour Party outbursts.

38 Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London, 2017), pp. 41 – 42. The original derisive comment regarding the CPGB was made by Dmitry Manuilsky in 1928 when he was Secretary of the Executive

colleagues in SIS and the domestic security service MI5 to exercise caution when approaching known anti-Stalinist or potentially Stalinist émigrés. Although MI5 was fairly confident it had a handle on known and suspected communists, there were many Soviet contacts who were as yet unknown to the secret services: Between 1933 and 1938, Soviet illegal *rezidents* Arnold Deutsch and Theodore Maly had successfully cultivated relations with significant numbers of German and Austrian communist émigrés in France and the UK, many of whom were highly respected in the fields of politics, art, literature and science.[39] And even though Willi Münzenberg's Comintern front organisations operating across the continent offered a vast potential network of informants, he himself was closely monitored by the NKVD. There was of course the not insubstantial risk that NKVD agents posing as anti-Stalinists might be approached by accident. To confuse matters further, it was also possible that émigré agents pronouncing themselves to be anti-fascists might in fact be working on behalf of *German* intelligence: Paris, the ideal recruiting ground given its vast immigrant population, was thought to be awash with such individuals.[40] The attendant risks were, however, weighed against the urgent military and diplomatic imperative to strike an early blow in the hope of destabilising the Nazi regime – something that opposition figures within the German *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) and Carl Spiecker's *Deutsche Freiheits Partei* had thus far failed to produce.

A key criterion for Grand's early search for communist contacts seems to have been that the individuals concerned had publicly expressed a decisive refutation of Stalinism, and that MI5

Committee of the Comintern, and this arguably continued to be the Comintern's view of the CPGB into the 1930s and 1940s.

39 As later events involving Ursula and Jurgen Kuczysnki would reveal, MI5 missed some of the most important of these.

40 Michael Jabara Carley, 'Fiasco: The Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance That Never Was and the Unpublished British White Paper, 1939–1940', *The International History Review*, 41/4 (2019), pp. 701-728.

monitoring could attest to their prolonged antipathy towards the current Soviet regime. Public breaks with national communist parties and strong links to Leon Trotsky, therefore, appear to have served as evidence of suitability. Further essential criteria included evidence of secret networks of friends or close acquaintances operating inside Germany, and the capacity to smuggle information into and out of occupied territory. If the individuals identified had a history of developing their own propaganda, so much the better. Here again, communists – and particularly journalists - were the most obvious target for SIS recruitment. Dr Heinz Gittig's 1972 research into illegal anti-fascist publications disseminated within Germany between 1933 and 1945 found 550 booklets circulated in Germany between 1933 and 1939 of which the vast majority were of communist origin and had been smuggled in from abroad, suggesting a reasonable capacity for anti-Nazi propaganda amongst the émigré communist community. This number is dwarfed, however, by Peter Hoffman's later finding that in 1936 'the Gestapo seized 1,643,200 illicit leaflets distributed by the Communist and Social Democratic Parties alone', and close to a million in 1937.[41]

By the winter of 1938, having reviewed lists of potential contacts supplied by MI5 and SIS, Grand had narrowed his focus to a group of German and Austrian political émigrés living in England that revolved around Karl Otten, a German expressionist writer, broadcaster and prominent anti-militarist activist who had fled political persecution in Germany in 1933. SIS had followed Otten's movements abroad from as early as December 1936, when a report stated that he had been appointed by the Comintern as Münzenberg's principal agent for

41 Dr Heinz Gittig, *Illegale Antifaschistische Tarnschriften 1933 bis 1945* (Leipzig, 1972). Gittig's doctoral thesis on the subject was cited in Ellic Howe, *The Black Game,* 9. See also, Hoffman, *History of the German Resistance*, p. 16.

Spain.[42] As far back as September 1937 MI5 had applied for a Home Office Warrant (HOW)[43] for Otten claiming that, although he was a Social Democrat he had 'recently been brought within Comintern circles [and] has several contacts with Comintern agents in Paris.'[44] A later Section D report described Otten as a 'professorial' figure who 'revelled in violent activity, although possessing none of the outward characteristics generally associated with the terrorist.'[45] From the Hampstead home of friend and fellow German émigré Otto Lehmann-Russebueldt, Otten ran what MI5 referred to as the Carl OTTEN group (sic) but which, in an apparent nod to its location in North London, was known to its members as the Primrose League.[46] The League's stated aim was to support the anti-Nazi struggle by smuggling secret military information out of Germany. It was reportedly bankrolled by former editor of *The Times* Henry Wickham Steed who passed information received through this channel to Winston Churchill via Churchill's nephew Randolph.[47] A close relationship had been formed between Steed and the Churchills as early as 1936 when Churchill formed the Focus Group, an association of anti-appeasers which included Steed, Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Angell, historian Philip Guedalla, Liberal Leader Archibald Sinclair and Labour MP Hugh Dalton (the latter would later go on to oversee SOE as Minister for Economic Warfare). Interestingly, Roy Jenkins has referred to this group as one of a 'series of 'fronts' which in their cumulative

42 TNA KV 2/1123/1 Memorandum dated 14 December 1936.
43 A Home Office Warrant allowed for all incoming post to be intercepted, read and copied before being sent on to the addressee.
44 TNA KV 2/1123/1 Application for Home Office Warrant, 4 September 1937.
45 TNA HS 7/3 Section D Report on the PROBST organisation. Further information on Karl Otten can be obtained from the Karl and Ellen Otten archive, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach (DLA).
46 Members may have been aware of the late 19th century British conservative political grouping of the same name.
47 TNA KV2/1120-1 Report from officer B.4.b of MI5 dated 22 December 1938. Section B4 was responsible for Soviet counter-espionage. The name of the individual operating under B4b is not known, though quite possibly could have been Dick White, who was recruited by Guy Liddell and around this time was both working closely with Maxwell Knight on soviet counter-subversion and liaising with Vansittart on identifying anti-Nazi contacts in Germany.

effectiveness were reminiscent of the contemporary efforts of [their] sworn enemies – the British Communist party.'[48]

Professing themselves willing to work with anyone, from 'communists to countesses', the Primrose League was predominantly made up of left-wing and extreme-left-wing political émigrés who relied on a single contact man based in Paris, Karl Groehl, to maintain communications between themselves and like-minded dissidents in Germany and Austria.[49] Several months of monitoring Otten's correspondence had satisfied MI5 that, despite SIS concerns that Groehl was in fact posing as a Trotskyist on orders from Moscow, while Otten and other members of the League were 'very far to the Left' they were nonetheless 'extremely critical of orthodox Communism' and were willing to share secret information on German militarisation with the British.[50] An MI5 report from August 1938 also noted that some members of the League were 'terrified the British authorities may…turn them out of the country for having indulged in political activity.'[51] Although he was considered the 'centre of their Continental Intelligence Service', with good links to informants (predominantly intellectual German Social Democrats) practiced at crossing the border between Belgium and Germany at Aachen, or between France and Germany at Saarbrücken, some members had a poor opinion of Groehl's judgement, and of the quality of information he passed on, which varied from anecdotal reports to details of German military installations.[52] So much is known

48 Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A biography* (London, 2001), pp. 494 – 495.
49 Charmian Brinson and Richard Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence, MI5 surveillance and anti-Nazi refugees 1933 – 50* (Manchester, 2014), pp. 72-73.
50 TNA KV 2/1123/1 DGW (Dick White) minute to H.O. 17 May 1938. There is some evidence that the group had also been in receipt of funds from Czech intelligence, who were arguably more liberal than the British in their expenditure on intelligence in the run up to 1938. For SIS concerns about Groehl's loyalties, see KV 2/2171/2 SIS Report of 6 May 1938 re: Karl Groehl.
51 TNA KV/2/2171/1 M/S (Claud Sykes) to B.4.b, 9 August 1938.
52 Ibid. See also KV/2/2171/2 Cross Reference Check of 25 July 1948 referencing information from Claud Sykes provided on 13 June 1938.

about the internal workings of the League as, likely unbeknownst to its members, one of Otten's closest confidantes was in fact an MI5 agent who, by 1938, had been reporting back to MI5 on Otten's activities for at least two years.[53]

Claud M Sykes, who worked for Maxwell Knight's MI5-affiliated spy network under the codename M/S, furnished his handlers with regular updates on the espionage activities, internal disputes, and political connections of the Primrose League.[54] Through his intimate knowledge of German literature and expertise in translation, Sykes had quickly gained the trust of the League's members, skilfully navigating internal rivalries, and even being asked at one point to act as letterbox for some of their most secret correspondence.[55] In June 1938 Sykes reported to MI5 that Groehl was working with Otten and his associates as their 'letter box' in France. The secret service was also aware of his having made visits to the UK in the summer of 1938.[56] Of particular interest to Grand would have been a report passed from MI5 to the German section of the War Office that 'GROEHL was in touch with certain German technical men who went in and out of Germany.'[57] Grand later recalled that he engineered an introduction to Otten in December 1938 through another German émigré, Dr Kochman, who had been a head chemist with IG Farben, the major German chemical and pharmaceutical conglomerate which, on becoming a major Nazi government contractor, had dismissed all its Jewish employees. It was reportedly following this December meeting with Otten that Grand was introduced to Karl Groehl as a potential agent who might not only be willing to smuggle

53 John Green in *A Political Family,* p. 129 claims that Karl Otten was an MI5 informer himself.
54 For more on Claud Sykes see Henry Hemming, *Maxwell Knight: MI5's Greatest Spymaster* (London, 2017), pp. 195 – 6, 293, 339.
55 Münzner, 'The Surveillance of Friends', pp. 131 – 143.
56 Richard Dove, *Flying and Spying: Claud W. Sykes and the Karl Otten group in Political Exile and Exile Politics in Britain after 1933* (Manchester, 2014). TNA KV 2/2171/2 British Passport Control Office, Paris form requesting further details on Groehl dated 17 August 1938 cites previous visits in April/May and July 1938.
57 TNA KV 2/2172/1 Memorandum dated 12 September 1938.

information into and out of Germany, but also assist in the establishment of a British-sponsored sabotage network.[58] In fact, it appears Otten had been pushing since September for the British authorities to somehow acknowledge and finance Groehl's network. In a report to MI5 from that month, Claud Sykes noted:

> GROEHL, or someone else, has informed that there are about 50 – 60,000 active underground workers in the Communist Party of Germany, who are in very close touch with Moscow, and that a quick reliable line of communication has been established between them and Russia. These men can be relied upon to initiate sabotage work in all Germany's factories; they are already doing so in a quiet way, but would be ready to sacrifice their lives, if need be, when ordered to do so. At present GROEHL needs about ten subordinates who could organise both sabotage and propaganda in Germany for him.[59]

What is known about this Karl Groehl whom Otten was so keen to link up with British officials? Born in 1896 in the West Prussian town of Schneidemühl Groehl had moved to Berlin at the age of twelve after his widowed and impoverished mother reached out to a relative in desperation. In his memoirs, Groehl (writing under the name of Retzlaw, which he took following his evacuation from Paris in 1940) recalled the emotional impact of his impecunious but apparently loving childhood. His parents' Baptist faith, his mother's warnings to reject the anti-Semitic rumours that were rife at the time, combined with powerful stories of his grandmother watching half-starved Napoleonic soldiers feed themselves from the family pig trough profoundly influenced Groehl's later views on religion, Jews and militarism. After attending school in Berlin for two years, he found work with the German cable manufacturer *Cassirer*, where he was reportedly elected to represent the company's unionised workers. In

58 TNA HS 7/3 History of SOE to September 1940: France, Probst, Propaganda and Sabotage referencing 'note written by GRAND on 22 December 1938'.

59 TNA KV 2/2171/2 Report by M/S (Claud Sykes) of 21 September 1938. A week later, Sykes pointed to Otten's links with Winston Churchill: 'I somehow guess that [Otten] is in very close touch with Winston CHURCHILL, for he spoke of CHURCHILL'S coming intervention, and seemed to think that… CHURCHILL and EDEN will swing a large section of the Conservative Party over to Labour and form a new sort of National Government. Then he thinks they could form a united front with France and Russia against Hitler.' TNA KV 2171/2 Report by M/S (Claud Sykes), 28 September 1938.

1918, at the age of twenty-four, Groehl was imprisoned for refusing to answer his call up papers. On his release from prison in Poland a few days before the end of the First World War, Groehl claimed to have immediately involved himself in the November 1918 revolution as part of the *Spartakusbund* led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who would shortly go on to found the KPD.[60] A month or so later Groehl joined the newly formed KPD, going on to fight alongside fellow former Spartacist Leo Jogiches in the January 1919 uprising against the Berlin Freikorps and the 'police dictatorship' of Gustav Noske.[61]

Again, according to his memoirs, after the assassination of Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Jogiches, Groehl fled Berlin for Munich, where he made contact with Max Levien, the chairman of the communist party of Bavaria, and agitated in support of the formation of the *Bayerische Räterepublik*, which was declared in April 1919. While there are question marks over much of Groehl's claims regarding his activity during this time, it would appear that after the suppression of the *Räterepublik*, Groehl left Munich and assumed a new identity – that of Karl Friedberg. This, at least in part, is corroborated by contemporary French intelligence files which mention his alias.[62] Groehl's whereabouts for much of the 1920s are not clear, but he may have taken on a full-time role working for the KPD, becoming heavily involved with

60 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, Chapter 7 *Der Novembersturz 1918*.
61 Groehl is rarely mentioned in works covering the uprising. See, for example, Gilbert Badia, *Les Spartakistes 1918: L'Allemagne en revolution* (René Juliard, 1966 Paris), Hermann Weber, *Von Rosa Luxemburg zu Walter Ulbricht: Wandlungen des deutschen Kommunismus* (Hannover, 1961) and William A. Pelz, *The Spartakusbund and the German Working Class Movement 1914 – 1919* (New York, 1988); Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918 to 1923* (London,Second Edition 1997). The uncompleted memoirs of KPD co-founder Paul Frölich, however, refer to Groehl as having been sent to as an emissary of the leadership of the Bavarian Republic to report on the situation to the KPD central committee in April 1919. See Reiner Tosstorff (ed), *In the Radical Camp: A Political Autobiography 1890 - 1921* (Leiden, 2020), p. 157. SIS cross-reference checks mentioned in TNA KV 2/2171/2 of 14 December 1936 mention that he played 'a prominent part in the Communist movement in Munich'. An extract of an SIS report of 6 May 1938 suggests that he 'returned to Stalin communism' some time previously and was posing as a Trotskyist.
62 AN 19940508/1061 Fichier Groehl, Karl. The only file for Groehl in the Archives Nationales, this fichier contains only three slim slips of card listing him as double agent and noting various of his aliases that were known to them *viz* Karl Friedberg, Karl Block and Karl Erde.

growing the Comintern network in Western Europe and the expansion of KPD intelligence alongside Yakov Reich, 'the person mainly responsible for the distribution of the funds which the Soviet government allocated to Communists in the West.'[63] Between 1919 and 1926, Groehl reportedly undertook several trips to the Soviet Union accompanied by senior KPD cadres Walter Ulbricht, Hermann Duncker and August Thalheimer. Arrested by the Weimar authorities in 1926, Groehl received a second prison sentence but was amnestied in 1928. On his release from prison in 1928 Groehl found employment with a publishing company run by Willi Münzenberg. Following the 1933 Reichstag fire, when Münzenberg fled Berlin for Paris, Groehl claimed to have travelled to Moscow to report on events in Germany.[64] Instead of joining Münzenberg back in Paris, Groehl travelled directly from the Soviet Union to Switzerland, where he allegedly took over the direction of the Comintern distribution company the *Neuer Deutscher Verlag*. Some time around November 1933, following a major conflict with Hans Bickel, the head of distribution for the *Parti Communiste Suisse* (PCS), Groehl formally abandoned the KPD and joined the Trotskyist International for Communist Germany (IKD).[65]

Post-war British secret intelligence service reports (available only through MI5 paraphrased copies) suggest SIS agents had in fact picked up Groehl's trail as early 1932, when they first noted his involvement with the 1st Trotskyist Group in Basle, Switzerland *and French Intellligence* i.e., *before* his well-publicised conflict with the KPD.[66] This suggests that either the SIS records are incorrect, that they have been falsified, or that the high-profile conflict

63 Jakob Reich, 'The First Years of the Communist International', *Revolutionary History* 5/2 (Spring, 1994).
64 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 450. Groehl's apparent focus at this time was the liberation of communist prisoners and general sabotage missions.
65 Brigitte Studer, *Un Parti Sous Influence* (Lausanne, 1994), p. 450.
66 TNA KV 2/2172 Extract taken 29 May 1947 from SIS report no 2280 dated 15.6.46 re: Switzerland: Political/counter-espionage, Trotskyist groups.

with Hans Bickel was manufactured to provide Groehl with a reason for leaving the KPD. An SIS report from May 1938 also painted him as an individual who had returned to Stalinist Communism concluding that 'if it is correct that Groehl still poses as a Trotskyist, it is probable that he is doing so under the instructions of Moscow…'[67] Had the French *Deuxième Bureau* already recruited Groehl as a double agent?[68] Was he still working for Soviet intelligence? The only card in his French file states that he was an '*agent double des SR communiste et allemand*', suggesting that at one point at least he claimed to have maintained links with both the Soviet Union and German intelligence. The French suspected that Groehl may also have entertained links with Swiss intelligence. Although Groehl's true loyalties are hard to pin down, it is quite likely that he was not the only communist agent employed by the French and simultaneously courted by British intelligence. From the moment the KPD was banned following the Nazi Party's success in the Reichstag elections of March 1933, Paris became the new focal point for communist internationalism, and the *Deuxième Bureau* had kept a particularly close watch on 'networks of communist couriers, activists and exiles criss-crossing the continent, travelling back and forth between London, Paris and Berlin.'[69] This activity became even more important from 1935, when the headquarters of the Comintern Western European Bureau (WEB) moved from Berlin to Paris, making the French capital the primary base for myriad communist front organisations whose influence stretched across Europe.[70] The French National Police, the *Sûreté Nationale*, expressed concern that the thousands of exiles who had sought refuge in France were 'particularly susceptible to being radicalised into

67 TNA KV 2/2171/2 SIS report of 6 May 1938 re: Karl Groehl.
68 AN 199040508/1061 Fichier Groehl, Karl.
69 Thomas Beaumont, 'International Communism in Interwar France, 1919 - 1936 36', in Ludevine Broch and Alison Carrol (eds), *France in an Era of Global War, 1914 – 1945: Occupation, Politics, Empire and Entanglements* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 96 – 97.
70 Beaumont, 'International Communism', pp. 96 – 97.

revolutionary movements and violent acts' and kept extensive lists of suspected communists, but some within the *Deuxième Bureau* (France's external Military Intelligence agency 1871 - 1940) recognised at least some opportunity for recruitment - much as SIS would do a few years later.[71]

Just as Grand had steered clear of the CPGB in Britain, however, it appears that French intelligence avoided developing any links with its national communist party, the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF). Despite the PCF's vocal opposition to radical-socialist premier Édouard Daladier's appeasement of Germany, and its calls in *L'Humanité* for enhanced preparations for national resistance to an increasingly militarised and expansionist Nazi Germany, French intelligence officers were mindful above all things that the PCF was on the path to becoming 'one of the most successfully Stalinised communist parties outside of the Soviet Union'.[72] The PCF's extraordinary network of communist cells in offices and factories which had grown from 4,221 in 1935 to almost 13,000 in October 1937 remained a target for surveillance, not cooperation.[73] In fact, there was considerable resentment brewing within the *Deuxième Bureau* that the radicalisation of the French population under a succession of weak left-wing governments was drawing officers' focus away from the gathering and analysis of military intelligence towards the monitoring of radicalised groups on French soil.[74] In this context, there was limited appetite for arming these groups or supporting them in any other practical manner.

71 Beaumont, 'International Communism', p. 98.
72 Porch, *French Secret Services*, p. 132. Porch maintains that the long term (post-war) political survival of Jacques Duclos, leader of the clandestine PCF in France following its prohibition in 1939, 'can be explained by the fact that he clearly was Stalin's man in one of the most successfully Stalinised communist parties outside the Soviet Union..'
73 Annie Kriegel, *Les Communistes Français, 1920 – 1970* (Paris, 1985), p. 96.
74 Porch, *French Secret Services*, pp. 130 – 135.

What did Laurence Grand make of Groehl? By 1938, SIS officers had revised their original assessment of Groehl, believing him to have been too much 'of the Trotskyist persuasion' to have been recently involved in writing for the Comintern.[75] As far as Section D was concerned, MI5's conviction (and SIS's general acceptance) of Groehl's Trotskyist credentials and his links to the likes of Münzenberg and literary types in the UK offered Section D a tempting 'in' to a corps of expert ant-fascist propagandists who maintained a communist direction but no longer took directions from the Soviet Union. It was also clear that both Groehl and Münzenberg were in need of funds and protection. Despite having made a declaration of support for the sentence against his former patron Zinoviev during the early show trials of November 1936, Münzenberg had only narrowly avoided execution himself.[76] The years 1937 and 1938 had been particularly dangerous for Münzenberg and his associates, including Groehl.

Grand first started visiting France in the winter of 1938/39, after Groehl had apparently been forced to postpone a visit to the UK due to the febrile situation in Paris.[77] Tentative early conversations with the *Deuxième Bureau* were friendly, with the French showing an interest in Section D's explosives unit, but Grand's French counterparts professed themselves highly sceptical of Britain's interest in sabotage and subversion against German targets in peacetime. Events of November 1938 had given them particular reason to be nervous: the murder in Paris of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by the German-born, Polish-Jewish refugee Herschel Grynzspan had unleashed the full force of the Nazi propaganda machine and

75 TNA KV 2/2171/2 SIS to Passport Control, copied to MI5 dated 23 August 1938.
76 McMeekin, *Red Millionaire*, p. 294; Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the seduction of the intellectuals* (London, 1994), pp. 299 – 303 & passim.
77 TNA KV 2/2171/2 Memo to MI5 relating to Karl Groehl issued by Claud Skyes on 23 September 1939, in which he states that Groehl claimed he 'could not afford to leave Paris for a single day'.

the French were anxious to avoid provoking Germany further.[78] Even though the French appear to have seen Groehl as a useful double agent, with French intelligence colleagues holding fast to the primacy of their military function, distrustful of left-wing governments, and alive to the threat of both Soviet penetration and British interference, this was not an auspicious time for Section D to seek collaboration on the recruitment of foreign communists in France and the matter lay unaddressed for several months. With little hope of opening a conversation on this front with the French, and in all likelihood completely unaware of his prior association with the *Deuxième Bureau*, it appears Grand finally decided to approach the German émigré without referring the matter to his French counterparts.

Described variously by his associates as a typical revolutionary who was not happy 'without a revolver in his pocket and a scheme for blowing someone up', an unreliable maverick, a Trotskyist, and a Stalinist posing as a Trotskyist on orders from Moscow, Karl Groehl was nothing if not an enigma.[79] Small, hard of hearing, and of reportedly 'mild' appearance he often worried that he did not cut the right figure since he apparently 'considered that a man of his trade should be an awesome sight.'[80] The fact that he wasn't, and that he successfully cultivated links with several intelligence agencies, probably saved his life. By the time of Section D's approach, Groehl was living an impecunious existence on the top floor of a five-storey building at either 7 or 13 rue Barrault in the 13ème arrondissement of Paris.[81] That Groehl was in danger at the time is almost certain and it is unlikely that Groehl, cognisant of his precarious situation, hesitated at all when offered the chance to work with the British. In

78 Jonathan Kirsch, *The Short, Strange Life of Herschel Grynzspan* (New York, 2013), p. 143.
79 TNA KV/2/2171/2 Report by M/S (Claud Sykes) for B.5.b to B.4.b dated 9 August 1938. As noted elsewhere, the identity of B5b and B4b is unknown.
80 TNA HS 7/3 Section D Report on the PROBST organisation (SIS name for a clandestine group run by Groehl and Otten, which they themselves called the LEX organisation).
81 TNA KV/2/2172/1 Note on Karl Groehl from SIS dated 29 May 1947 and TNA KV 2/2171/1 SIS report on Retzlaw/Groehl dated November 1942.

fact, it is quite possible that he sought out the opportunity via Otten: His letters to Otten reveal an expectation that the British might supply him not only with materials and funding, but also a measure of protection. It is also possible that he was also looking for an 'in' to British intelligence.

At the same time as Grand was reaching out to the Primrose League, Section D was in the process of recruiting another propaganda specialist by the name of Guy Burgess, who at the time of his engagement was working for the BBC. Although it is not possible to determine exactly how and when Burgess began working for Section D, it appears likely he was recommended by SIS colleagues following a series of ad hoc missions he had undertaken on behalf of the service in 1938. Prior to meeting with Grand, Burgess had already served as a secret personal liaison officer between Chamberlain and the French government during discussions over appeasement in the run up to the signing of the Munich agreement. Burgess would later claim that the early work Grand set him to involved liaison between Section D and the British Ministry of Information. His role probably also included developing British propaganda for transmission into enemy countries. There is some suggestion – which will be discussed in later chapters - that he was also tasked with early engagement with underground communist networks in France.[82] What is clear is that Burgess desired to pass to Moscow a significant amount of information about Section D. Evidence of whether he was successful or not likely rests in the Soviet archives. Files reviewed by historians Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev in the early 1990s reveal that at the very least Moscow was aware of Grand, having allocated him his own personal code name: GRENADIER.[83] Despite his best efforts to avoid pro-Stalinist

82 Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, p. 106.
83 Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels: The British secrets at the Heart of the KGB Archives* (London, 1996), p. 173.

émigrés and British communists, therefore, by the end of 1938 the Soviet Union in all likelihood had some insight into Grand's preparations for sabotage in German occupied territory. Given the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion in Moscow at the time, however, it is possible the NKVD refused to believe the sincerity of many of the reports it received.

Over the course of 1938, SIS initiated research into potential targets for anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion, recruited explosives experts and identified potential agents, among the first of whom were a Trotskyist double agent and a Soviet spy who, because he was a member of the British middle class, was trusted implicitly even if his louche behaviour gave rise to concerns. A key next step would be to persuade French intelligence of the value of liaising with the British over the development of sabotage materials and the recruitment and use of communist agents. However, while Grand's unit remained relatively insignificant, faith in the Maginot line remained unshakeable, and Sectio D's detractors maintained powerful influence within the Foreign Office this would prove remarkably difficult.

Chapter II: *Insaissable Sabotage*

In the autumn/winter of 1938, perhaps realising that SIS had somewhat stolen a march on them, the War Office had decided that its small research unit, General Staff (Research), or GS(R), which had been established earlier in the year to conduct research into a variety of problems relating to tactics and organisation in the armed forces, should turn its attention to irregular warfare. Royal Engineer Major J.C.F. (Jo) Holland was invited to take on the brief and, in a nod to the importance and secrecy of the project, was informed that he and his staff (which at the time was non-existent) could 'go where they like, talk to whom they like' whilst being 'kept from files, correspondence and telephone calls'.[1] Much as Grand had done several months earlier, but with a greater focus on military applications, Holland - who had first-hand experience of irregular warfare in the Balkans, Ireland and India - set about studying the characteristics of guerrilla warfare. Although he had been officially instructed to consider the implications for colonial operations only, he was simultaneously given most secret instructions to report on the possibility of Britain providing support for insurgencies in any country of Eastern Europe overrun by the German Army.[2]

On the strength of a preliminary report submitted to the Deputy Chief of the Imperial Staff (DCIGS) in January 1939, Major Holland was given the go ahead to expand GS(R) – shortly to be renamed Military Intelligence (Research), or MI(R) - through the addition of two Grade II staff officers: one an expert on demolitions and explosives, the other an officer in charge of organisation, recruitment and training. For the first of these appointments Holland poached eccentric sapper Major Millis Jefferis from Section D's expanding technical branch where he

1 William Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: Special Operations Executive 1940 - 1945* (London, 2000), p. 8. Gubbins's papers, IWM 3/2/56 suggest that Holland 'chose' the subject of his research.
2 This shows the War Office at odds with Foreign Office, where Cadogan was clear that he was in favour of Germany expanding eastwards.

had been working on prototypes of a number of sabotage devices, often using an old fireplace in which to conduct his experiments.[3] For the second appointment, Holland – in agreement with Grand - decided to approach Lt Colonel Colin Gubbins, an experienced Royal Engineer who spoke both French and Russian, had personal experience of the Russian revolution and the Irish war of independence, and had spent a period working on signals intelligence (SIGINT) in India. Gubbins later described how his first task had been to prepare secret, practical pamphlets on guerrilla warfare that offered tactical tips for partisans.[4] Recalling the work involved, Gubbins later stated that his primary difficulty was that, 'strangely enough, there was not a single book to be found in any library in any language which dealt with this subject.'[5]

Gubbins would later strongly suggest to the historian M.R.D. Foot that the inspiration for pamphlets and a training course on irregular warfare had originated within GS(R). Alluding to what he considered to be Section D's impractical blue-sky thinking, Gubbins recorded that:

> 'Holland and I anticipated that War was only a few months away, and therefore that we had to get down to earth at once to practical steps, and discard fascinating dreams of the distant possibilities. Hence the Pamphlets, my trips to Europe, (which were so secret that even the DMI was not informed and was very angry when he discovered) the courses in elementary guerilla warfare (theoretical) that we held in London for civilians we selected (explorers, linguists, climbers,

3 Turner, *SOE's Secret Weapons Centre*, p. 17.
4 The Art of Guerrilla Warfare, The Partisan's Leader's Handbook, and How to Use High Explosives.
5 Wilkinson & Bright Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, p. 35.

> international businessmen, etc) more with the idea of finding potential 'material' than of direct training, etc, etc.'[6]

Despite his claims that MI(R) was the incubator of ideas for pamphlets and training courses, by the time Gubbins came on board there existed, if not a wealth of studies, at least a reasonable body of literature and a sum of anecdotal reports on guerrilla warfare, and how its 'unconventional' methods might be absorbed into more traditional military strategy. Indeed, the very existence of Gubbins' post owed much to Laurence Grand's own writings on irregular warfare. Gubbins omitted to mention Grand's work in his correspondence with Foot in the 1960s, instead insisting that 'On the outbreak of War and very soon after my departure for Warsaw, Holland moved himself and MI(R) back to the War Office, as he had no faith in 'D', with his wild cat and fantastical schemes, ever [sic] getting down to brass tacks and specific achievements.'[7] In addition to Grand's study, Gubbins would have had access to Major General Sir Charles Gwynn's 1934 study on *Imperial Policing*, which included a manual of the same name dealing with tactics associated with guerrilla warfare, as well as Major Rogers' Rangers handbook (which still exists in modified form as part of the modern-day U.S. Army Rangers handbook).[8] He would also have doubtless been furnished with a wide variety of newspaper reports of guerrilla warfare from Cuba, Afghanistan, Spain, and China that had appeared in the British press between the 1890s and 1930s. Not least among these would have been articles by a young Winston Churchill which remarked upon the importance of local

6 IWM Gubbins Papers File 3/2/56 Undated comments on SOE in France sent to M.R.D. Foot at some point in 1964. At one point in February of that year Foot acknowledged Gubbins' 'almost daily comments' on the manuscript. Gubbins continued to provide notes up to November of 1964.
7 Ibid.
8 Robert Johnson, 'Command of the Army, Charles Gwynn and Imperial Policing: The British Doctrinal Approach to Internal Security in Palestine 1919 – 29', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43/4 (September 2015), pp. 570 – 589; Boot, *Invisible Armies*, pp. 61 – 63. See also 'Rogers' Rangers and the birth of special operations in North America'*, The Maple Leaf,* 16/3 (March 2013).

support for the Cuban nationalists in securing successes in the Cuban war of Independence, and provided commentary on the guerrilla tactics adoped by Pashtun fighters who exercised great mobility in 'roadless, broken and undeveloped country'.[9]

Gubbins might also have been aware of Professor Hermann Kast's 1921 explosives manual, *Spreng und Zündstoffe*, of which IRA chemist and bomb maker James O'Donovan made ample use when developing his own 'practical methods of bomb, land-mine, grenade and incendiary manufacture' in the 1930s.[10] In the months prior to Holland's secondment to GS(R), O'Donovan had been approached by the Head of the IRA Army Council, Sean Russell, to help launch a sabotage campaign, known as the S-Plan, against the United Kingdom,[11] the details of which were discovered by the British police in February 1939 during a series of raids on houses in London following the IRA bombing of Tottenham Court Road and Leicester Square underground stations.[12] The S-plan, which covered propaganda as well as direct action on major industry and communications networks, and which Russell described as 'the goods', was published '*in extenso*' in the Daily Telegraph and Daily Advertiser and also in the Daily Herald and News Chronicle on 7 February 1939. Lengthy extracts were also later read out in

9 Hal Klepak, *Churchill Comes of Age: Cuba 1895* (Stroud, 2015); Simon Read, *Winston Churchill Reporting: Adventures of a Young War Correspondent* (Boston, 2015); Randolph Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Youth, 1874 – 1900* (Michigan, 2015); Jimmy Burns, *Papa Spy* (London, 2009), pp. 19 – 20. Winston Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (New York, 2010), p. 227.

10 Hermann Kast, *Die Spreng und Zündstoffe* (Braunschweig, 1921); David O'Donoghue, *The Devil's Deal: The IRA, Nazi Germany and the Double Life of Jim O'Donovan* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 19 & 83 – 84 citing Jim O'Donovan's handwritten memoir entitled 'How it came about', circa 1962. To avoid suspicion, O'Donovan had his copy of *Spreng and Zündstoffe* re-bound in a new cover entitled 'Study of Wild Flowers'.

11 J. Bowyer Bell has pointed out that the plan as O'Donovan presented it was beyond the IRA's capabilities, and had no truly 'strategic' overview. Bell, J. Bowyer, *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916 – 1979* (Dublin, 1979), p. 148. In a nod to the spread of ideas from one organisation to another, Bell also notes that O'Donovan's work inspired the anti-British campaign launched by the Paletine Stern group later in the 1940s.

12 Ian Adams, *The Sabotage Plan: The IRA Bombing Campaign 1939 – 40* (Self-published, 2010), p. 28. Adams publishes the text of the S Plan on pages 103 – 116.

court.[13] While Eunan O'Halpin has sought to downplay the relative importance of the conflict in Ireland in informing the British approach to guerrilla warfare, Aaron Linderman, in his study of the influences at work on SOE - and Gubbins in particular - states with confidence that 'of all the conflicts which inspired Gubbins's thinking on unconventional warfare, Ireland surely comes first', although he refers mainly to Gubbins' own experience of the Irish Civil War.[14] Holland's own account of the Irish influence, dated 13 April 1939, accepts that 'there is little doubt that the Irish made guerrilla warfare into a science' but rather tehndentiously follows this statement with the noncommittal 'it is believed that the circulars which were distributed to the Irish Republican Army contained a whole doctrine of the subject…'[15] Although not explicitly mentioned in SOE archives, and while the distinguished Irish historian Eunan O'Halpin has suggested the IRA experience had relatively little influence on SOE, the discovery of the S-Plan almost certainly furnished Gubbins with timely reference material for his own sabotage pamphlets and manuals and its influence deserves greater attention than it has heretofore been afforded.[16]

Among the most influential of all contemporary accounts of modern-day irregular warfare, however, were those penned by Tom Wintringham, the Oxford-educated Lincolnshire communist who led the British Battalion of the International Brigades at the Battle of Jarama

13 O'Donoghue, *The Devil's Deal*, p. 87. William Kautt has argued that the Irish leaders in the Anglo-Irish War followed (albeit unknowingly) virtually every step that modern guerrillas and theorists of revolutionary warfare would later write down. William H. Kautt, *The Anglo-Irish Wars, 1916 – 1921* (Westport CT, 1999), p. 4.
14 Eunan O'Halpin, "The Irish Experience of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency since 1919," *An Art in Itself: The Theory and* Conduct of Small Wars and Insurgencies, ed. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra, 2006), p.70; Aaron Linderman, 'Reclaiming the ungentlemanly arts: The global origins of SOE and OSS' (Texas A&M PhD Thesis, 2012), p. 48.
15 TNA HS 8/256 'Duties of the New Branch', approved at a meeting between the CIGS, DCIGS and Col. Holland on 13 April 13 1939, p.2.
16 Eunan O"Halpin, 'The Irish Experience of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency since 1919', *An Art in Itself: The Theory and Conduct of Small Wars and Insurgencies*, ed. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra, 2006), p. 70.

in 1937. Prior to leaving for Spain, Wintringham had already gained a reputation as a prominent Marxist military theorist: Over the course of the 1930s he had produced a series of pamphlets on modern warfare including *War and the Way to Fight Against It* (1932) and *The Coming World War* (1935). In 1936 Wintringham had been appointed Military Correspondent of the communist *Daily Worker*, in which capacity he wrote a number of articles on modern warfare. In 1939, as Gubbins was working on his pamphlets, Wintringham published *English Captain*, an account of his time in Spain in which he promoted the idea of an international militia.[17] By this point Wintringham, who had been reluctantly expelled from the CPGB as a result of allegations that his lover was a 'Trotskyist spy', had caught the attention of 'modernising' military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, and had also been interviewed by Sir Ronald Adam, then Deputy Chief of the Imperial Staff (DCIGS) along with other senior members of the military.[18] Although most works on SOE and Section D insist that Gubbins' pamphlets were the result of his own extensive reading and personal experience, there are a number of other indications that Wintringham played a significant part in helping Section D/MI(R) develop its pamphlets on guerrilla warfare. In 1983 Douglas Dodds Parker, who worked closely with Gubbins later in the war and who subsequently made no secret of his attempts to thwart communists in Western Europe, made an intriguing reference to the fact that 'during the years from 1939 to 1941 when the Soviets were in alliance with the Nazis, some British Communists were patriotic and far sighted enough to share their skills with us.'[19]

17 Thomas Wintringham, *English Captain* (London, 1939), p. 18. As Gubbins alluded to in his papers (IWM Gubbins Papers 3/2/56, Notes to M.R.D. Foot on the origins of SOE Pamphlets) there were also a number of secret fact finding visits to the continent, including Spain, which took place in 1938 – 1939, although some cautioned against drawing too many lessons from the Spanish Civil War. See, for example, TNA WO 106/1588 Major C. A. de Linde, 'Report of the Assistant Military Attaché (Paris) on his visit to Nationalist Spain', 26 April 1938, p. 2.

18 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 170.

19 Dodds Parker *Setting Europe Ablaze*, p. 36. For more on Dodds Parker's conviction that the scale of the threat of communism in Westrn Europe was underappreciated during the war years see his papers in the

More specifically, he wrote that many sabotage practices, for example putting gravel in axleboxes and changing destination plates on railway wagons, were suggested to the British 'by Communists who also helped to prepare the handbook on guerrilla warfare' which 'was based on up-to-date experience in the Spanish Civil War.'[20] Dodds Parker went on to suggest that these anonymous communist advisers were seen as useful to the British as early as 1939 because they were supposedly well versed in *insaissisable sabotage*, i.e. 'that in which it was impossible to track down the saboteurs', and because communists were 'almost the only groups trained and ready' for action.[21]

While Wintringham's experience and expertise combined with his engaging, lucid style clearly influenced senior military thinkers, fear of Wintringham maintaining contact with comrades in the CPGB and the Comintern led MI5's counter intelligence section, Section B, to rule him out of any sort of sensitive employment in the armed forces. When, on the outbreak of war in September 1939, he applied for a post with the Transport, Mechanical Section of the War Office, which was apparently 'anxious to employ him', Guy Liddell, head of MI5's counter-espionage and counter-sabotage branch Section B, firmly opposed his employment 'in a confidential capacity'.[22] As Hugh Purcell notes, Wintringham then 'found himself in the odd position of being consulted by very senior army personnel, although he had been rejected for an army commission'.[23] Purcell asks whether this was because of Wintringham's communist past or his age. Guy Liddell's diary entries make it clear that it was the former.

Magdalen College Archives, Oxford. For example, MC P2/4/2C/92 Letter of 29 May 1996 to Professor Michael Foot.

20 Dodds Parker, *Setting Europe Ablaze*, p. 86.

21 Ibid, p. 81.

22 TNA KV 4/185 Guy Liddell. Diary entry of 5 September 1939.

23 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 170.

It is quite possible that Wintringham not only helped Gubbins with the development of his field manuals, he may also (although this is not verifiable) have given advice to Holland and Grand during the early months of 1939 when they were working on a joint paper on the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare to present to the highest political and military authorities. The brutal methodology that Grand proposed in order to produce 'a general uprising throughout German occupied territory' in Romania, in which agents would endeavour, where possible, 'to execute members of the Gestapo with as much show as possible, in order to produce in the minds of the local inhabitants that the guerrillas were more to be feared than the occupying secret police' shows signs of Grand's personal predilection for 'banditry' but in it one can also see in signs of Wintringham's own thinking.[24] It may well also have been influenced by interviews with Groehl in France and the UK that took place as Holland and Grand were writing up their research.

After Grand's tentative outreach in Paris, in February 1939, deputy Chief of SIS Stewart Menzies officially briefed his French counterparts on the work Section D had carried out to date. In his speech, Menzies 'spoke of the need for both propaganda and 'terrorism'…against Germany and Italy'[25] suggesting SIS and the *Deuxième Bureau* move beyond their current coordination over German cryptology and the sharing information on the activity of communist and fascist agents on British and French soil, presided over by the charismatic and incongruously wealthy SIS Paris station chief Dunderdale and the 'silent' but all-seeing Commandant Gustave Bertrand.[26] With Menzies having put the official stamp on the SIS programme, Grand quickly moved to develop a more substantive acquaintance with his

24 TNA HS 8/256 Paper submitted by Grand to Acting CSS, 20 March 1939.
25 Atkin, *Section D*, p. 15.
26 Kim Philby described Bertrand to Moscow as 'a fat, unpleasant character, as silent as an oyster'. West & Tsarev, *Crown Jewels*, 307 – 308. For more on Bertrand, see: SHD GR 28 P 3 161.

opposite number, Commandant Brochu, head of the *Deuxième Bureau*'s *Matériel de guerre et Sabotage* (MG/Sg) section. After having gained no traction in relation to recruiting foreign agents on French soil, however, Grand moved quickly to arrange for Groehl to visit England.[27]

With Section D's plans now clearly articulated to their French counterparts, Grand and Holland's paper was presented and discussed over the course of two days in late March 1939 by acting Chief of the Secret Service (CSS), Stewart Menzies; Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), General Gort; Director of Military Operations (DMO), Sir Henry Pownall; the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence (DDMI), Sir Frank Beaumont-Nesbitt; Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Alexander Cadogan, and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax. Halifax gave his approval, promising to run it by the Prime Minister in order to secure the required funds. He was also, however, clear that he intended to immediately forget all about the proposals, and sought assurance that 'the cognisance of H.M. Government in such a scheme could be hidden'.[28]

The timing of these discussions is interesting given so much has been made of Chamberlain's refusal to contemplate a collective security agreement with France and the USSR, and of the serious political opposition he faced as a consequence.[29] It is important for the sake of a balanced historical record to recognise that, on 22 March 1939, the day before Grand's presentation at the Foreign Office, both the French and Soviet governments had agreed to a British proposal for a four-power declaration including Poland, but that this had been voided

27 According to Groehl's MI5 file SIS arranged for Groehl to be 'invited' to the UK in February and June/July 1939 following previous failed attempts to encourage the British authorities to finance his endeavours. See, for example, TNA KV 2/2171/2 Report from Claud Sykes re: Karl Otten dated 28 September 1938 and
28 TNA HS 8/256 Notes of meeting at Foreign Office of 23 March 1939 attended by Lord Halifax, Alexander Cadogan, CIGS General Gort and Acting CSS Stewart Menzies, and Laurence Grand.
29 Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937 – 1939* (London, 2003), p. 66.

by Poland's lack of response.[30] The day after the collapse of talks, the British Foreign Secretary, with the cognisance of the Prime Minister, approved the planning stage at least of secret and potentially extremely violent measures to infiltrate and attack Nazi Germany, some of which might well be carried out by communist agents under the orders of British officers.

Given the speed with which the political situation was evolving, there was an urgency in identifying individuals whose services SIS might secure to carry out such attacks. SIS returned to its chart of German émigré intelligence networks, which as has been shown already included Willi Münzenberg (in addition to Groehl and Otten).[31] Although the chart featured some conservative figures, the majority were politically left-wing individuals including Konni Zilliacus, a left-wing member of the Labour Party who was widely thought to have communist sympathies;[32] Victor Gollancz, whose Left Book Club numbered among its contributors several well-known communists and whose publications Wintringham said were 'never not revolutionary'; the Marxist editor of *The Week*, Claud Cockburn; Ellen Wilkinson, a journalist, Labour politician and former member of the CPGB; and Dorothy Woodman, the socialist Secretary of the Union for Democratic Control, an anti-fascist research and lobbying group.[33] Whether and how these individuals were contacted is not explicitly discussed in files reviewed for the purposes of this thesis at the National Archives, Kew, or at the Labour History Archives, Salfrod, but it is almost certain that they all featured in Grand's card index of potentially useful contacts and many may well have been approached with a view to securing lines into

30 Carley, 'Fiasco', p. 707.
31 TNA KV 2/1121 Karl OTTEN Chart of Émigré intelligence networks.
32 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1990), p. 74 notes that Zilliacus 'always took the communist line on foreign policy'.
33 KV 2/1121 Karl OTTEN Chart of Émigré intelligence networks. The date of the folder is 1943, but as it contains names such as Münzenberg, who died in the summer of 1940, it is probable that the chart was drawn up in circa 1939.

Germany for the propaganda and explosives that Section D's rapidly expanding team was producing.

Another of the prominent figures mentioned in the SIS chart was the Labour MP for Bristol East, Sir Stafford Cripps, whose growing disillusionment with Chamberlain's handling of foreign affairs had prompted him to launch a campaign in early 1939 for a Popular Front of anti-Chamberlainites - including the CPGB – which would unite parties of the Left on a limited range of foreign and defence issues.[34] This 'Popular Front' was initially cautiously greeted by the Labour leadership, although it provoked active hostility from the trade unions, who reportedly saw in it the makings of a Comintern plot.[35] Although Cripps was subsequently expelled from the Labour Party, he retained his parliamentary seat and went on to become one of the most prominent politicians in the country, with many mentioning his name as a possible future prime minister.[36] Despite – and indeed because of – Cripps' growing popularity, MI5 kept a close eye on him for most of his political life, compiling monthly reports on his public statements and private conversations.[37] Information gathered by French police on communist activity in 1930s France suggests that they were also concerned about the activity of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), with which Cripps had been involved through his work with the Socialist League until its dissolution in 1937. French interest was not so much on account of the ILP's political influence in Britain but rather its apparent support for dissident communists (i.e., anti-Stalinist communists) in the UK and abroad, in particular the

34 Ben Pimlott (ed), *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, 1945 – 60* (London, 1986).
35 Pimlott, *Diary of Hugh Dalton,* p. 222.
36 Jonathan Schneer, *Ministers at War: Winston Churchill and his War Cabinet* (London, 2015), pp. 117 -119.
37 O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil*, p. 14 citing TNA KV2/668.

Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) in Spain. In June 1939 the French *Sûreté* reported that:

> '*Ce sont actuellement les milieux sympathisants anglais qui donnent l'appui le plus important aux communistes d'opposition résidant en France. Il existe en effet à Paris, 12, Impasse Compoint, un 'bureau de presse Franco-Britannique' qui est officiellement la filiale Parisienne du journal anglaise 'Independent News' organe du parti travailliste indépendent, mais qui est, en réalité, le centre de liaison entre les communistes d'opposition de France et de l'étranger.'*[38]

Facing an increasingly organised opposition from an alliance of Left-wing parties, including the CPGB, some of whom according to French intelligence were providing financial support for communist groups in France, it would have been understandable had Chamberlain backtracked and vetoed SIS plans for destabilising the Third Reich through the use of communist agents. By the time of Grand's March meeting with Lord Halifax, however, it was arguably already too late to put the brakes on Section D's programme. Paul Paillole, then the head of German counter-espionage with the French SR section of the *Deuxième Bureau*, recalled the period thus: '*Ce printemps voit l'éclosion de vocations SR et d'initiatives désordonées…la section d'armament et des études techniques prend contact avec le colonel Grant (sic) de l'état-major britannique. Elle prépare des sabotages et des destructions en Allemagne*!'[39] Paillole's account implies it was the French who initiated contact and that the two agencies worked in concert. As British accounts tell a different story, it is regrettable that references such as this one by Paillole are not elaborated upon elsewhere in French texts. An abridged, translated, copy of MI(R) proposals does, however, exist in the French military archives at Vincennes which points to a certain openness of discussion. The document in

38 AN 19940503/4 Note sur l'activité des communistes d'opposition étrangers résidant en France, 3 June 1939, p. 2.
39 Paul Paillole *Services Spéciaux 1935 – 1945* (Paris, 1975), p. 132.

question, dated July 1939, provides a brief overview of British engagement with current or former army officers from a variety of countries who had indicated willingness to form paramilitary organisations for the carrying out of sabotage in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Libya and Abyssinia.[40] There are no annotated comments from the French side, but its contents and location among files pertaining to exchanges of information relating to intelligence exercises indicate it received attention. French military archives also suggest that, in return, the French shared details of their own recent intelligence exercises in which officers of the *Deuxième Bureau* were required to break codes, check correspondence for signs of secret inks, and review information on potential enemy agents.[41] The French, who had developed enviable expertise in these more traditional aspects of military intelligence, expressed considerable interest in working with Section D to develop new sabotage devices and were eager to collaborate, for example, on ideas around the use of electrical fuses and balloons (an area of British interest which may well have been inspired by IRA man Paddy McGrath's 'good work' on balloon bombs, and Jim Ryan's 'perfection' of an alarm-clock electric fuse mechanism) and arrangements were made for exchange visits between the two countries to develop joint expertise in these areas.[42] Section D representatives remained unable, however, to persuade their French colleagues of the merit of SIS proposals to recruit anti-fascist émigrés for the purposes of sabotage and subversion against Germany - in peacetime or in the event of war. If the British government was nervous

40 SHD GR 7 N 2501 *Etat d'avancement des préparatifs 'para-militaires'.*
41 SHD GR 7 N 2559 (Second Folder entitled EMA/2 1939 – 1940 Service de Missions S.M.E.) Letter of 18 Dec 1939 from Lt. Col. GUBBINS to Colonel de MIERRY, Chef du 2e Bureau.
42 O'Donoghue *The Devil's Deal*, pp. 83 – 84.

about encouraging civilian armed resistance groups, in the summer of 1939 the French remained completely opposed to the idea.[43]

The exponential growth of Section D around this time made it impossible for Grand to personally manage all staff and agents. He therefore personally recruited Clara Holmes to manage and direct Otten, Groehl, and other German speaking émigrés who were gradually being brought into the picture. Holmes, who had previously worked for the SIS station in Vienna, was joined by a Ms Stamper and the two women set up their operation at 46, Lexham Gardens, Kensington.[44] Holmes and Stamper's role in Section D was vital as already by May Groehl was being referred to in SIS reports as one of the Service's top three anti-Nazi contacts operating intelligence networks into Germany.[45] Only a month earlier, Valentine Vivian, head of counter-espionage at SIS wrote to Guy Liddell in MI5, asking that in time of war an exemption from internment be permitted for a handful of 'alien refugees' in order that they might assist Britain with the development of anti-Nazi propaganda.[46] At the head of this - very short - list was Karl Otten. Keeping these men safe, supplied and comfortable with their British connections was a matter of priority. But, despite his importance to SIS, Groehl was still struggling to eke out an existence in Paris, made harder by the fact that he was unable to open a local bank account. He likely used his visit to the UK in February 1939, ahead of which British customs was instructed to let him through as a known anti-Nazi, to plead his case for

43 TNA HS 7/3.Contact with the French on Post-Occupational Resistance.
44 TNA HS 9/733/4 Personal File for Clara Holmes contains a glowing reference for Holmes, in which she is referred to as having expert knowledge of Austria and Austrians. See alsoTNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: Germany. Ms Stamper, who has nno available personal file, is known to have later changed her name to Lefeuvre.
45 The other two being Georg Bernard, former editor of the Berlin newspaper Vossische Zeitung and the journalist and pacifist Berthold Jakob. Bernard fled to Paris in 1933, and the newspaper closed shortly after due to pressure from the Nazi authorities. For more on Jakob, see: TNA KV 2/2171/1 Memo from SIS relating to Karl Groehl, 3 May 1939.
46 KV 2/1121 Karl Otten Letter from Valentine Vivian (SIS) to Guy Liddell (MI5), 19 April 1939.

additional funding. His memoirs and intercepted letters are peppered with references to 'Madame', with whom he was in regular contact and who can in all confidence be identified as Clara Holmes. Despite the large element of dissimulation in Groehl's memoir, his description of the woman he referred to only as 'Madame' as an intelligent, calm woman in her mid forties, who had lived in Vienna and Berlin between the wars fits neatly with Holmes.[47] Although he would later recall that he first met Holmes in October 1940, it is quite possible that they were introduced when Groehl made a second Section D-sponsored visit to the UK in June or July 1939.[48] If we are to believe the details in his passport application, Groehl paid visits not only to Karl Otten in London, but also to Claud Sykes at his home at 32 Souberie Avenue, Letchworth.[49] Whether he had direct contact with Groehl or not, it is quite likely that a report written in July by Wickham Steed detailing Germany's suspected war aims, and the methods Hitler planned to adopt in order to reach them, was based on information Groehl sourced from contacts in Germany.[50]

Throughout this time MI5, many of whose officers remained ignorant of Groehl's association with SIS, continued to monitor his activity through an HOW for Otten and, in the summer of 1939, the service signalled its concern that Groehl was continuing to cooperate closely with Willi Münzenberg in France.[51] The aforementioned SIS chart of émigré organisations

47 TNA HS 9/733/4 Clara Holmes' Personal File notes that she worked for the Austria Section of SIS between 1917 and 1940, although she officially moved to work for Section D and then SOE in May/June 1939. In Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 449 Groehl notes that Holmes was the widow of a British diplomat, but makes no mention of her connection to British intelligence. He claims that he eventually discovered her real name at the end of the war.

48 TNA KV 2/1121 Karl Otten. Note of 12 May 1939.

49 Ibid. Geoffrey Warde of the Blenheim Hotel, Marlborough Place, Brighton, sponsored Groehl's visa application but it is likely this was part of an unofficial arrangement with SIS as opposed to an indication of a connection between the two men.

50 Wickham-Steed *War Aims* (London, 1939), pp. 148 – 152. Wickham Steed noted that the information came 'from a reliable source'.

51 TNA KV-2-2171-1 Letter from unknown individual withiin SIS to Kenneth Younger, MI5 dated 8 May 1939.

illustrates that since at least May 1939 British intelligence had linked Münzenberg, Groehl, and Otten, together with the former centre-right German politician Gottfried Treviranus. There were also indications that Münzenberg was being financed by the International Federation of Transport Workers (ITF), a transnational workers' organisation suspected by the British of also being a front for the Comintern.[52] Working out who belonged to which faction and deciphering the meaning of messages passing between England and France posed a constant challenge for MI5 and SIS. A detailed report from May 1939, compiled in part from information gathered from monitoring of the Primrose League, stated:

> 'In the case of the German emigrants, the chief centre of their activities has been Paris, where for a considerable time after the Nazis consolidated their position, a not unfriendly 'Left' government, and powerful local Communist and Socialist parties encouraged émigré activities…The organisations in Paris are, for the most part, transplanted shoots of former political parties. Several are new groups with high-sounding names which in reality merely serve as a cloak to cover their real objects, viz: to obtain money from those interested in obtaining information, and doing as much damage as they can to the power that ejected them.'[53]

If this was the case, then it points to Thorez's PCF and Daladier's *Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste* having actively facilitated the work of, for example, exiled members of the KPD and the German SDP. It also adds weight to the suggestion that the *Deuxième Bureau* had employed Groehl since his arrival in France, circa 1935. The most politically active of Groehl's fellow émigrés, to whom France's Popular Front politicians had allegedly been

52 Treviranus' involvement is difficult to unpick, partly due to the fact that his Home Office files (TNA HO 382/694 & HO 405/55358) are closed until 2043-2049 on the grounds that the information contained therein might 'substantially distress or endanger a living person or their descendants.'

53 TNA KV2/1121 Karl Otten. Note from Kenneth Younger of MI5 to Valentine Vivian of SIS, dated 4 May 1939 enclosing pamphlet 'containing instructions for sabotage, which is being issued by the OTTEN group presumably for circulation in Germany and Czechoslovakia.'

providing a certain level of support, were predominantly dispersed across the following organisations, as identified in M5 files:

1. KPD (leaders PIECK, DAHLEM, MERKUR and ULBRICHT)
2. SPD (leaders BREITSCHEID, WELS, STAMPPER and HERZ)
3. SAP – Socialist Workers' Party
4. Communist Opposition Party (Brandler group)
5. Marxian revisionists
6. The Schwarze Front – (branch of the Otto Strasser organisation, formerly in Prague).
7. Freies Deutschland
8. The Zukunft group (Willi Münzenberg's organisation)[54]
9. Catholic opposition (ex-Centrists and Bayerische Volkspartei)
10. Ex-Reichsbanner
11. Deutsche Freiheits Partei – (ostensibly a non-Party group including such people as Spiecker (Paris) and Treviranus, and associated with Herman Rauschning's 'new group'. Representatives in Zurich and London).
12. The émigré Austrian Legitimists.
13. The émigré Sudetendeutschen.[55]

Intercepted correspondence between Groehl and Otten suggests MI5 expended a great deal of energy trying to ascertain the links between these various groups. Various letters, for example, indicate that Groehl was in touch with the BRANDLER (communist opposition) group. Groehl also wrote to Otten about exiled groups affiliated with the 'drei buchstabe', which MI5 deduced to mean the KPD8 but which could also conceivably have been linked to the Rote Drei – a Soviet espionage ring centred on Switzerland. Referring to a couple he called the Lowenheims, who had apparently been operating at some point from Prague, Groehl wrote to Otten in June:

54 MI5 noted that Münzenberg was persona non grata in Moscow, but still had access to funds, and maintained a fairly large organisation with filials in Amsterdam, Zurich, Basle and London. His chief co-operators at the time are recorded as: Arthur Koestler, Weichman, Julius Deutsch, Max Werner, Max Braun, and Thorman, several of whose names crop up in correspondence between Groehl and Otten.
55 TNA KV2/1121 Karl Otten. Note from Kenneth Younger of MI5 to Valentine Vivian of SIS, dated 4 May 1939

> '*They have a Russian espionage bureau!!! They work for the three letters [drei Buschstaben]. Their last heroic deed in Germany was to sink the minutes of their secret sittings (they keep minutes!!!) in the Muggelsee, and they were fished up again. Result, many arrests and heavy sentences! When they left Prague they had no money. Their business is the usual Russian disguise (Booksellers, Radio businesses are their favourite covers, naturally they also form other firms).*'

Rather ominously, Groehl finished his letter: 'Do what you think right. They are swine and not decent people.'[56] This raises a number of questions: was Otten in a position to 'do' anything about members of Soviet-backed (possibly KPD) intelligence? Was Groehl aware that his letters were being read and therefore hopeful that the British would take action? Or was this a ruse designed to put the British off the scent of his own activity? Groehl certainly sent MI5 far and wide with information trailed in his letters to Otten: Another written over the summer referred to an Indian called 'Nambiar', whom Groehl knew by his nickname, 'Nehru'. According to Groehl, not only was Nambiar '100% anti-Nazi', he knew 'everything the Nazis do' and carried 'great weight among Indians.'[57] MI5, eager to discover everything and anything about potential Indian independence groups, followed this lead up and, after a number of enquiries was able to confirm Indian nationalist Arathil Nambiar's connections with fellow nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, as well as sisters Lu Schuler and Eva Geissler-Schuler, all of whom had prior communist and Indian nationalist associations.[58] In the same letter, Groehl flagged that Nambiar had a good opportunity to observe Nazi activity at first hand given his lengthy stays in Prague and Berlin. If SIS thought that Nambiar might be a

56 TNA KV 2/1121 Letter from Younger to Vivian of 30 June 1939 including extracts of a letter from Groehl to Otten.

57 TNA KV 2/1121 In an original translation of his letter of 3 July 1939, it is written that Groehl considered Nambiar to be '100% fascist', but this is clarified in later correspondence between SIS and MI5 as '100% *anti*-fascist'. See letter addressed to Major Valentine Vivian, SIS 25 July 1939.

58 Groehl was a close friend of Lu Schuler, whose sister Eva was the former wife of communist Indian revolutionary Manabendra Rath Roy. According to Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: politics, intelligence and propaganda, 1941 – 43* (London, 2011), p. 14, for much of the 1930s Bose was observed to ruminating over the potential for an ideological synthesis between Communism and Fascism in an independent India.

'useful' communist, however, they were much mistaken. Although he had been badly beaten by the Nazis in the 1930s, his desire to see India divested of colonial rule reportedly saw him drawn, albeit reluctantly, into Subhas Bose's plans to support the Axis in 1942.[59]

While Grand appears to have steered clear of the likes of the KPD leaders Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, links were made (likely on advice from Claude Dansey) with Strasser's Schwarze Front and Karl Spiecker's *Deutsche Freiheits Partei*, and possibly also Münzenberg's *Zukunft* group. Interestingly, MI5 concluded that although he was thought to be cooperating with UK based members of several émigré groups such as Münzenberg's '*Zukunft*', Groehl was not personally affiliated with any communist organisations, instead choosing to circulate among a number of far smaller associations of ex-politicians, editors, journalists, and Jewish relief organisations. The number of MI5 reports confirming that Groehl and Otten appeared to be demonstrably 'against' the Comintern testify, however, to a certain nervousness. There certainly remained gaps in their understanding of his contacts and political motivation. With regards to how precisely Groehl and his associates accessed intelligence from within Germany, British officers struggled to gain a clear picture, and what they did ascertain was far from reassuring. A report based on information gathered by SIS and MI5 noted that:

> '…the Communists and Social Democrats undoubtedly still have contacts with 'cells' in Germany, and obtain smuggled reports via Basle (Rhine shipping), Dutch and Belgian ports (barges at Antwerp and Rotterdam from the Ruhr and Rhineland), German seamen, and through various other channels. They also meet visitors from Germany and all freshly arrived émigrés. But their principal sources are (a) the German and foreign press; (b) conclusions drawn from statistics, and (c) their own inferences drawn from various facts and current rumours.' Their reports are, therefore, 'strongly tendentious'.[60]

59 TNA KV 2/1121 Letter from DW (unknown) to Kenneth Younger, MI5 dated 17 July 1939. Subsequent files suggest that MI5 believed Nambiar to have been a Soviet agent in the 1920s. For more on Nambiar and Bose see Hayes, *Bose in Nazi Germany*, pp. 77 – 79, 116 – 117, 196.
60 TNA KV2/1121 Karl Otten. Note from Kenneth Younger of MI5 to Valentine Vivian of SIS, dated 4 May 1939.

There were also concerns that some of the organisations Groehl was in contact with had been penetrated by the Gestapo, with the same report stating: 'Undoubtedly, Nazi agents have succeeded in [penetrating organisations] in Paris, and at Basle there have been instances of Nazis masquerading as émigrés.'[61]

Lacking many alternatives, Section D was obliged to maintain its confidence in Groehl, and Holmes and Stamper worked hard to ensure that he was supplied with material that would excite anti-Nazi opinion in Germany and German occupied territory. As well as collating and editing material for black propaganda into Germany, the two women found suitably qualified individuals to design eye-catching sketches and put finishing touches to the text and used their contacts to develop a vast card index of German residents considered suitable targets for anti-Nazi literature. Refugees helped to address the envelopes in German handwriting – at times processing thousands in a matter of a few hours. The envelopes were then forged with 12 pfennig carmine Hindenburg postage stamps before being transported to Germany via Section D's contacts.[62] Several thousand leaflets were delivered to Groehl personally by Holmes, who lugged heavy suitcases of propaganda material up several flights of stairs to the agent's top floor flat on the rue Barrault. It is possible that Holmes also used these occasions to hand over explosive devices for use by his agents in the field although no verifiable reports of any such devices having been used in Germany have been published.[63] Yet, just as Section D was developing its capacity to resource its agents, Groehl was becoming increasingly

61 TNA KV2/1121 Karl Otten. Note from Kenneth Younger of MI5 to Valentine Vivian of SIS, dated 4 May 1939.
62 Lee Richards, *The Black Art: British Clandestine Psychological Warfare against the Third Reich* (Peacehaven, 2010), pp. 6-8.
63 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: France, Propaganda and Sabotage. See also, TNA HS 9/733/4, Clara Holmes Personal File, which records that, in order to facilitate the smuggling of 'black' propaganda into Austria and Germany, she was 'obliged to make long and tiring journeys to various parts of France, carrying large suitcases of camouflaged material and delivering them to various contacts who arranged the smuggling lines across the frontiers.'

cautious. In September 1939 William Oldag, an anti-Nazi refugee whose wife Hilda was thought to be acting as an 'intermediary between the Militant Socialist International and other extremist groups in UK and Germany' told British police during his entry interview in England that he had visited Karl Groehl's flat in Paris, where Groehl had 'mentioned overthrowing Hitlerism through sabotage and offered to supply fountain pens with explosive, colourless liquid.'[64] According to Oldag's testimony, Groehl had then sent him to Switzerland with the promise that he would forward on these pens – an offer which never materialised. Somehow SIS concluded from later interrogations that it had in fact been Oldag who had been 'the driving force behind the plans for sabotage', and that it was he, and not Groehl, who had wished to send travelling trunks packed with explosives – 'made up in the style adopted by the IRA' – to senior German officials. Groehl, SIS speculated, 'may have sent him to Switzerland to get rid of him'.[65]

Why was Groehl suddenly holding back? As his increasingly nervous letters to Otten attest, Groehl was profoundly conscious of the dangers lurking in Paris in the late summer of 1939. Although promised protection by SIS - and possibly also by his *Deuxième Bureau* connections – the German Abwehr's own sabotage and subversion agency, Section II, which was responsible for the exploitation of opposition parties abroad and the kidnap and assassination of key individuals likely had good information on the whereabouts of many politically active Germans living in Paris.[66] High ranking German officials and socialites continued to exploit their wide network of connections in French politics and the media in order to argue the case for action against anti-Nazi activists. Their approaches were warmly received in certain

64 TNA KV 2/2171/1 MI5 report of interrogation of William OLDAG dated 8 October 1939 signed F.O.D and addressed to Lt. Colonel V. Vivian of SIS.
65 TNA KV 2/2171/1 Report of police inerview of William OLDAG dated 8 October 1939.
66 Paul Paillole, *Services Spéciaux*, pp. 140 – 141.

quarters: According to Olivier Bernier, Baroness von Einem, said to have been the female head of German espionage in Paris, was entertained on a daily basis by Odette Bonnet, the wife of the French foreign minister Georges Bonnet and a glamorous ball was thrown for the German Ambassador Otto Abetz by the director of the far-Right journal *Gringoire* immediately prior to his expulsion from the country on charges of espionage.[67] Indeed, such was the virulence of anti-Soviet reporting in the French press in the early months of 1939 that it drew a protest in late spring from the Deputy People's Commissar on Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potemkin, who effectively told the French ambassador 'If you want us as allies…stop insulting us.'[68]

The French communist press campaigned vociferously for closer ties with the Soviet Union and by the summer, although French premier Daladier and foreign minister Bonnet both feared that a war with Germany would hasten the spread of communism across Europe, the prospect of support from '100 Soviet divisions' began to look increasingly attractive.[69] Observing the positive shift in French attitudes towards concluding a pact with Stalin, Britain turned up the pressure, ensuring Britain obtained complete subordination of French policy to its own, which was to continue stalling the Soviets in anticipation of securing concessions from Nazi Germany.[70] The French Premier might have considered Chamberlain 'a dessicated stick, [and] the King a moron…' but he dared not risk alienating his powerful neighbour to the

67 William Wiser, *The Twilight Years: Paris in the 1930s* (London, 2001), pp. 223 – 226. The Baroness von Einem, maiden name Reissa von Scheurn Schloss, later fled to Germany and was sentenced to death in absentia by a Paris military court on 28 April 1940.
68 Carley, 'Fiasco', p. 710.
69 Ibid, p. 710 estimates that, by the time war came to the USSR in 1941, the Red Army had been able to organise more than double that number.
70 Michel Winock, *Histoire de l'extreme droite en France* (Paris, 1998); Valerie Deacon, *The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: Members of the Cagoule and the Corvignolles in the Second World War* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2016)*;* Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933 – 1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Michel Doubry (ed), *Le Myth de l'allergie francaise au fascism* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003).

west in favour of pursuing a bilateral pact with the Soviet Union.[71] While prevaricating over the conclusion of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact, British officials hedged their bets by making increasingly cordial overtures towards the Soviet ambassador. Towards the end of July 1939 Maisky reported that the hammer and sickle flag had been hoisted on Cardiff's County Hall during his visit to the city.[72] Within a matter of weeks, however, Stalin refused to wait any longer for a decision on an international security treaty and on 23 August 1939 Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyachelsav Molotov placed his signature alongside that of his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop, sealing a pact of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and ushering in a period of British and French state action against communist party members.

While the PCF and the CPGB discussed the practical and doctrinal implications of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which put an abrupt and uncomfortable end to their anti-Nazi campaigning, the French government acted swiftly, banning the PCF's primary newspaper *L'Humanité* on 26 August 1939 before outlawing the PCF itself a month later. In the absence of clear directives from Moscow, some PCF and CPGB members still refused to believe the astonishing information that started to percolate through international channels and, on 2 September, the PCF *Députés* voted to approve war credits. When a week later Germany invaded Poland, prompting Britain and France to declare war, those communist *Députés* who were of mobilisation age answered the call to serve in the armed forces. It was not until 7 September, a full two weeks after the Nazi-Soviet Pact had been signed, that Comintern leader Georgi Dimitrov met with Stalin at the Kremlin to hear directly the message to be communicated to

71 As reported by US Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt and cited in Olivier Bernier *Fireworks at Dusk* (Boston, 1993), p. 308. For more on Bullitt's impressions of France, see Orville H. Bullitt (ed.) *For the President, Personal and Secret: Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt* (Boston, 1972).
72 Gorodetsky (ed), *The Maisky Diaries* (London, 2015), p. 401.

communists abroad. Difficulties with telecommunications and in locating key cadres meant that the PCF leadership only received reliable details of the Comintern line on the 14 September, probably via French *Député* Raymond Guyot who travelled to France from Moscow sometime between 8 and 11 September. Even then, it was not until 29 September, when Comintern representative Eugen Fried finally confirmed the message already conveyed by Guyot, that the PCF leadership (now operating illegally) was finally convinced of the correctness of the new line. From then, it took a further three weeks for Dimitrov to publish a message clarifying the Soviet position for a worldwide audience. As Allen Middlebro' has shown, the shock of the Nazi-Soviet Pact prompted thousands of PCF members to reject the Party outright. Many more neglected to renew their membership. While Courtois has rejected claims that this created two parallel communist parties, it certainly created a pool of disaffected communists who were ready to put country before the Comintern.[73]

Delays in communicating the new Soviet line caused similar confusion in the UK where, in October, CPGB General Secretary Harry Pollitt was obliged to resign after having issued a September statement in support of the anti-fascist war. Even up to 2 September British intelligence reported that there were signs from the CPGB that British communists would support the war against Germany 'on the grounds of Germany's aggressive action to deprive the Poles of their independence'.[74] Although there was no internment of communists in Britain as in France, a number of active and former communists were immediately marked out by MI5 as unsuitable for commissions, or positions in sensitive departments. On 5 September 1939 Guy Liddell made the following entry in his wartime diary: 'We are prepared

73 Allen Middlebro', 'Choices and Actions of Members and Former Members of the French Communist Party, 1939 – 1941' (Oxford DPhil thesis, 2010), p. 173. Courtois, *Le PCF,* p. 478.
74 TNA KV 4/185 Guy Liddell. Diary entry of 2 September 1939.

to let Communists into the army rank and file but it is not our intention that they should obtain posts where they have access to confidential information.'[75] The following month, Liddell's caution appeared justified when MI5 bugging of CPGB headquarters in King Street, combined with other intelligence, revealed that discussions were taking place within the CPGB, now led by Rajani Palme Dutt, as to whether the Party should seek to penetrate the army and cause disaffection or whether members should make political capital by objecting to serve. Despite advance notice of communist plans to disrupt British armed services, the sheer volume of work involved in vetting applicants with suspected links to communist or fascist groups meant that the usual processes were no longer feasible. With checks running at around 16,000 a month at the beginning of the war, choices had to be made. Ultimately, it was decided that checks on possible links to the IRA would have to be cut. This ran counter to MI5 advice that Irish republican recruits posed 'by far the most dangerous' political threat as far as military security was concerned, and an SIS report of 30 September 1939 which stated that the possibility of an IRA revolution was not 'out of the question.'[76] French intelligence had also identified such a threat from Ireland, and its officers approached the British with a request to run a counter-espionage organisation in the country. The British 'sat on [the French request] politely but heavily.'[77] MI5 was more amenable, however, to accommodating *Deuxième Bureau* plans to set up an Anglo-French Bureau, the purpose of which would be 'to obtain information from existing French agents operating through Scandinavian countries and to recruit such agents from neutral seamen and others who may be thought suitable.'[78] During the course of deliberations, on 9 October, Guy Liddell

75 TNA KV 4/185 Guy Liddell. Diary entry of 5 September 1939.
76 Ibid. Diary entries of 22 and 30 September 1939.
77 Ibid. Diary entry of 28 October 1939.
78 Ibid. Diary entry of 1 September 1939.

wondered whether Britain might usefully send the French a group of UK-based Czech communists, stating that 'as a group they are apparently anxious to fight the Nazis'. He accepted that 'they may engage in subversive activities once they have enlisted' but concluded that 'the probability is that [the French] will know how to deal with them.'[79]

Despite their apparent usefulness to subversive operations against the Third Reich, the attitude of the French state towards both home-grown and émigré communists (or suspected communists) was generally characterised by suspicion and hostility. Having been warned that the French authorities were planning restrictive measures against 'enemy aliens', and in the full knowledge that fellow communists were being rounded up and sent to internment camps, Groehl lived in daily expectation of arrest, leaving his flat only for the briefest of moments to buy groceries. When French police eventually came for him at 11 p.m. on 3 September he had already packed a bag with essentials including some bread, a drinking cup, toothbrush and shaving kit. The truck which picked him up was already half full with detainees, and would stop several more times to take on more people before arriving at the police station at around 3 a.m. On being registered, Groehl was transferred to *La Santé* Prison, where he spent the next two to three weeks apparently in complete ignorance of developments outside. Paris-based Section D officer Major Leslie Humphreys, who had assumed direct oversight of Groehl on the outbreak of war, telephoned London on 19 September to say that Groehl had been located in *La Santé*, relating that he had allegedly been arrested after two contacts of the *Deuxième Bureau* had accused him of being a Stalinist agent and only half-heartedly anti-Nazi.[80] Section D were convinced that Groehl's 'denouncement' as a Stalinist was a fabrication

79 TNA KV 4/185 Guy Liddell. Diary entry of 9 October 1939.
80 TNA HS 7/3 Record of telephone call from Leslie Humphreys, 19 September 1939. The names of Groehl's accusers were given as Brach and Dhorn.

dreamt up to teach Groehl a lesson on the inadvisability of working for the British and it was expected that he would be released in due course. In face of French obfuscation, and in dire need of their premier agent, Humphreys decided, however, to increase the pressure by alleging that one of Groehl's accusers was himself a Nazi agent. This was a risky tactic, based as it was on purely anecdotal evidence provided by one of Groehl's associates, and because Humphreys had already received assurances from Commandant Brochu that he would intervene to ensure Groehl's release. In light of the severity of Humphreys' accusation, the French requested sight of the 'substantial proof' of Nazi penetration of French intelligence that he claimed to have. In a panic, Section D set about hurriedly cobbling together a dossier. The resulting papers did little to persuade the *Deuxième Bureau* of Nazi penetration, but were sufficient to allow both sides to save face and move on. Groehl was released but subjected to continual police harassment. The case was recorded in Section D files as a potent, early 'illustration of the difficulties which could be encountered if the most complete tact were not used with [Britain's] Allies.'[81]

What is extraordinary about Section D's efforts to secure Groehl's release is the fact that, a matter of hours after Groehl was deposited at *La Santé* prison, serious revelations regarding high-level Soviet penetration of the Foreign Office reached senior British officials. The allegations, which originated from Soviet defector Walter Krivitsky, shocked the government with their 'revelations of leakage' and precipitated an urgent investigation led by the heads of counter-espionage in both MI5 and SIS. There is no evidence that Groehl's communist past was re-scrutinised during the course of the investigation, or that suspicion fell on any current or former member of Section D. In fact, while MI5 and SIS continued to exchange regular

81 TNA HS 7/3 Record of telephone call from Leslie Humphreys, 19 September 1939.

views regarding Groehl and Otten's communist affiliations, Section D reports remain relatively sanguine about the political activity of émigré communists (at least, non-Party members) operating on behalf of Britain in France or the UK. Section D's sense of invulnerability and general lack of security did not go unnoticed in SIS. Commander Langley, one of Grand's original two staff members, might have claimed after the war that 'the only high-ups in London who were aware of our activities were the Chief of the SIS and a couple of Cabinet ministers…'[82] but circulation lists for various sensitive memoranda show that Section D's existence was a poorly kept secret indeed. It could be said that Section D was so focussed on sabotaging the Nazi military and industrial complex that its leader wilfully overlooked the possibility of Soviet penetration. However, SIS in general – not just Section D - was largely ignorant of the extent of its exposure.[83]

Major Humphrey's mission in Paris might have got off to an inauspicious start, but it was in Section D's interest to do everything possible to ensure their key Paris-based agent remained at liberty and available to assist with plans to secure routes for the infiltration of increasingly sophisticated propaganda and sabotage equipment into Germany, and to identify potential sites for weapons dumps.[84] Groehl's centrality to Section D operations is evident from his position in a list of the ten 'head agents' run from the Paris office from September 1939. It is notable that he is the sole agent permanently based in France:

82 Turner, *SOE's Secret Weapons Centre*, p. 33.
83 Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 606. MI5's Jane Archer formal debrief of Krivitsky in 1940 gave some pointers, but it would be over a decade before the extent of SIS penetration by Soviet intelligence became clearer.
84 TNA HS 8/214 Report on the activities of D Section during July 1940, pages 14 & 15 and TNA HS 7/3 History of SOE to 1940: Contact with the French on Post-Occupational Resistance, in which it is reported that weapons dumps were created 'in Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, Lille, Chalon, Rheims, Eernay, Soissons, Compiègne, Montdidier, Beauvais, Gisors, Gournay, Rouen, Strasbourg and towards the Italian frontier'. M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 6 refers only, however, to weapons dumps having been created around Paris.

1. Karl Spiecker (SIS alias CHARLIE – used to post letters in Germany)[85]
2. Karl Otten (SIS alias London Karl, alias CATHERINE – based in London)
3. Karl Groehl (real name Karl Retzlaw, SIS alias Paris CARL, alias KATY – based in Paris)
4. Willy Kenmore (Willi Kahnheimer, SIS alias KIDSON – head agent in Switzerland)[86]
5. C. Hamilton Ellis (SIS alias ELMER T. RUDD – briefly employed in Switzerland)[87]
6. Martin Bachtold-Acheson (SIS alias BAXTER. Sub-agents THE LARK, The LINNET and the BLACKBIRD – location unknown, possibly Switzerland)[88]
7. M. Berger (see below)
8. M. Albert Tall (SIS alias for Berger & Tall: FORTNUM and MASON – London and Switzerland)[89]
9. Bernard Wall (SIS alias BERNARD – passed letters into Germany from Italy)[90]
10. John Verney (SIS alias JOAN – engaged in Italy)

85 Carl Spiecker was a journalist and centrist German politician who co-founded (with Otto Klepper), the anti-Nazi *Deutsche Freiheitspartei* whilst in exile in Paris in 1936/1937. In 1939 he was operating in the Netherlands.

86 Willi Kahnheimer, also known as William Kenmore, was a Director of Roditi International Corporation Ltd. Originally an exporter of textiles, in 1937 Roditi applied for permission to construct and operate a radio station in Liechtenstein. The motivation behind Roditi's expansion into radio has yet to be established, but interestingly it coincided with a move by Oswald and Diana Molsey to set up a radio station in the country to raise funds for the British Union of Fascists. An SIS connection to the venture has yet to be clarified, although Leslie Humphreys went on to be employed by Roditi after the war. For more, see the University of Birmingham's Cadbury Research Library XOMN/B/6/3.

87 Bailey, *Target Italy*, pp. 39 – 41. Section D had employed the fluent German speaker in the hope that he would be able to monitor railway movements from Germany to Italy. Hamilton-Ellis made it to Switzerland (under the alias of Elmer T. Rudd) days before Italy entered the war, but fled the country shortly afterwards on the advice of the British Legation in Berne. Section D was reportedly furious and he was dismissed in November 1940.

88 TNA HS 7/3. History of Section D to 1940.: France. Martin Bachtold-Acheson, a former agent of Claude Dansey, has no personal file held at the National Archives, Kew, it having allegedly been destroyed prior to Section D's evacuation of France. His sub agents, the LARK, the LINNET and BLACKBIRD, were used to smuggle explosives to PROBST organisation. After the reorganisation of British sabotage and subversion in June 1940, Bachtold-Acheson returned to working as an SIS agent under Dansey.

89 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: France. Berger, an old friend of a Section D officer, was the Managing Director of industrial magnet-suppliers, Scintilla Magnetos Ltd. Albert Tall, formerly chief clerk in London of the Swiss Federal Railways, was introduced to Section D by Berger. Neither committed themselves to any concrete schemes, and at one point Section D even considered Tall might have been an agent provocateur.

90 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: France records Wall as having been the Vatican City correspondent for the Tablet. His support to Section D was described as 'rudimentary'. The only personal file on Bernard Wall in the National Archives is HS 9/1552/4 which contains a single side of yellow A4, being a request for 'a trace of WALL, Bernard…with a view to ascertaining reliability.' Wall introduced Section D to Verney, his 'cut out', who was accused of having been indiscrete, precipitating the end of Section D's relationship with both men.

In the UK, however, MI5 continued to monitor (and occasionally restrict) the movements of certain German and Austrian émigrés, including communists, residing in – and travelling to and from – the UK. On 26 September, when a communist named Goodman, who was known to be associated with *The Week*'s Claud Cockburn, applied for a travel permit to visit Paris he was turned down 'on the grounds that if the French asked us to accept one of their Communists we should have refused him leave to land.'[91]

In the face of increasing persecution and with no chance of sanctuary in the UK, several French communist *Députés* went into hiding, or succumbed to waves of arrests. Others, among them PCF General Secretary Maurice Thorez and communist *Député* Raymond Guyot, answered the call to join the armed forces.[92] Philippe Robrieux claims that when Moscow demanded Thorez desert, he initially refused to comply. When he relented in late September or October 1939, Robrieux claims this marked the moment when Thorez '*se livrait corps et âme à Staline*'.[93] The 40-year-old Groehl, meanwhile, claimed early ineligibility for military service. From early November it therefore became increasingly important for him to obtain some sort of cover. His concierge informed him that certain people had visited the building, enquiring about Groehl's international correspondence, and the police called on him shortly after to demand he make a declaration of income.[94] Given the tense political environment Groehl was lucky not to have been denounced. Protection by concierges in these instances was not to be assumed: Over the preceding years the Paris police had been 'encouraging landlords to get rid of concierges who had radical tendencies and who might shelter questionable

91 TNA KV 4/185 Guy Liddell, Diary entry of 26 September 1939.
92 Marc Giovaninetti, '50 ans au coeur du système communiste: Raymond Guyot, un dirigeant PCF' (DPhil thesis, Paris, Université 13, 2013), Chapter 9.
93 Philippe Robrieux, *Maurice Thorez: vie secrete, vie publique* (Fayard, 1975), p. 248. Thorez was comdemned in absentia to six years in prison on 25 November 1939 for desertion in time of war.
94 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 375.

characters.'[95] Frustrated by a combination of police intimidation, and what he perceived as Section D's complete disregard for his safety, Groehl wrote increasingly urgent messages to Otten in London, asking why his British handlers couldn't speak with the French police. In a letter dating from November, he complained that 'Rauschning has gone to London again. So has Fuchs. They journey to and fro as they please….I am not even allowed to leave Paris.'[96] Elsewhere, he asked 'Is England the chief enemy or Germany? Please speak to Madame so that I can come over.'[97] By mid-November, having been informed of the possible assassination of an acquaintance who appears to have also been associated with British intelligence, Groehl wrote: 'I heard from Brussels yesterday, Friday, that there had been an action against SEPP. My information also said that SEPP had been shot (or defeated – '*geschlagen*')!! So that is English 'protection'. The Germans don't let their people get shot…'[98]

While he lobbied for passage to the UK, Groehl was simultaneously discussing the founding of a new organisation which would produce black propaganda (i.e., propaganda that purported to have been created by the very people it wished to discredit). Groehl now insisted that this new organisation, for which the passcode would be LEX (possibly a reference to the Holmes/Stamper operation at Lexham Gardens) should keep its distance from Münzenberg,

95 Olivier Bernier, *Fireworks at Dusk: Paris in the Thirties* (Boston, 1993), p. 276.
96 TNA KV 2/2171/1 Letter of 9 November 1939 from GROEHL to OTTEN. If the Fuchs Groehl is referring to here was Klaus Fuchs, then he was indeed allowed to travel freely in the UK following the dismissal of initial concerns raised by the German Embassy in 1934. British police records show that he was subsequently allowed to study for Doctorates at both the University of Bristol (received 1937) and the University of Edindburgh (received 1939). In 1941, noting that the Ministry of Aircraft Production was anxious to employ Fuchs to carry out 'important research' at Birmingham University, Ms Bagot followed up on the concerns raised in 1934. An important note of 10 October 1941, which appears to have been authored by Jane Archer of MI5, suggests that if the work could not be done without Fuchs 'we should accept such risk as there might be'. For further detailed correspondence in relation to Fuchs, see TNA KV 2/1245/1 FUCHS, Emil Julius Klaus. Fuchs' case can be contrasted with that of Arthur Koestler, whose trajectory was not too dissimilar to Groehl's in that MI5 was against allowing him entry to the UK, but he was eventually assisted by British Intelligence, who had a hand in engineering his escape from France to the UK via Lisbon. For more on this see James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance 1930 – 1960* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 128 and Koestler's personal MI5 file KV 2/1273.
97 According to Groehl, Clara Holmes had instructed him to call her 'Madame'.
98 TNA KV 2/2171/1 Letter of 9 November 1939 from GROEHL to OTTEN.

because he 'will frighten too many people away', by which it is likely Groehl meant the officials of the various governments with whom they intended corresponding.[99] Shortly after his November correspondence with Otten, and in spite of Liddell's ban on accepting communists from France, Section D managed to secure Groehl papers for a brief visit to the UK.[100] Little is known about his movements in the UK in December 1939, but he was clearly subjected to close questioning about the lack of concrete results achieved up to that point. In response, Groehl and Otten went to great pains to point out that they had delivered 173,350 pamphlets into Germany in the period up to 13 December, and in that month alone had arranged for the dissemination of 5,445 leaflets into Austria, 2,000 into Germany via Belgium and 10,000 into Germany via Romania.[101] But Grand, under increasing pressure to deliver concrete results, demanded more.

The sums secured by Sinclair for Grand to lay the foundations for his sabotage and subversion programme, and the subsequent rapid expansion of Section D over the course of 1939 had excited a remarkable amount of jealousy within SIS.[102] Towards the end of the year, Lord Hankey, the 'well established spider of the Whitehall web'[103] was charged with carrying out an investigation into a souring of relations between SIS and MI5, with particular emphasis on an examination of 'certain subterranean activities…which have been forced upon the Government by the conditions of modern warfare'.[104] During the course of Hankey's enquiries, Grand admitted he had no idea of the breakdown of his expenditure. When pressed

99 TNA KV 2/2171/1 Translated letter from Karl Groehl to Karl Otten of 15 November 1939.
100 TNA KV 2/2171 Note from B7a to B4b of 14 December 1939. The role of MI5 section B7 is unknown, as is the identity of officers B7a and B4b. MI5 noted that it would be wise to search Groehl as he continued to be 'regarded with some suspicion'.
101 TNA HS 7/3 Propaganda into Germany.
102 Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE*, p. 9.
103 Jenkins, *Churchill*, p. 328.
104 TNA CAB 63/192. Hankey's investigation into the British Secret Service lasted from late 1939 to March 1940.

to offer a figure, he suggested that Section D's total monthly expenditure was in the region of £10,000: a sum roughly equivalent to £695,000 in 2022. To give a sense of scale, Keith Jeffery has put the *total SIS budget* for the year 1939 as £500,000, a sum which had to cover the employment of sixty-nine overseas officers and 134 ancillary staff spread across thirty four different sites as well as the cost of running numerous unspecified foreign agents.[105] The overall SIS budget had increased almost threefold since 1935 but, as Sinclair's Chief of Staff reported, such was the simultaneous increase in demands on their services from June 1939 that many SIS activities had to be 'considerably curtailed owing to lack of money'.[106] While many within SIS complained at the size of the Section D allocation relative to the overall SIS budget, Kim Philby later claimed that Grand was in fact never given the resources he needed to carry out his ideas as his demands on the Treasury and on the armed forces were often blocked from within the Service, either due to a genuine fear of his apparently unregulated new section or because of a certain degree of jealousy at his ability to attract significant government investment despite a lack of attributable results.[107] To be fair to Grand's detractors, much of Section D's financial reports appear to have been worked out on the back of envelopes, or close stationery equivalents.

Grand's financial mismanagement was not the only complaint lodged against him, however. When asked by Gubbins to provide sabotage material for the Polish Home Army, Grand reportedly offered him 'wagonfuls, my dear Colin, wagonfuls.' In the event, partly due to an

105 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 247. SIS funding only receives a couple of pages of attention in Jeffery's work.
106 Ibid, p. 246 - 248. In 1935, Sir Hugh Sinclair had complained that the SIS budget (£180,000, equivalent to approximately £13.5 million in 2022) was the same as that required for a year's maintenance of a single H.M. Destroyer in home waters. Overall defence spending increased from 3.5% of GDP in 1938 to 9% of GDP in 1939, but the amount allocated to SIS still only constituted approximately 0.0004% of the overall military budget.
107 Dansey, who by this time had complained bitterly about Grand, was himself the subject of complaints regarding the use of unreliable agents for the provision of worthless information, at great cost to SIS. For more on this see Read and Fisher, *Colonel Z*, pp. 186 – 187.

unwillingness to divulge the capacity of Section D's secret supply lines, and partly because of his insistence on greater detail around the quantities and measurements of the material required (information that Gubbins was unable to supply) these 'wagonfuls' never transpired.[108] This discrepancy between promises and product was partly responsible for the launch of Hankey's investigation which, although it found that Section D had 'displayed ingenuity and resource', provided many senior staff the opportunity to air their negative opinions of the work of Section D, thereby paving the way for Grand's removal.[109] Section D was given a stay of execution but, in the face of mounting opposition, Grand was aware he needed an early and rather spectacular success. Groehl and Otten, who continued to claim that they were ready and 'anxious to blow up anything within reach', were pressed deliver on their promises.[110]

While searching for alternatives to the less-than satisfactory German lines operated by Groehl, Grand began to cogitate on the potential to explore direct cooperation with the Soviet Union. Icy winds might have been blowing across Anglo-Soviet relations following the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland in December 1939, but the British government was careful not to embolden anti-Soviet commentators in the British press who were seeking to bury any possibility of a future rapprochement, and who spoke in secret of pursuing a peace with Germany to prevent the country 'turning Bolshevik'. Back in early October the anti-Bolshevik Churchill had even told Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky 'better communism than Nazism'[111] and, observing developments that autumn, the conservative minister and one time private

108 Wilkinson & Bright Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, p. 47
109 Ibid, pp. 46 – 47.
110 TNA HS 7/3 History of SOE to September 1940. France, Probst, Propaganda citing message from Mrs Holmes to Courtauld of 30 September 1940. The following pages outline the plan for the sabotage of the Tüllinger Hügel, code name K Plan 1.
111 Gorodetsky, *Maisky Diaries*, pp. 231 – 232.

secretary to Churchill, Lord Boothby had remarked: 'Nothing is more certain than that this war will mark the transition from monopoly capitalism to socialism…You cannot hope to go through world convulsion of this magnitude without fundamental changes in the social as well as the economic structure.'[112] At the heart of government and the secret services there was a growing conviction that the domestic political space was opening sufficiently to allow for a discussion of secret attempts to nudge the Russians into the war on the side of the Allies. The Foreign Office began to consider strategies to entice the Russians into the war on the side of the British, and Section D was determined to play a central role.

112 Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 72.

Chapter III: Scattered networks

While Lord Hankey's draft report on the secret services was circulating amongst senior cabinet ministers and the Chiefs of Military Intelligence (and, in all likelihood, among NKVD officers thanks to Hankey's assistant John Cairncross, one of the most prolific purloiners of classified government material on behalf of the Soviet Union) Grand busied himself in the early months of 1940 with a search for new potential saboteurs. There is evidence that Section D felt such was the gravity of the situation, it was worth reaching out to the clandestine PCF and even contacts within the Soviet Union in order to draw them into secret cooperation against the fascist powers. Fraught with danger and the potential for infiltration, these potential new lines became all the more important as German forces made their rapid advance towards Paris, precipitating the fall of France and the scattering of British and French intelligence networks.

One of the more extraordinary events of the time involved plans for Section D officer Guy Burgess to visit France in the spring of 1940. The true aim of the March visit is not known: Burgess himself would later claim that it was planned with the aim of producing a radio broadcast, which fits with his background in radio production and Section D's involvement in the production of anti-Nazi propaganda. No record exists, however, of any radio production, and Burgess' biographer Andrew Lownie has recently suggested that the real aim of the visit, for which Burgess was accompanied by the novelist Rosamond Lehmann, was to make secret contact with French socialist Edouard Pfeiffer as well as members of the 'communist underground.'[1] Lehmann herself later complained that Burgess disappeared for much of the

1 Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, p. 106 citing Selina Hastings, *Rosamond Lehmann* (London, 2022), p. 207 and John Costello, *Mask of Treachery* (New York, 1988), p. 376

time, but knowing Burgess' poor judgement and penchant for copious amounts of drink and good-looking young men, she may conceivably have assumed that he had disappeared into the streets of Paris in search of a good time. Further evidence about Burgess' visit may be included in the one remaining Section D file at the National Archives in Kew, which has yet to be opened to the public (HS7/5), although a report filed by MI5 following a post-war investigation into Burgess concluded that the reason or pretext for the trip was never discovered.[2]

If Lownie is correct, and the aim of Burgess' visit was indeed to make contact with the communist underground, it was a dangerous diplomatic gamble. By the late spring of 1940, most of the PCF leadership was either in prison, in hiding or in exile. PCF General Secretary Maurice Thorez had already made his way to Moscow and *Député* Raymond Guyot had also deserted and was hiding out in Paris before making his own way to the Soviet Union.[3] Reaching out to the clandestine PCF, led by Jacques Duclos from his base in Bordeaux, would have been diplomatic dynamite for Anglo-French relations. For the underground PCF, it also ran counter to all communist security protocols. Furthermore, in February 1940, a month before Burgess' visit to Paris, the London NKVD section completely closed down, apparently due to a conviction that its British agents were supplying the Centre with 'disinformation'.[4] This points to Burgess having himself pursued the opportunity to visit Paris in order to gather information of use both nominally to Section D and actually to the NKVD, thereby reinstating his position as a useful informant. What exactly he was able to ascertain, whether or not he

2 See TNA KV 2/4105 and KV 2/4117 Guy BURGESS detailing various reports dating from 1939 to 1951 attempting to ascertain the sequencing of, and rationale for the visit to Moscow.
3 Giovaninetti, 'Raymond Guyot', p. 364. Giovaninetti claims that, following his desertion, Guyot disappeared to an unknown address in Paris, from where he spent much of March writing for *Federation de Jeunesses communistes*.
4 Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent: the life and death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford, 2015), p. 128.

did indeed make contact with any members of the communist underground, and what Grand made of his trip report remains to be discovered.

If the PCF had fully activated its clandestine organisation by 1940, in the UK the CPGB was starting to accept that its current legal status might not last and that it was incumbent upon the Party leadership to prepare for a deterioration in relations, and even war, between Britain and the Soviet Union. In early 1940 the CPGB leadership therefore began to establish an underground structure that would, it was hoped, be capable of carrying out sabotage attacks against British war production should orders to that effect be received from Moscow. MI5 monitoring of veteran party organiser Bob Stewart, which included the bugging of the CPGB's London headquarters on King Street, suggested that he had been put in charge of picking suitable candidates for this underground work. A security service summary of Stewart's activity recorded that after the outbreak of war Stewart went 'to ground for some months', with callers at King Street told 'it was no good enquiring for him.'[5] Shortly after the end of the war, Edith Tudor Hart, the Austrian-British photographer and Soviet agent, was recorded saying that 'Bob Stewart had been put in charge of the preparation of a plan for subversive activities in 1940 in case the Communist Party in Great Britain should be suppressed by the Government, which they feared…'[6] The CPGB's reach among the British population was, however, far smaller than that of its French counterpart and the pool of reliable members who could be trusted to adhere to the Moscow line in defiance of British government policy was far more restricted. Although CPGB membership reached 20,000 for the first time in March 1940, not only was there a very high turnover, its predominantly young members were

5 TNA KV 2/1181 Brief security service summary on activities of Bob Stewart 1920 to 1943.
6 Ibid. MI5 Record of Discussions between Edith Tudor Hart and WOLFGANG (as reported by KASPAR), 4 October 1945.

concentrated in a small number of geographical areas and focussed around a small number of industries.[7]

Guy Liddell, MI5's head of anti-subversive activities, nonetheless peppered his diary entries with commentary on the perceived communist threat to the British war effort in 1940, specifically referencing CPGB influence among workers in essential war industries. On 13 February, Liddell noted a conversation with Roger Hollis, MI5's CPGB expert, about action to be taken against communists in Britain in the event of Russia entering the war on the side of the Axis. 'We have a list of contacts in factories and D Division and factory managers are notified about these people', Liddell wrote. 'They can therefore be laid off in time of emergency if necessary. It would further seem desirable to intern all organisers and members of the CPGB's Executive Committee, but I don't think it would be necessary at any rate in the first instance to make any recommendation that the Party should be declared illegal'.[8] A few weeks later, he was musing on international communist links, this time reviewing information passed to MI5 by Colonel Liam Archer of the Irish Department of Defence (IDD), which not only revealed funding flowing into the British party from Earl Browder's US Communist Party (CPUSA), but also pointed to potential contacts between certain members of the CPGB and the IRA.[9] Ultimately, however, no ban was placed on the CPGB, nor were attempts made to censor its mouthpiece, the *Daily Worker.* While CPGB members continued to be monitored via phone taps, Special Branch tailing, mail interception and carefully concealed listening devices, the Party structure was left largely untouched. Bob Stewart remained at liberty to

7 Andrew Thorpe, 'Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1920 – 1945', *The Historical Journal*, 43/3 (2000), pp. 777 - 800

8 MI5's D Division, or D Branch, was responsible for protective security in munitions, aircraft factories and dockyards. This was a different section entirely from Section D of SIS.

9 KV 4/185 Guy Lidell. Diary entry of 15 May 1940.

continue planning for subversion without MI5 apparently ever getting a real handle on exactly what it was that he was up to.

While Stewart was busy identifying potential communist saboteurs, a founding member of the CPGB made his way to the UK from Belgium where he had spent several months.[10] Tommy Bell was directly involved in coordinating the Executive Council of the National Council for Democratic Aid (NCDA), a 'hush hush body' which was allegedly designed to pool the experiences of UK-based émigré communists, and which a former news editor of the *Daily Worker* later claimed had come 'near to being a Communist International itself'.[11] According to Douglas Hyde, in 1940 a number of émigré communists were using various émigré organizations in the UK 'to spread their influence, employing their ample leisure in perfecting their knowledge of Marxism and their plans for the seizure of power.'[12] These communist émigrés 'saw themselves as the rulers of tomorrow and were confident that they could deal with their respective coalition governments when the day came.' Hyde even went so far as to state that 'all were also closely in touch with London Soviet circles who saw their importance at a time when others thought that they counted for little' and that inadequate MI5 monitoring of the activity of the NCDA had allowed Soviet agent Klaus Fuchs, for example, to operate undisturbed.[13]

Apparently operating entirely separately to the NCDA, Karl Otten was pressed by Section D to provide details of military targets that Groehl's sub-agents still operating in Germany were allegedly primed to destroy. For months Groehl and Otten had been lobbying Section D to

10 See TNA KV 2/1538 (1918 – 1935) and KV 2/1539 (1935 – 1944). Volume 2 of KV 2/1539 was reportedly destroyed by fire in 1940.
11 Hyde, *I Believed*, p. 207.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

support a sabotage attack on the Tüllinger Hügel, a wooded hill located on the border triangle of Germany, France and Switzerland which was thought to be 'the centre of electrical control for the fortifications as far as Freiburg and a centre of transmission of information to [German] HQ behind the Siegfried Line'.[14] However, just as Section D began to focus squarely on providing material support for the destruction of this target Groehl began to stall, arguing variously that he was unwilling to dictate targets to his contacts, that the Tüllinger Hügel was within range of French artillery and therefore it made more sense for the French to launch an attack, or that it was now too dangerous for him to visit Basle where his key contact was based.[15]

The sense of frustration felt in London at Groehl's reticence was palpable. Section D officers turned to exploiting his on-off rivalry with Otten in the hope of spurring him into action but Groehl remained firm. He would only instruct his contacts to select whichever targets they deemed appropriate. In desperation, and after having made additional enquiries with the War Office and *Deuxième Bureau* colleagues about observed construction in the target area, Major Leslie Humphreys, Head of Section D's Paris section, took it upon himself to arrange delivery of the required explosives to Basle, 'at considerable risk to himself'.[16] Reports later came in from a variety of sources that a large explosion had taken place not far from Tüllinger Hügel, possibly at the site of a munitions store near Haltingen, a small village 4 miles NNE of Basle. Groehl subsequently reported that the sub agent to whom the explosives had been delivered had 'seized an easy opportunity to use the explosives on a munitions dump and had not

14 TNA HS 7/3 History of SOE to September 1940. Section on France, PROBST, Sabotage and Propaganda citing message from Mrs Holmes to Courtauld of 30 September 1940. The following pages outline the plan for the sabotage of the Tüllinger Hügel, code name K Plan 1.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.

hesitated to do so.'[17] Uncharacteristically, given the considerable effort to which its Paris-based staff had gone, and the urgent need to provide concrete proof of their effectiveness, Section D appears to have been reticent in claiming reports of the explosion as evidence of its own success. Following the Tüllinger Hügel incident, there appears to have been a marked reduction in Section D interest in Groehl and his networks. Additional explosive devices were delivered to Groehl's contacts but again chosen targets such as the Rheinfelden Aluminium works were never attacked. Groehl and Otten, who for so long had been championed as Section D's primary anti-Nazi agents, were now accused of suffering from 'a devastating inability to prevent themselves from chasing the latest political myth, to the detriment of their para-military efficiency.'[18]

The ineffectiveness of the explosion near the Tüllinger Hügel was compounded in the spring and early summer of 1940 by a string of disasters for Section D elsewhere in Europe, including the arrest of its agents in Sweden, which led the British Envoy to Sweden to complain that 'our sleuths seem to be thoroughly bad at their job.'[19] Citing myriad failed operations, Claude Dansey asked pointedly whether Grand should be allowed to 'go on galloping about the world at his own gait' or if he would finally be forced to 'conform and cooperate' with the rest of SIS.[20] The focus on these failures and the antagonism felt towards Section D in the historiography of British involvement in wartime sabotage and subversion has, however, obscured some of Section D's most potentially valuable, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, final acts, one of which was to prepare a stay-behind organisation in France. In his diary entry of

17 TNA HS 7/3 History of SOE to September 1940. Section on France, PROBST, Sabotage and Propaganda.
18 Ibid. For evidence of Grand's high hopes for Groehl and Otten see TNA KV 2/2171/1 Memorandum from SIS relating to Karl Groehl, 3 May 1939.
19 Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 377.
20 Ibid, p. 352.

14 June, Orwell wondered why no-one appeared to be preparing to lay mines in Paris ahead of the German advance.[21] In fact, on 25 May 1940, as the German army made its rapid advance across Northern France, Grand was busy making suggestions as to ways in which the British and French together might raise civilian morale in France to a point where they could be relied upon to undertake acts of sabotage.[22] Ever hopeful that French military intelligence might seek advice from, and cooperation with, the British on guerrilla warfare, Grand instructed Humphreys to place the greatest emphasis on the creation of weapons dumps, the organisation of parties to use them, and the circulation of information within German-occupied territory. Accordingly, the Paris office created a series of ten weapons dumps across a 150-mile arc to the north of Paris, in charge of each of which were placed two men responsible for distribution and recruitment after the anticipated German occupation.[23] On 29 May, however, Humphreys informed Grand that Section D's Paris branch was 'experiencing great difficulty in finding people willing to stay behind in occupied territory'.[24] Grand then sent Major George Hill, who combined significant experience with explosives and intelligence with a long history of working into Russia on behalf of SIS, including reportedly assisting Trotsky in the forming of a Soviet military intelligence service to report on German activity, on an urgent mission to discover the French degree of preparation. What Hill found was that the French, obsessed with what the British referred to as the 'Maginot Complex' had 'not even begun to organise centres of resistance in Paris'.[25]

21 Orwell, *Diaries*, 253. Diary entry of 14 June 1940.
22 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: Contact with the French on Post-Occupation Resistance.
23 Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 6.
24 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940: Contact with the French on Post-Occupation Resistance.
25 Ibid.

Section D's offer to help destroy petrol dumps and bridges along a front-line section behind Rouen in 1940, was rejected by the *Deuxième Bureau's* Commandant Brochu on the grounds that that destroying property *in the path of* the enemy was not within his or Section D's remit. Brochu did offer to ensure his men would not miss opportunities to strike *behind the lines* as the Germans advanced should Section D be able to furnish them with adequate supplies, which the British understood to be a delaying tactic.[26] The apparent reticence in relation to making preparations for guerrilla warfare came from the very top. When Churchill spoke of the potential of supporting irregular operations against Nazi occupation during a Supreme Allied War Council in June 1940, Pétain dismissed the idea out of hand, saying 'it would mean the destruction of the country'.[27] General de Gaulle, betraying a similar suspicion of irregular warfare operations, also objected to the idea for some time even after his own Free French intelligence apparatus had been established following the Armistice. When Colonel Passy, the head of de Gaulle's *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA), later recommended that agents of Free France be sent on SOE training courses in order to learn the art of sabotage, de Gaulle refused, ordering him to "Keep to the strict duties of military research and intelligence."[28]

Watching the rapidly deteriorating military situation in France and mindful of his own experience during the Spanish Civil War, British communist Tom Wintringham lobbied for the urgent creation of a guerrilla training school in Britain to prepare Britain for sabotage and subversive activity in the event of a German invasion. While Section D struggled to gain traction with their French counterparts in developing a putative underground army, the

26 TNA HS 7/3 History of Section D to 1940. French Section.
27 Matthew Cobb, *The Resistance: The French fight against the Nazis* (London, 2009), p. 20; Edward Spears *Assignment to Catastrophe, II* (London, 1954), pp. 155 -6
28 Albertelli, *Services Secrets*, p. 62.

military correspondent of the *Daily Mirror* began to openly discuss plans for a 'mass rising to resist invasion' of the UK, ideas which he reportedly discussed with 'a group of cross-party, radical-thinking MPs including Harold Macmillan, Robert Boothby, Tony Horabin and Leslie Hore-Belisha.'[29] Although a government 'plan of campaign… to instruct the civil population on the subject of resistance' had been formulated as soon as Churchill became Prime Minister on 10 May, the sheer speed with which the programme was rolled out (Foreign Secretary Eden made the first call for recruits on 14 May) allowed little time to prepare uniforms or collect sufficient rifles, let alone prepare a relevant training programme.[30] When questioned in the House of Commons about the training of the 250,000 volunteers who had already come forward, Under-Secretary of State for War Edward Grigg could only reply evasively: 'I hope that the opportunities for training will be adequate'.[31] On 5 June General Kirke, Commander-in-Chief Home Forces made a speech to leaders of the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) in which he noted that about 80,000 rifles had been issued and more uniforms were in the pipeline but, when asked about actual LDV duties, he offered vague remarks about focussing on 'static defence and information' and suggested recruits learn to make home-made Molotov cocktails, which as far as he understood would be best employed by throwing them out of an upstairs window onto passing tanks.[32]

Wintringham was forthright in his criticism of this amateurish approach to home defence, and set in motion the wheels of a private guerrilla warfare school, to operate on the grounds of his friend Edward Hulton's estate at Osterley Park, Middlesex.[33] This school, as Charles Graves

29 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 180.
30 TNA HS 7/3. Early History of SOE to September 1940, p. 16 'Home Defence'.
31 Charles Graves, *The Home Guard* (London, 1943), p. 48.
32 Graves, *Home Guard*, p. 70.
33 Nicholas Rankin, *Churchill's Wizards: The British Genius for Deception 1914 - 1945* (London, 2008), pp. 375 – 380.

admitted in his government-sanctioned account of the Home Guard, was a far cry from the first official LDV training school at Draycot near Claverley, which opened 'with a borrowed Legion tent at the sandpits for teaching musketry and the Musketry Manual published privately by the Commandant.'[34] At Osterley the instructors, who included former members of the International Brigades, taught a vast range of subjects including: the use of shadow and cover; the handling and improvisation of hand grenades, land mines and anti-tank grenades; the use of various types of rifles, shotguns and pistols; camouflaged field craft, scout stalking and patrol; street tactics and defence of cities; the use of smoke screens; defensive measures against parachutists and troop-carrying aircraft; field work; road blocks; anti-tank traps. So impressive in fact were Wintringham's Osterley courses that various detachments of the Scots Guards, Irish Guards, Welsh Guards, the Royal Armoured Corps, various Line Regiments, and even a Naval Shore Establishment were ordered to attend.

The idea that British troops and local volunteers should be trained in such tactics by a Marxist revolutionary did not sit well with many within government or its intelligence services and in July 1940 a report by the Inspector's Directorate of the Home Guard stated that 'the London District Assistant Commissioner did not think the Instructors were of a suitable type because of communistic tendencies.'[35] Wintringham and Hulton were summoned by a representative of the Home Guard and told to close the school down. Hulton promptly demanded to see Edward Grigg who reassured him that Wintringham and his instructors could 'carry on while he made enquiries.' Grigg won a brief grace period for Osterley and the school went on to train 5,000 members of the Home Guard.[36] At the same time, Section D's Guy Burgess was

34 Graves, *Home Guard*, pp. 78- 79.
35 Ibid, p. 197.
36 Ibid, pp. 78- 79.

reportedly advising Valentine Vivian, deputy chief of SIS, to establish a training school for prospective foreign agents – a proposal which received permission in July, with the first course being organised in August 1940.[37]

In France, however, the speed of the German advance had rendered impossible any further preparations for action behind the lines. Section D officers held small hope that those unnamed few they had appointed to guard weapons caches might '[keep] alight a flame of Resistance among those very few who still believed in the ultimate victory over the Germans'.[38] Karl Groehl was potentially among those Section D intended to rely upon to stay behind, but after French Interior Minister Georges Mandel ordered that all Germans living in Paris and the surrounding areas, without exception, be interned in two separate camps – the *Stade Buffalo* for the men and the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* for the women - it was no longer possible for Groehl to rely on his wits and his British sponsors to evade capture. On the crowded spectator seats of the *Stade Buffalo* he encountered a number of acquaintances, including Willi Münzenberg, German author Leopold Schwarzschild, and former *Spartakusbund* and KPD member Erich Wollenberg. Groehl later recalled: 'Fortunately, the month of May was warm and dry, but the nights were quite fresh….After several days, a sergeant began walking through the camp with a paper in hand and calling out names. The called parties were taken to the camp office and disappeared. After five or six days, the sergeant called out two other names: Otto Strasser's and mine. I was sitting on the lawn in a circle with Münzenberg, Erich Wollenberg, Schwarzschild and others whose names I don't remember. I was taken to the office and received a letter from the city command of Paris stating that I was to be released and that the letter was to be used as an ID for controls…I

37 Atkin, *Section D*, p. 50.
38 TNA HS 7/1 Brief History of SOE, first draft used on first course of post-war lectures on SOE, p. 3.

went back to my comrades to say goodbye and to exchange meeting places in Toulouse and Marseille. I said goodbye to Willi Münzenberg, whom I never saw again, I always remembered his disappointed and bitter expression at the farewell.'[39] It is not clear why Groehl chose to highlight Münzenberg's expression. Perhaps his intention was to signal that Münzenberg suspected the fate that awaited him, and reproached his friends for deserting him. Or perhaps it was to give strength to the argument that he was in a depressed state and liable to commit suicide.[40] Why Groehl was released and not Münzenberg, who enjoyed an even greater network of influential acquaintainces, is not known although Stephen Koch, citing information provided by Münzenberg's widow Babette Gross, claims that the former Comintern propaganda specialist had in fact been advised by acquaintainces in British intelligence to remain in the internment camp and take the route south to the Spanish border.[41] It is equally possible NKVD agents had arranged for him to remain where they could watch, and follow him as he transferred from Paris to an alternative camp in the south of France.

On his release from the S*tade Buffalo*, Groehl did not immediately journey south, as might have been expected. He later explained that he initially thought Paris was going to be defended, and hoped he could help somehow.[42] On 10 June, however, having heard on the radio that the government was planning to quit Paris he prepared to leave. As he was 'burning

39 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 433.
40 Although his death had the appearance of a suicide, and was recorded as such by the coroner, many – including Münzenberg's wife Babette Gross - believe his death to have been an NKVD-sponsored murder. For the arguments on both sides, see Koch, *Double Lives*, pp. 308 – 9, 387.
41 Koch has also suggested Münzenberg greatly feared 'one of his most dangerous enemies [who was at work] within the British intelligence service', which somewhat undermines his later claims that Münzenberg held secret discussions with British intelligence officials in Paris seeking their advice as to whether or not he should attempt to escape internment. Koch, *Double Lives*, pp. 310 – 311. See also Richard Deacon, *The British Connection: Russia's Manipulation of British individuals and institutions* (London, 1979), p. 173. For more on Münzenberg's 'informal salons' held for British intelligence officials in Paris, see McMeekin, *Red Millionaire*, p. 303.
42 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 433. Several of his acquaintances also remained in the city. Among these Groehl mentions self-proclaimed anarchist Walter Mehring, Austrian author and actress Hertha Pauli, and the left-wing former Nazi and staunch anti-communist Otto Strasser.

letters and packing clothes and laundry…an Englishman from the propaganda service came and said he had orders to take [Groehl] to Orléans', the nearest city to the newly relocated SIS headquarters.[43] Groehl reportedly insisted on bringing four guests with him, a request which the British officer could not agree to given the significant pressures on transport. With around two million Parisians evacuating the city in June alone, a seat in a car was a rarity: of those who had any form of transport at all, most had to make do with bicycles, horses, carts or even prams.[44] Being unable to provide the five places required, the 'Englishman' instead gave Groehl the address of a café in Orléans where he would be waiting the following day at noon.

If we are to believe Groehl's account, written several decades after the event and potentially with an axe to grind, it was also around this time that he held a conversation with member of the *Deuxième Bureau*. Whereas the British 'propaganda man' had seemed anxious to continue the acquaintance, this French Intelligence officer reportedly warned Groehl that the *Deuxième Bureau* no longer wanted anything to do with 'party people' as they had superior informants among merchants, athletes and diplomats. According to this 'Colonel Fleurion' (no doubt a pseudonym, either of his own or Groehl's invention) the mood of the working classes was as 'irrelevant' to French intelligence as it was to Hitler'.[45] The *Deuxième Bureau*'s distancing of itself from émigré communist contacts, if indeed that is what was happening, may well have been influenced by heightened suspicions around Soviet direction of communist activity in France. At the beginning of May, following orders from Moscow, one of the Party's most senior cadres, Raymond Guyot, who had been writing tracts for the

43 Retzlaw, *Spartakus,* p. 434.
44 Hanna Diamond, *Fleeing Hitler: France 1940* (Oxford, 2007) and Eric Alary, *L'Exode: un drame oublié* (Paris, 2010).
45 Retzlaw, *Spartakus,* p. 426.

communist youth since his desertion from the army, left France entirely, making his way north through Belgium and thence to Moscow, which he reached some time around the 23 – 25 May 1940.[46] There he found a small group of PCF leaders and their families at the Comintern residence in the 18th century park of Kuntsevo. Their number was enlarged in early June by the arrival of senior Comintern member Giulio Ceretti (pseudonym Paul Allard) and his family as well as a young communist activist by the name of Francine Fromond. On 19 June 1940, the day after de Gaulle's appeal to the French people from London, deputy Comintern director Dmitri Manouilski mooted the idea of sending key PCF figures back to France, '*pour soulever le peuple contre la bourgeoisie traitresse*'[47] but as no trace has been found in either Russian or French archives of any further discussion on this subject, Guyot's biographer Marc Giovaninetti has concluded that either Dimitrov dismissed the suggestion out of hand or the PCF leaders quickly persuaded him of the inadvisability of the proposal.

Having missed the opportunity to evacuate with Section D, and apparently despairing of the limited preparations for resistance in Paris, Groehl and his associates made their way south to Orléans alongside thousands of refugees. Fearful of missing his appointment, Groehl put the most important of his papers, some money and his false Danish passport in his pockets and tried to get around the endless column of evacuees by bicycle. When he eventually reached Orléans he discovered he was too late: a waiter informed him that an English officer had sat there for over an hour with a cup of coffee but had since left. 'According to the

46 Giovaninetti, *Raymond Guyot*, p. 364.
47 Ibid, p. 377. For more on Manouilski's close connection to Stalin and his role in the Comintern purges of 1937 -1938 see Claude Pennetier & Bernard Pudal, *Autobiographies, autocritiques, aveux dans le monde communiste* (Paris, 2002), p. 124.

description I gave the waiter, it was my propaganda man' Groehl wrote mournfully, 'and so, my chance of being taken by my friend to England was lost'.[48]

Unable to obtain an authorized passage out of France, Groehl began to look for ways of illegally crossing the border with Spain. Having heard from a trustworthy source that the mayor of Banyuls-sur-mer was a 'leftist' socialist, he decided to pay him a visit. Winking, the mayor regretted out loud that he was forbidden to give advice to refugees. He also said that it was forbidden to follow the dried-up stream through the forest to the border and that anyone who dared to go the difficult way despite the ban must report to the French border patrols who passed along the border every two hours. The mayor then mentioned the times that the border patrols passed. 'What a wonderful man' Groehl remembered. Acquaintances from the Berlin Trotsky Group then offered him advice on how to secure a *récépissé,* which Groehl secured under the name Retzlaw 'which was common where my mother came from'[49] before heading to Perpignan and the Spanish border where, five months later, at the end of September 1940, he finally crossed the Pyrenees on foot.[50]

Section D's evacuation from Paris, although rife with logistical problems, was far more straightforward than that experienced by most refugees. Having returned from Switzerland on 11 June to assist with the evacuation of staff, Humphreys left Paris on the 12th before daybreak, arriving at the Chateau de Villiers, a few miles south of Orléans at 6 a.m. Later that day, however, hearing that Paris had still not fallen, Humphreys attempted to regain the city accompanied by George Hill and another officer by the name of O'Donnell. The way being

48 Retzlaw, *Spartakus*, p. 435. Groehl travelled on to Marseille, where he frequently met with the former 'left' party leaders of the KPD, Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow, engaging in 'violent discussions' about the mistakes of the past. According to Groehl, they argued that Stalin, not Hitler was the main enemy.
49 Ibid, p. 439.
50 Ibid, pp. 443 – 444.

blocked by retreating troops and refugees, the men were forced to abandon the project and sleep on the side of the road. Humphrey's account of his movements suggests that, if it was he who spent a full hour during that chaotic 12 June waiting to make contact in a café in Orléans, he was either pinning his hopes on Groehl agreeing to continue running networks in France and Germany or he was being true to his word that the British would provide him with protection. Humphreys certainly made sure that Commandant Brochu, his colleagues and their families were supported and offered passage to England. The head of the *Deuxième Bureau*, Colonel Rivet, appears to have resisted losing Brochu, however, and asked instead that one of his subordinates, a Lieutenant Turck who had worked with Brochu in the *Matériel de Guerre et Sabotage* section, be allowed to travel to England as Rivet's personal representative to carry on alone until more formal contact between British and French intelligence could be re-established.[51] After making arrangements for future communications with Commandant Brochu, and fixing a possible rendezvous at Lisbon at a later date, Humphreys took an 'emotional farewell' from Rivet and Commandant Perruche on 18 June 1940.[52]

51 TNA HS 7/3 Operations Susequent to the Fall of France. Turck was later infiltrated into France as SOE agent CHRISTOPHE, tasked with making contact with sympathisers in the French Armistice Army. After the war, a number of SOE agents came forward to allege that Turck had betrayed them to the Vichy authorities. Turck vigorously denied the claims and Leslie Humphreys went to great lengths to try and help exonerate him, claiming that it was a case of mistaken identity.

52 TNA HS 7/3 Operations Subsequent to the Fall of France. According to the Early History of SOE to September 1940 held in the National Archives, Kew, around this time Turck, operating under the pseudonym M. Tunmer, made certain attempts to recruit on behalf of Section D. Unsurprisingly, this 'raised many technical difficulties with the growing de Gaullist party'. A number of men were reportedly recruited into the British sabotage and subversion organisation after consultation with de Gaulle but prior to the formation of the BCRAM under André Dewavrin (Colonel Passy) in April 1941. For more on Section D and SOE connections with Vichy contacts after the fall of France, see SHD GR 28 P3 161 Dossiers généraux de la France combattante: missions, réseaux, mouvements; Richards Brooks, *Secret Flotillas: Clandestine Sea Operations in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Adriatic, 1940 - 1944 Vol II* (Barnsley, 2013), pp. 386 – 387; Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance 1940 – 1945* (Paris, 2013), pp. 13 – 14.

Grand's response to the scattering of Section D's networks in France, fear of a German invasion of Britain, and a newly established figurehead of the French military resistance who regarded the British promotion of sabotage and subversion as unwelcome interference in his plans for a more traditional, French-led military resistance was to explore the possibility of reaching out the Soviet Union. As such, Grand arranged for his emissary Guy Burgess to travel under diplomatic cover to Moscow along with the Oxford-based British social and political theorist Isaiah Berlin, who was to be considered for the post of press attaché at the British embassy in Moscow. Although there is evidence of post-facto Foreign Office objections to the scheme, Foreign Office officials, British passport control and SOE later denied any knowledge of the trip and most of the relevant records appear to have been destroyed.[53] Burgess would later claim that the intention had been to use the visit to propose that 'the Russians arm non-communist resistance groups in the East in return for Britain providing support for communist groups in the West.'[54] Although this is indeed what transpired the following year, Malcolm Atkin has claimed that in 1940 this was an 'unlikely scenario', suggesting instead that the men were instructed to explore the possibility of supplying the Polish resistance from British-controlled territory, although on what basis he makes the claim is not clear. MI5 files state quite clearly that Grand had been 'anxious for [Burgess] to go to Moscow, where he hoped to get in touch with the Comintern and influence them against the Germans.'[55] According to this account, when the Foreign Office objected, Burgess was 'sent to New York where, he said, he

53 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS 30.1.41 D/CA report to AD/I; TNA FO 371/24847.
54 Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, p. 108; Burgess' file at the National Archives includes the following note dated January 1941, which looks to have been signed by Fitzroy Maclean: 'It seems odd that Colonel Tomlinson should have taken it upon himself to send Mr Berlin to Moscow at a time when we were doing what we could to prevent him from going there. I really think that Northern Department might have been consulted. It would be interesting to know what D's organisation intended that Mr. Berlin and Mr. Burgess should do in Moscow.' TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS. Colonel James Noel Tomlinson worked for Section D and later for SOE.
55 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS. Report of 30 January 1941 from Lt. Col. James Noel TOMLINSON (D/CA) to Bickham Sweet Escott, personal assistant to CD, Sir Frank Nelson (AD/I).

had friends who would get him onward visas to Russia.'[56] Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Information (and friend of Burgess) Harold Nicolson noted in his diary on 2 July 1940 that, having been refused the post of Press Attaché in Moscow, it was in fact Berlin who had conceived the 'wild idea of going to Washington and working his way to Moscow from there.'[57] MI5 reports do not say what happened after the men's arrival in New York, noting simply: 'Papers destroyed.'[58] Although this episode likely bolstered the rationale for dismantling Section D it would be unfair to characterise this extraordinary overture to the Soviets as one of Grand's more eccentric and potentially explosive 'war winning' ideas, thrown about in the hope that something might stick:[59] The plan had been approved by Gladwyn Jebb who was at the time Cadogan's Private Secretary, and Harold Nicolson had assisted his friend Burgess in making arrangements. The new Head of SIS, Stewart Menzies, who had taken over following Sinclair's death in November 1939, was also fully apprised of the details.[60] So who put a stop to this mission that has been called 'one of the strangest incidents in the history of Section D'?[61] Despite its apparent consideration within SIS, the Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office, significant concerns were raised about the proposed visit at the last minute. Burgess and Berlin had already set sail from Liverpool to America on 9 July when the message came through that Burgess was to be urgently recalled

56 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS. Report of 30 January 1941 from Lt. Col. James Noel TOMLINSON (D/CA) to Bickham Sweet Escott, personal assistant to CD, Sir Frank Nelson (AD/I).
57 Balliol College Archives, Harold Nicolson Diary, 2 July 1940.
58 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGES. Report from Tomlinson to Sweet Escott, 30 January 1941; TNA FO 371/24847 United Kingdom-Soviet relations, 1940.
59 Joan Bright Astley in *The Inner Circle: A view of war at the top* (Stanhope, 2007), p. 25 claimed that Grand thought every idea a potential 'war-stopper'.
60 Henry Hardy, *Isaiah Berlin: Letters 1928 – 1946* Cambridge, 2004), pp. 302 -3, 312; Stewart Purvis & Jeff Hulbert, *Guy Burgess: The Spy who Knew Everyone* (London, 2016), p. 122; Atkin, *Section D*, pp. 145 - 146; TNA KV 2/4105 Guy Burgess. For more on Menzies' appointment see TNA FO 1093/127.
61 Atkin, *Section D*, pp. 145 – 146; Hardy, *Isaiah Berlin,* pp. 302 -3, 312.

and that Berlin was no longer to be considered for a post at the British Embassy in Moscow.[62] This sudden change of heart regarding the mission points to the receipt of urgent advice about the inadvisability of the trip in general, of the individuals involved in particular, or indeed that more senior ranking officials than those who had initially approved the scheme had exercised their veto. Miriam Rothschild claimed that John Foster, a legal adviser at the British embassy with whom Burgess lodged in the US, had become alarmed by Burgess' personal habits and urged for him to be recalled.[63] Stewart Purvis and Jeff Hulbert present some evidence that it was actually Burgess' friend and MI5 officer Victor Rothschild who had set the alarm bells ringing by contacting Guy Liddell, the Head of MI5's B Division in charge of counter-intelligence, to emphasise that the Soviet Union would use Burgess' drinking problem and homosexuality as the basis of bribery.[64] Whatever the source, a telegram of 27 July to the British Ambassador in Washington, stated categorically: 'It is not desired that either Berlin or Burgess should proceed to Moscow. Burgess should return to the United Kingdom immediately.' A penned note in the margins adds 'Berlin, who is not in the employ of HMG, must do what he thinks best', although it is clear that there was no love lost for Berlin within Mi5.[65] Even after Burgess returned to the UK, he continued to discuss his desire to 'get in touch with the Comintern and use them to create disorders in occupied territory'[66] but by this point plans to disband Section D were well advanced, and any such discussions were put on

62 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS. Telegram of 27 July 1940 which would appear to have been sent from Gladwyn Jebb to Philip Kerr, British Ambassador to the United States of America.
63 Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman,* p. 109 citing report by Miriam Rothschild to the author on 4 February 1999.
64 Purvis & Hulbert, *Guy Burgess*, pp. 123 – 124.
65 TNA KV 2/4105 Guy BURGESS Telegram 27 July 1940. Penned in the margins of another telegram, dated either 31 July or 1 August 1940, a commentator has written 'Mr Berlin is intolerable'.
66 Balliol College Archives, Oxford. Harold Nicolson Diary, 21 August 1940. Initially, Burgess was relatively unaffected and was shortly able to report to Moscow that he was taking up a post at a new SOE training school in order that he might collect the names of agents and broaden his contacts within SIS and MI5. For more on this, see John Costello & Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (London, 1993), p. 241. Burgess was, however, let go shortly afterwards, having been arrested for drunk driving.

hold pending the formal establishment of its successor agency the Special Operations Executive, which following an intense diplomatic wrangle would no longer report to the Chief of SIS but would sit within the Ministry of Economic Warfare, overseen by the Labour MP Hugh Dalton. Despite it's supposed high level of secrecy, news of this proposed overture to the Soviets quickly reached Rivet's new Vichy intelligence bureau, possibly from disaffected Section D officers: By 4 August 1940, the newly formed Vichy counter-intelligence agency, the *Travaux Ruraux*, was already recording attempts by the 'English Intelligence Service' to enter into contact with Russian intelligence.[67]

The idea of approaching the Soviet Union at this time was not restricted to Section D. On 11 July 1940, two days after Burgess and Berlin had set sail to the USSR via the US, the Communist MP Willie Gallacher approached Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, R.A. Butler, to ask for help in securing passage to Moscow for himself, Harry Pollitt, Rajani Palme-Dutt or Peter Kerrigan in order, as they put it, to influence the Soviet leader. Communist historian and commentator Monty Johnstone has revealed that when he originally came across notes of this request in Gallacher's papers, he took the Communist MP's account of this meeting at face value but later revised his assessment, arguing that there was no way the CPGB leadership could have reasonably believed they had the ability to influence Stalin. Instead, Johnstone believed the CPGB must have used this as an excuse in order to get permission to visit Moscow, from where they could more effectively seek clarification of the Comintern line following the unexpectedly sudden fall of France.[68] In anticipation of a visit the CPGB sent a coded telegram to Comintern head Georgi Dimitrov requesting an urgent

67 Simon Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies*, p. 67 citing SHAT Fonds de Moscou 715/166 TR 'Note sur l'activité des agents doubles et analyse des questionnaires des SR étrangers, 15 January 1942.
68 Monty Johnstone, 'The CPGB, the Comintern and the War, 1939 – 1941 Filling in the Blank Spots', *Science and Society* 61/1 (1967), pp. 27 – 45.

meeting to which Dimitrov quickly replied requesting communication of the names of the delegates. Three days later Gallacher visited Butler again to inform him that Dutt was to be the CPGB delegate to Moscow. From that point, however, Johnstone notes all archival references to the request disappear, from which one can reasonably infer that the visit was abandoned. Given Burgess and Berlin's abortive mission to Moscow and the febrile political atmosphere in London, this was only to be expected, although the talk in the streets was that anything and everything should be done to bring the USSR into the war on the side of the Allies.

Soviet Ambassador to the UK Ivan Maisky noted in his diary in June his appreciation of the sentiments being expressed in the streets of the English capital:

> *In the street today one could often hear talk of the impossibility of fighting alone. Politicians and journalists sighed voluptuously: 'Ah, if only a revolution would break out in France and the Petain Government could be overthrown!' Even the Tories have been speaking in a similar vein. No wonder! Some have hinted rather openly that a revolution in France is needed as a bait to draw the USSR into the war. 'Paris is well worth a mass' said Henry IV. 'The participation of the Soviet Union in the war against Germany is well worth a revolution in France,' say British Tories today.*[69]

The new political head of SOE[70], Labour Minister for Economic Warfare (MEW) Hugh Dalton argued in early discussions with Vansittart and Churchill's private secretary Gladwyn Jebb that SOE should be afforded the latitude to involve itself in domestic politics in its countries of operation and that SOE agents should be authorised to offer political guarantees to French workers with a view to mobilising left-wing opinion throughout occupied Europe into a mass

69 Gorodetsky, *The Maisky Diaries*, p. 287. Diary entry of 17 June 1940.

70 SOE was originally envisaged as having three branches: SO1 responsible for propaganda, SO2 for subversive operations and SO3 for planning. SO3 quickly fell away, leaving SO1 and SO2. By 1942 the organisation was generally referred to as SOE although, for ease of reference the term SOE will be applied here to cover all operations.

anti-fascist movement.[71] A small discussion group within SOE even debated the pros and cons of supporting a Left revolution in France. Some claimed that such a policy 'would come into conflict with the declared intention of HMG to arrive at a modus vivendi with the Petain Government' and that it would 'certainly give great offence to Weygand, with whom particularly, HMG hoped to make contact.' If there was to be a revolt, it was argued this would have to be led by the likes of Generals Weygand or Noguès, and neither of these men would agree to any association with a Left-Wing Movement. This argument was further bolstered by the suggestion that it was perfectly possible there would be a swing to the political right in France and it was therefore inadvisable to 'put our money on a horse which quite likely may not win.'[72] Dalton nonetheless continued to argue that 'Revolution, if it comes at all, will come from the Left' and that 'as a first step we should endeavour to get into touch with Socialist and Syndicalists and even well-disposed Communists.'[73] But this was not Section D, and Dalton would later complain that officials within SOE regularly frustrated efforts to organise a coordinated mass resistance due to a combination of 'too little political gumption and biases against the Left'.[74]

Even had there been a will to engage with left-wing movements in France, there were extremely limited foundations for resistance activity in the country in the latter half of 1940. The PCF was navigating a fine line between coexistence with the German authorities and laying the foundations for a future anti-fascist uprising. From his new base in Moscow

71 TNA HS 6/309 Policy to France. Short record of a meeting held on Sunday 17 November attended by Dalton, Sir Robert Vansittart, Gladwyn Jebb and various other Foreign Office and SIS personnel; TNA HS 8/334 Subversion: A description of the Special Operations Machine and some suggestions as to future policy, October 1940.
72 TNA HS 6/309 Untitled Minute on 'views on the possibility of arriving at some compromise in the dispute on the paper about our policy towards France' addressed to Minister Dalton, dated 15 November 1940.
73 TNA HS 6/309 Untitled Minute of 15 November 1940.
74 Wilkinson & Bright Astley, *Gubbins and SOE,* p. 80.

Raymond Guyot had started to develop an organogram of the *Jeunesses Communistes* in the 5 Paris regions (Ville, Est, Ouest, Nord, Sud), but there was no talk as yet of encouraging young communists to resist occupation.[75] With the Nazi-Soviet Pact still in force, and Stalin unwilling to draw Hitler's attention eastward, Jacques Duclos, the head of the underground PCF, 'generally considered to be the NKVD's impresario in France', received no instructions to put in place resistance activity.[76]

As German bombs started to rain down on British cities in advance of an anticipated German invasion, the guerrilla warfare training school established by Lord Hulton and Tom Wintringham continued to train hundreds of soldies and civilians alike. By August 1940 Wintringham was being referred to by the editor of the *Tribune* as 'the foremost military expert in the world' and his instructors had become 'the idols of the LDV' such that 'even a nodding acquaintance with them carried more prestige among the LDV than a close friendship with a Hollywood film star would have done in peace time.'[77] This exponential increase in Wintringham's visibility and popularity prompted the government to commission a formal investigatation into activities at Osterley.[78] Malcolm Atkin implies that this was not entirely necessary as Hulton had been working, if not for Section D, then as a 'close confidant and collaborator'.[79] With Britain's sovereignty in the balance, many began to question the

75 Giovaninetti, *Raymond Guyot*, p. 377 citing RGASPI 533-9-2 f. 48. Danielle Casanova, who likely provided Guyot with much of his information, was confirmed as national director of the JC in December 1940.
76 Porch, *French Secret Services*, p. 132; Giovaninetti, *Raymond Guyot*, p. 375. Communist promotion of positive fraternisation with the Germans in France was such that the editors of the proscribed Communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*, following directions from Thorez, made a personal approach to the German occupation authorities asking for permission to restart publication. The approach by Maurice Tréand and Jean Catelas was unsuccessful (and led to fierce recriminations after the war) and the paper was forced to carry on publishing clandestinely until 1944.
77 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 181; Graves, *Home Guard*, pp. 78 – 79.
78 Ibid, p. 185.
79 By the end of 1940, 37 students were undergoing training in England at official SOE schools. See HS 7/1 Brief History of SOE, first draft used on first course of post-war lectures on SOE, p. 5

potential not only for a socialist revolution in France, but one on British soil. In an extraordinary exchange reported by Ivan Maisky, Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax reportedly stated 'our landlords will be *taxed out of existence*, but I don't think we'll have an agrarian revolution…I'm sure, for instance, that everybody in my village would be sorry if something happened to my family.'[80] For many, Osterley was seen as a potentially dangerous recruiting ground for revolutionaries[81] although, as George Orwell noted, given the atmosphere it would not have been a surprise 'to see Churchill or Lloyd George at the head of them'.[82] Wintringham's politics may have been suspect to MI5 and the War Office, but in the primacy of his anti-fascism, he was not so far removed at the time from the nation's leaders. The question was more one of ownership: The War Office could not countenance the country's foremost expert in irregular warfare being a communist and so, with War Office backing SOE finally got the go ahead to close Osterley and open its own training establishments staffed by their own 'trusted' instructors who had no prior connection to the CPGB, including the very British Kim Philby.[83]

80 Gorodetsky, *Maisky Diaries*, p. 296. Diary entry of 10 July 1940.
81 Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p. 185.
82 George Orwell, *The Orwell Diaries* (London, 2010), p. 257. Diary entry of 20 June 1940.
83 By the end of 1940, 37 students were undergoing training in England at official SOE schools. See HS 7/1 Brief History of SOE, first draft used on first course of post-war lectures on SOE, p. 5

PART TWO

Chapter IV: Reaching out to the Soviets

The following chapter highlights a shift in British secret service engagement away from direct engagement with individual, anti-Stalinist communists towards a focus on bilateral cooperation designed to contribute to an overarching military strategy aimed at drawing the Soviet Union into the war on the side of the Allies. Looking at this period of openness towards the Soviet Union in the context of longer-term engagement with communists in Britain and France, including discussions about supporting a left-wing revolution in France, the following pages examine the lengths to which the British were prepared to go to court Stalin, and then to appease him as Britain stalled on opening a second front – all the while monitoring closely the impact of promoting pro-Soviet messaging on domestic attitudes towards communism as a political ideology.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, Section D had made an ill-fated attempt to reach out to the Soviets as early as the summer of 1940. The Head of Section D was dismissed shortly after this incident, which to his detractors was only one of a string of dangerous miscalculations. Yet the original idea of tentatively scoping for an arrangement between the Soviet Union and the UK in the field of sabotage and subversion appears to have taken hold within SOE. In the early months of 1941, Churchill was becoming increasingly exasperated with SOE's lack of progress in getting 'bodies' into France to stimulate resistance networks. On 17 February, Churchill's personal assistant Desmond Morton and the ailing executive head of SOE Frank Nelson had a robust telephone conversation during which Morton reportedly exploded, saying SOE 'had not a friend in the world', that Churchill hated Dalton, hated Jebb, hated Nelson, hated the entire organisation and that it was only because Morton was backing

it that it hadn't been wound up entirely.[1] SOE was receiving very similar messages to those passed to Grand a year earlier: the organisation needed to prove its worth, and soon. Casting around for ideas, senior SOE officials discussed revisiting Grand's original proposal to approach the Soviets with a view to providing mutual support in anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion operations. At the same time, it was also suggested that 'it might be desirable to have some contact with the Communist Party organisation outside Russia, in order to find out how they themselves could bring pressure to bear on the Kremlin and secure their collaboration with us in conducting subversive activity in enemy-occupied zones.'[2] There is little evidence, however, that by this they meant the CPGB. Dalton's own party was at the time disbanding local Labour parties in order to reform them without their 'disruptive' (i.e. communist) elements and calling for all communications from communists to be 'placed in the waste paper basket'.[3]

If antipathy towards home-grown communists prevented SOE from exploring links with the CPGB, by the spring the idea that SOE would do well to prepare the ground for closer relations with the Soviet Union had firmly taken hold. On 10 April 1941, Gladwyn Jebb wrote to Alexander Cadogan at the Foreign Office to say:

> 'Clearly there is no chance at the moment of getting any co-operation with the Soviet authorities in subversive activities directed against the Axis, but action by Germany against Russia is certainly not impossible and there may be even some chance, though admittedly slight, of a rapprochement between the USSR and this country.'[4]

1 TNA HS 6/309 Account of telephone conversation between Desmond Morton and Frank Nelson as recounted by Nelson, 17 February 1941.
2 TNA HS 4/327 SOE/Soviet Policy D/P (Russia) Section and the Moscow Mission
3 Andrew Thorpe, 'Locking out the Communists: The Labour Party and the Communist Party, 1939-46', *Journal of Contemporary British History* 25/2 (2013), pp. 221 – 250.
4 TNA HS 4/349 Letter from Gladwyn Jebb to Sir Alexander Cadogan dated 10 April 1941.

In anticipation of a softening of diplomatic relations, SOE representatives were sent to Turkey for a meeting with Sir Stafford Cripps, the former Socialist League leader identified previously by SIS as a key figure in pre-war anti-Nazi networks operating into and out of Germany who was now serving as British Ambassador to the USSR. The aim was to persuade Cripps to accept an SOE staff member on his team in Moscow who would explore channels of communication with Soviet intelligence. Cripps was initially averse to the idea but eventually relented, asking only that the selected officer's work to be kept at a remove from his own. In anticipation of the mission's success, SOE scouted for suitable Russian speakers to join a nascent 'Russia Section'. One of those in charge of recruitment was George Alexander Hill, the explosives expert who had taken a variety of roles in Section D including the training of officers (including Kim Philby), assisting Section D operations in France and a previously unsuccessful attempt to identify Russian-speaking potential agents among the refugee community in the UK.[5] Hill (supported by George Wiskeman of SOE's Scandinavian section) fairly quickly identified and recruited eight officers with experience of the language and country, sending them off to Brickendonbury Manor in Hertfordshire for training, and then on to Oxford for additional language tuition.[6]

The recruitment of these eight officers signalled the commencement of a period of frenetic activity within SOE, with wide-ranging discussions exploring possible missions including: blowing up the Caucasian oil fields to prevent them falling into the hands of the German

5 Atkin, *Section D*, pp. 145 – 146 suggests that a full appreciation of British recruitment of agents for the Soviet Union may not possible due to the relevant records having been culled during the Cold War. O'Sullivan in *Dealing with the Devil*, claims that Hill's SOE file is closed. As of 2022, no PF file for Hill is recorded at the National Archives, Kew.

6 The officers named were: Major A.D. Seddon; Major C.T. Milnes-Gaskell; 2/Lieut R.F. Hingley; 2/Lieut M.O. Walshe; Captain W.S. Morgan; Lieut R. Schlee; Lieut L. Knoop (later known as Connop); Lieut M.R. Chaplain. Brickendonbury Manor, known as Station XII, was the first official Section D training school. Established in the summer of 1940, it was often referred to as 'the D School'.

armed forces; persuading the Armenian national socialist Dashnaks to pledge their support to the USSR; organising Kurdish tribespeople to defend certain Iranian frontier passes; and smuggling explosives into Iran.[7] With recruitment underway in the UK and the Soviets making positive noises about receiving a representative from SOE, the pressing question became who to send to Moscow to lead the negotiations. The most qualified candidates either had a history of espionage against the USSR, or were involved in other 'undertakings' that could compromise (or be compromised by) SOE activities. SOE's nervousness in this regard is reflected in Dalton's reaction to the proposal that Hill himself visit Moscow as an interpreter. In bright red pen he wrote 'No! Hill has a White past and will arouse suspicion. I do not approve….'[8] Other candidates included Mr Bosworth Monck, an engineer with experience of working in Russia, Persia and Iraq who was considered for a post of commercial secretary in Moscow on the recommendation of an acquaintance of Gladwyn Jebb, and Major (later Colonel) Hulls, an oil expert with experience of intelligence work in the Caucasus. SOE archives suggest that both men made their way at some point over the late summer/early autumn to Moscow, although the files are silent on the nature of any work they carried out there.[9] The Foreign Office pressed on, however, with the recommendation that Hill be sent out as liaison to the NKVD. A draft telegram from the Foreign Office to Sir Stafford Cripps was circulated within MEW and SOE suggesting the British be frank with the Soviets that Hill had been active in Russia in the last war. A furious Dalton noted in the margins 'You don't even admit how!'[10] Dalton was overruled, however, and Hill was duly appointed. Ironically, Hill would later come

7 TNA FO 371/29597 1941: Soviet Union referencing a discussion in early September 1941 about use of SOE officers for the defence of certain Iranian frontier passes and FO 371/29594 1941: Soviet Union.
8 TNA HS 4/355 SOE representation in Russia. Note on sabotage and subversion activities dated 2 July 1941.
9 Ibid. Note of 30 June 1941 to Colonel LC HOLLIS; Draft telegram from 18 July 1941 to Sir Stafford Cripps; Very Secret note of 20 September 1941.
10 Ibid. Draft telegram from Foreign Office to Sir Stafford Cripps, 3 August 1941.

under British suspicion for being too close to the Soviets, with SIS wondering whether SOE's man in Moscow 'gave more than he got'.[11]

With personnel arranged for transfer to Moscow, the British moved to secure Soviet support for operations in Romania and Bulgaria.[12] Stalin declared himself amenable, but was clear that the Soviet focus was on reinstating and/or reinvigorating Moscow's oversight and control of Soviet intelligence networks across Western Europe, the activities of which had been severely curtailed due to waves of arrests of communist party members, and a lack of wireless codes and equipment. These early, scoping discussions suddenly took on a heightened sense of urgency following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 21 June 1941, which in the words of Alfred Rieber marked a 'crucial turning point in the history of world communism.'[13] This was a critical moment for SOE and its newly appointed head of operations, Colonel Gubbins. As Wilkinson and Bright Astley have noted:

> 'One of the most important factors affecting Gubbins' new responsibilities was the Soviet entry into the war and its impact on resistance in North West Europe – particularly in France. Stalin's call to communist sympathisers world-wide to take immediate action to relieve pressure on the Red Army had resulted in an upsurge of anti-Fascist resistance throughout Occupied Europe on a scale hitherto undreamed of by SOE. Some of these extreme left-wing groups were led by organisers recruited and trained by the Comintern before the war and some actually received orders direct from the NKVD. These professional anti-Fascists, used to years of living illegally, were very different from the moderate socialists who Dalton would have chosen to spearhead the workers' revolution, and were the latter's natural enemies. It was a pattern soon to be established world-wide and accounted for much of the antagonism to SOE displayed by both radical left-wing and extreme right-wing circles.'[14]

While SOE worked to consolidate and streamline the staff inherited from Section D and orient itself towards the new political and military reality on the continent, Charles de Gaulle was

11 O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil*, pp. 64 – 68.
12 TNA HS 7/27 SOE War Diary Russia August 1942 to June 1944, pp. 24, 34, 98 – 100.
13 Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party, 1941 – 1947* (New York, 1962), p. 3.
14 Wilkinson & Bright-Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, p. 94.

simultaneously setting up his own Intelligence Bureau in London. De Gaulle's new *Service de Renseignements*,[15] headed by Major André Dewavrin (Colonel Passy) initially considered anti-fascist resistance in the same purely military terms as its predecessor, the *Deuxième Bureau*.[16] Passy's SR was keen to create tight *réseaux*, or networks, dedicated to the collection and transmission of military intelligence only. The appreciation of civilian resistance gradually evolved to incorporate escape lines for exfiltrating key agents from France and the sabotage of German installations and communications but, for the time being, the thought of developing civilian-led networks was anathema to the Free French.

The Soviets, however, saw things very differently. Mirroring SOE attempts to create resistance networks in Europe, on 29 June 1941, a week after the German invasion, the Soviet Council of Commissars (Sovnarkom) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party ordered the creation of partisan detachments in German-occupied territories. The following week, the NKVD formed its own special sabotage group, with its head Pavel Sudoplatov, the man who had successfully overseen the 1940 assassination of Leon Trotsky, appointed to lead the organisation, reporting directly to NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria. This group later became the 4th NKVD Directorate in charge of terror and sabotage in enemy-occupied territory.[17] With Soviet plans for anti-Nazi sabotage moving apace, and the seeds of Hill's initial scoping

15 The Free French *Service de Renseignements* was renamed the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action Militaire* (BCRAM) on 15 April 1941 before changing its name again to the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA) on 17 January 1942. It is now most commonly referred to in histories of the service as the BCRA.

16 Albertelli, *Services Secrets*, pp. 90-99. The men who worked for the *Service de Renseignements* (SR) were sometimes accused of being *Cagoulards*, right wing paramilitaries who fought communists in street battles in the 1930s. Little was said to have distinguished them from Vichy reflexes except that they were in London and in favour of continuing the war against Nazi Germany. The ambiguity of the Vichy position is explored more fully in Simon Kitson, *The Hunt for Nazi Spies* (Chicago, 2008).

17 Vadim J. Birstein, *SMERSH – Stalin's Secret Weapon, Soviet Military Counterintelligence in WWII* (London, 2011), p. 146. By the end of the summer of 1941, Stalin was in receipt of a detailed plan for centralizing control over all partisan groups.

mission to Moscow having apparently fallen on fertile ground, SOE pushed for the conclusion of a formal agreement with the NKVD, negotiated by Lieutenant Colonel Dennys Robert Guinness.[18] Objections were raised internally to SOE's initial proposed offer to the Soviets of technical and logistical support. Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, Chairman of the government's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) lamented what he saw as a British 'mania for offering the Russians advice and technical experts, neither of which they want, and which only arouses their suspicions.'[19] In a nod to Soviet sensitivity, Cripps also refused to put any suggestions to the Soviet government which 'in his view would show a distrust on our part of Soviet powers of resistance.'[20] In fact, the Soviets were only nominally interested in SOE's offers of technical support. In the absence of direct lines into Europe, they were more keen to avail of British logistical support to infiltrate NKVD agents into occupied Europe. This the British were to a certain extent prepared to provide, as long as it was matched by Soviet assistance in, for example, smuggling explosives into Iran for use in the event of a German attack, or sabotaging the Caucasian oil fields ahead of their seizure by German advance troops. Detailed plans were not entered into at this early stage, however, for fear of 'getting the Russians in with us' on SOE activities.[21]

In the background of secret talks with British representatives in Moscow, the NKVD and the Comintern were instructed to identify suitable individuals who could be trusted to make

18 It would appear that the original intention had been to send out SOE Chief Charles Hambro, but as both he and Archie Boyle, SOE's Director of Intelligence and Planning, were unable to travel, Guinness was put forward to take the only available seat on the aeroplane leaving on 11 August 1941. See Note of the same date in FO 371/29595 1941: Soviet Union (subversive activities).
19 TNA FO 371/29598 Sabotage and Subversive activities. Code 38 file 3343, cited in Martin Kitchen *SOE's Man in Moscow* Intelligence and National Security 12:3 (1997), pp. 95 – 109.
20 TNA FO 371/29594 1941 Soviet Union: Notes by E.O. Cooke dated July 1941 on SO2 (SOE) proposal to explore Russian interest in assisting with smuggling explosives into Iran for use in the event of a German attack.
21 TNA FO 371/29594 1941 Soviet Union: Notes by E.O. Cooke dated July 1941.

contact with scattered Soviet intelligence networks in Europe. Potential recruits were sought among members of national communist parties living in exile in Moscow, as well as students attending specialist Soviet schools. The NKVD/Comintern glance also appears to have run over prisoners of war, suspected 'leftist deviationists' languishing in Soviet prisons, and possibly even young Spanish adults who as children had been educated in Soviet schools after fleeing the Spanish civil war. The principal recruitment agent for France was André Marty, who had oversight of all French students studying at the Soviet political schools. He was in all likelihood assisted in this task by the Italian communist and Comintern associate Giulio Ceretti and former PCF *député* Raymond Guyot, who had maintained strong connections with the international communist youth movement.[22]

Manouilski's June 1940 proposal to infiltrate the entire Moscow-based PCF leadership team back into France, was now revisited and in July 1941, Soviet officials asked Ambassador Cripps to secure the relevant permissions to send Maurice Thorez, André Marty and Raymond Guyot to the UK for an onward mission to France, a request which Cripps passed directly on to London for review by Churchill and Foreign Minister Anthony Eden.[23] A reply was not sent to the Soviets straight away. Having heard nothing back from the British, Soviet Ambassador Maisky renewed the approach, suggesting this time a meeting between General de Gaulle and Maurice Thorez. Both Churchill and de Gaulle objected strongly. De Gaulle, wary of facilitating a rival political resistance group on French soil, was adamant that he wanted '*aucun rapport avec les personnes concernées.*'[24] Moscow backed off and the PCF leaders

22 Maurice Thorez, the Secretary General of the PCF who had been living in the USSR ever since Stalin ordered him to desert the French army in 1939, had been pretty much side-lined since his arrival, with the Soviet leader agreeing to meet him only twice during his five years of exile. For more on Thorez's position at this time, see Robrieux, *Thorez,* p. 262.
23 Giovaninetti, *Raymond Guyot*, p. 401.
24 Ibid, p. 401.

remained in the USSR. Over the following months Cripps instead spoke with Stalin on more general questions of potential liaison in Germany, the Balkans, and other areas – a subject Stalin reportedly welcomed, saying if the British 'would send the right people here it would be arranged at once.'[25] Discussions during July and August continued to range widely over the role of Iran and the Dashnaks, the release of Polish prisoners of war from Soviet camps, and the destruction of Caucasus oil fields but, this being the first ever attempt at coordination between Anglo and Soviet intelligence, the meetings naturally involved an elaborate dance, with precise offers accepted then retracted, or adjusted to the point of inconsequence.

Towards the end of July, Cripps became increasingly worried, declaring at one point that he no longer wanted to be 'mixed up more than necessary' in the business.[26] His reports to London were clear that the apparent lack of Soviet interest in meaningful intelligence cooperation would be better addressed through a high-level conference than through backroom deliberations. Observing also that a British sense of superiority was potentially harming negotiations, he further suggested that future negotiators would do well to treat the Soviet Union as an equal in order 'to correct the twenty years of distrust and suspicion between the two nations.'[27] Soviet trust might also have been damaged by British attitudes towards information security: Despite the secrecy of the talks, a surprising number of people on the British side were privy to fairly detailed information about their content. Whereas Guinness reported that, for the Soviets, only Stalin, Molotov, M. Nikolaev, Chichaev and, tellingly, a 'M. Beria whom I don't know' were privy to the detail of the bilateral conversations

25 TNA FO 371/29595 Moscow to FO, 27 July 1941.
26 Ibid.
27 H. Harnak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow, June 1941 – January 1942', *The English Historical Review* 97/383 (1982), pp. 338 – 340 citing J.D. Langer, 'The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission and the debate over unconditional aid for the Soviet Union, 1941', *Journal of Contemporary History* 14/3 (1979), pp. 463 – 82.

(although how he could have known this is not clear), on the British side reports were circulated amongst a broad group of officials in the Foreign Office as well as MI5, SOE and SIS – from whence, thanks to Kim Philby and John Cairncross among others, certain details doubtless reached the NKVD.[28] This rather undermines Keith Jeffery's assertion that the first SIS chief Sir Stuart Menzies heard of the SOE-NKVD arrangement was when he was handed a leaked copy of an SOE report in February 1942.[29]

Following a further period of intense negotiations, on 16 August, a draft agreement between SOE and the NKVD was finally ready for circulation. London argued that the text as it stood went too far.[30] Key points such as the Soviet request for a liaison mission in London were met with particularly strong opposition from the UK, but Guinness pushed back from Moscow, insisting that a refusal would make a very bad impression.[31] One of Guinness' reports to London gives a sense of what the Soviets were apparently willing to 'offer' at the time:

> '[the Soviets] have many active groups in countries close to us but cannot communicate with them. They badly want to install a W/T set in G.B. somewhere and are also prepared to let us have the same facilities in Russia or to let us use their W/T to Bulgaria or any other country. Again, they are quite prepared to give the names and passwords for their groups in France, Holland, etc. and we can put our agents [in touch] with them. In fact, they are anxious to play the whole game even to giving me their toys and W/T sets to take back with me. If you can accept the draft agreement it will I am sure mean a great

28 TNA FO 371/29596 1941: Soviet Union. Note from Guinness of 16 August 1941. Seemingly oblivious to the weakness of its internal security, SOE would later suggest that the NKVD had probably discovered a significant amount about SOE's internal operations from the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the BCRA.
29 Jefery, *MI6*, p. 356. See West and Tsarev, *Crown Jewels*, pp. 303 – 345 'the Philby Reports', for multiple examples of information reportedly leaked by Philby to Moscow, including details of the BCRA, various members of SIS, and Operation Overlord. West and Tsarev note that documents showing Philby's prodigious output were stored in what in 1998 was referred to as the 3rd Department of the First Chief Directorate of the KGB.
30 TNA HS4/243 25 June 1941, 'S.O.2 [sabotage] Service for the USSR'.
31 TNA FO 371/29596 1941: Soviet Union. Message from Guinness to London on draft of SOE-NKVD agreement, 11 September 1941.

> deal to our organisation and in any case I would like to have your approval or amendments to it by wire as soon as possible.'[32]

A fortnight later, Guinness returned to London with a revised proposal. Foreign Office officials and Frank Nelson of SOE again debated the terms before sending Guinness back to Moscow on 30 September 1941 to sign – in the margins of the Moscow Supply Conference - an Agreed Record of Discussions and a Preliminary Survey of Joint Subversive Policy.[33] These documents, which led to the British training, equipping and infiltrating a number of Soviet agents into enemy and enemy-occupied countries, were never signed by any politician. Of particular interest to this study is the paragraph of the 'Preliminary Survey' relating to France, which stated the 'British will give the Soviet party assistance in establishing communication with their organisation in France and will despatch Soviet agents for this purpose.'[34] Mindful of de Gaulle's negative reaction to Moscow's proposal of sending PCF leaders Thorez, Marty and Guyot to France, it was not until the second quarter of 1942 that the existence of the arrangement, or details of any of its terms, were revealed to the Free French, or indeed any of the other Allied governments or representatives of the enemy-occupied countries into which the NKVD agents were dropped.

After the agreement was signed, Guinness returned and George (now Lieutenant Colonel) Hill proceeded to establish SOE's mission in Moscow, codenamed SAM. The (eventually four) members of the SAM mission were inevitably watched closely, and their offices were bugged. It is quite possible that the same welcome was extended to the NKVD representative, Colonel

32 TNA FO 371/29596 1941: Soviet Union. Message from Guinness to London on draft of SOE-NKVD agreement, 11 September 1941.
33 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Notes on the Russian Section of SOE, p.1. See also TNA CAB 99 Papers 1 -11 on Moscow Conference of 29 September to 1 October 1941 and TNA CAB 99/7 – 1 & 2 for the British record of the discussions. Martin Kitchen mistakenly claims that it was George Hill who signed the agreement in Moscow in September 1941.
34 TNA HS 4/328 Copy of Agreed Record of Discussions between British and Soviet Representatives (original Sept 1941 agreement) and the Preliminary Survey from 1941.

Chichaev, who arrived in London as the SOE-NKVD agreement was signed. Chichaev, a former revolutionary who bore the marks of his guerrilla past in the form of a bullet scar on a damaged left hand, was provided with a wireless set to enhance communication between London and Moscow but, unsurprisingly, no available British records point to his having been monitored, or his offices compromised in any way.[35] Following a hastily arranged welcome at King's Cross station 'by a group of British leftists with clenched fists and singing Communist songs' Chichaev hit the ground running, telling anyone who would listen that there were hundreds of highly trained agents in the Soviet Union ready and waiting to be dropped into occupied Europe, and that all that was needed was for the UK to provide safe passage through the UK and onward infiltration into Europe.[36] Widespread propaganda disseminated in UK-facing publications such as *Russia Today*, which described the fearless exploits of Soviet guerrillas doubtless reinforced the impression of Red Commandos primed to strike against German occupying forces in France.[37] By the end of October 1941, arrangements had been made to infiltrate a number of NKVD/Comintern agents – often referred to in British documents as 'Russian agents' although in fact they originated from Germany, Austria, France, Poland and Spain – into various countries on the continent.

Over time, SOE conducting officers – individuals who would ideally speak the agent's language fluently, attend to needs as they arose, and attempt to draw out information where possible

35 KV 2/2827 Notes on the Russian Section of SOE, p. 8.This document, based on observations made by SOE officers in the UK and Russia, describes Chichaev as a short, well-built and generally mild-mannered man of about 42 years of age, who had reportedly risen to be a Colonel in the Red Army before transferring to the Soviet secret police (OGPU) and then the NVKD but who seemed not to take any decisions himself.
36 For more on the early stages of Anglo-Soviet intelligence cooperation following Chichaev's arrival, see Smith, *Sharing Secrets*, pp. 35 -40.
37 There was a vast range of pro-Soviet material available to readers in the UK in 1942 including Russia Today, the Practical Press, and Soviet War News Weekly, which carried articles with titles such as Red Commandos: A new Guerilla Terror (2 January 1942) and Guerillas: Pictures from the Front Back Home After Wiping Out German Units (26 February 1942).

- observed that many (though not all) of the agents arriving from the Soviet Union came inadequately prepared, under-resourced, and in some cases apparently reluctant to carry out their missions. Chichaev refused to acknowledge any deficiencies in his agents' preparation, however, instead lambasting his British counterparts for their inadequate provision of essential resources, and the paucity of available aircraft.[38] For their part, SOE officers, having been led to believe that support would be limited to providing accommodation and onward infiltration into the continent only, frequently expressed frustration at sweeping Soviet demands and complaints concluding that, in general, the NKVD missions 'caused a great deal of trouble, waste of time and energy on our part – a fact which never seemed to be properly appreciated by our Russian colleagues, who were forever carping at our slowness and inefficiency.'[39] Tensions were heightened by the fact that the British had agreed to facilitate infiltrations into Western Europe on the condition that SOE would be offered similar facilities to assist their own agents elsewhere - a condition that, to SOE's eternal chagrin, was never met.

The bubbling tension between the NKVD and the SOE Russia Section in the UK went completely unnoticed by the British public, who were experiencing something of a political volte-face. Having poured scorn and vitriol on Germany's former 'ally', the British media now rallied to embrace Britain's new partners-in-war. Soviet ambassador Maisky noted in his diary of 27 June:

> '…*bewilderment* is still palpable in the minds of the public. Psychologically, this is quite understandable. Only recently 'Russia' was considered a covert ally of Germany, all but an enemy. And

38 Both the British and Americans had scaled up production of aircraft in order to meet high demand from the Soviet Union, but planes destined for the Royal Air Force were jealously guarded by the RAF and SOE had to battle for the release of air crew for their own missions.
39 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Notes on the Russian Section of SOE, p. 2.

> suddenly, within 24 hours, it has become a friend! This transition was too abrupt, and the British *mentality* has yet to adjust to the new state of affairs.'[40]

Conservatives and Labour Party leaders alike quickly discovered that anti-communist and anti-Soviet rhetoric now had little or no impact on audiences, and actually risked being counter-productive.[41] Contrary to orders from the Labour leadership some district Labour parties began to stand in solidarity with their communist comrades. The Norwich District Labour Party, for example, called on the British government to prove its solidarity with the Soviet cause by lifting the ban on the *Daily Worker*, which had been in place since the beginning of the year.[42] Conscious of the changing political atmosphere, Churchill instructed the Ministry of Information 'to consider what action was required to counter the present tendency of the British Public to forget the dangers of Communism in their enthusiasm over the resistance of Russia.'[43] In July 1941, R.H. Parker, Head of the Home Division at the Ministry of Information, wrote to the Director General of the BBC noting his concerns that a surge in support for Russia might 'equally popularise Communism as a method of political living'.[44] His Majesty's Government continued to censor pro-Soviet messages for fear 'that popular admiration for Russia would too often crystallise into Communism'[45] and, despite criticism from the press and in Parliament, the BBC was not allowed to play the Soviet national anthem, the Internationale, as part of its daily broadcast of Allied national anthems.[46]

40 Gorodetsky, *Maisky Diaries*, p. 368. Diary entry of 27 June 1941.
41 Schneer, *Ministers at War*, p. 124; P.M.H. Bell, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (London, 1990), p. 29.
42 Thorpe, 'Locking out the Communists', p. 230.
43 Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 135.
44 Sonia O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945* (Oxford, 2004), p. 48,
45 Ibid, p. 134.
46 Bell, *Bull & the Bear*, p. 39. The Internationale was first broadcast on 22 January 1942.

A large number of fundraising benefits, concerts and demonstrations were nonetheless held in support of the USSR. Lord Beaverbrook, who had been appointed by Churchill as British representative on the joint head of the UK-US mission to the Soviet Union to negotiate unconditional aid to the Soviet Union to which the SOE mission had been secretly attached, realised that a pro-Russia campaign in the wake of the German invasion could stimulate production in British factories. His 'Tanks for Russia' week launched to great success in Birmingham in September 1941. It is worth here citing Jonathan Schneer who, in his detailed 2015 study of the trials and tribulations of the British war cabinet, concluded that:

> '…the German invasion of Russia transformed [British communists'] outlook. Now, with the socialist Motherland under attack, Beaverbrook's production drives had to be supported wholeheartedly. For the first time, the Conservative imperialist millionaire lord and the Communist shop stewards, who served as intermediaries between workers and trade-union leaders, saw eye to eye...[Beaverbrook's newspapers] echoed his cry of all possible support for Russia.'[47]

On 12 October, the adjustment appeared to be complete. After Maisky had delivered an address to a large international youth assembly at the Albert Hall, which was reportedly met 'with loud applause', he noted in his diary 'Everything 'Russian' is in vogue today.'[48]

Churchill was acutely aware that the entry of the USSR into the war was being closely linked in certain quarters to the work of Sir Stafford Cripps in Moscow and that his own suitability as the leader of a 'People's War' was being questioned. Labour MP Ivor Thomas wrote to a colleague that 'Winston has never, owing to his background and record, been able to capture the affections of the working classes as [Lloyd George] did…there will be a change in time,

47 Schneer, *Ministers at War,* p. 160.
48 Gorodetsky, *Maisky Diaries,* p. 394. Diary entry of 12 October 1941.

and inevitably (though possibly after a short interlude) Cripps will be PM…'[49] While this could be dismissed as wishful thinking from a fellow socialist, Conservative MPs were also alive to the political currents, with Quentin Hogg arguing in the House of Commons that 'if you do not give the people social reform…they are going to give you social revolution.'[50] Oblivious to the fact that Cripps had in fact become deeply disillusioned with the Soviet model, which he no respects believed could be imported wholesale to Britain, many British communists and non-communists alike revered him as the hero who had helped to create an Anglo-Soviet entente that would be good for Britain. Sections of the press suggested he might return from Moscow to challenge Churchill for the leadership of the country: 'Someday Sir Stafford will return from Moscow' wrote one journalist. 'He will have a great following. His sense of power, never modest, will be developed fully. He will be dressed up in the garb of leadership – and he will find somewhere to go!'[51]

With pro-Soviet feeling running high, MI5 returned with vigour to monitoring the political activity of émigré communists in the UK. Among those watched closely was Karl Groehl, who had been observed associating with a broad range of individuals, including the communist journalist Hans Jaeger, since his arrival from Lisbon on an SOE-sponsored flight in the autumn of 1940.[52] MI5 monitoring of Groehl's movements also pointed to regular contact with Stanislas Szymonzcyk, a contributor on military affairs to the SIS-funded monthly review *France Libre*, Alta Marta Lecoutre, and possibly also André Labarthe, the editor of *France Libre* who lived with Lecoutre and was at one point suspected by the British authorities of being a

49 Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 208.
50 HC Debate 17 February 1943 Vol. 386 cc 1742 – 916.
51 Schneer, *Ministers at War*, p. 124.
52 Donald Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (London, 2000), p. 30 refers to Hans Jaeger as a communist journalist and propaganda expert.

Soviet agent.[53] An informer called 'Thomas' confirmed to MI5 that both Szymonczyk and Lecoutre had been operating on behalf of the Soviet Union in 1940, but considered it unlikely that they would have carried on their underground activity into 1941 given the strength of their public profile. The fact that there had been no evidence of espionage activities since their arrival in the UK was not, however, seen as conclusive evidence of their purely political role as it was 'quite consistent with the general practice of Soviet agents that they should spend a considerable time after their arrival in this country in establishing a bona fide business cover for any underground activities in which they may wish to engage.'[54] Despite the large question mark hanging over Labarthe, Lecoutre and Szymoczyk, it was ultimately decided that they should be left untouched given Labarthe's public profile and the political repercussions of arresting him or his close acquaintances. As for Groehl, MI5 professed themselves astonished when they learnt that the man they had been tailing was in fact working for SOE. After an internal investigation during which Groehl's long-time Section D/SOE colleagues vouched for his reliability, MI5 concluded that Groehl had in all likelihood been meeting with Labarthe and Szymonczyk as part of his regular, 'journalistic' activities. Having apparently failed to establish that Groehl had known Szymonczyk for twenty years, SOE saw no reason to terminate his employment. Groehl's position may also have been strengthened by the fact that George Hill in Moscow was at the time arguing strongly for the use of Comintern agents

53 Szymonczyk's file at the National Archives in Kew is closed until 2064. A search of the UK National Archives records has revealed no publicly available file for either André Labarthe or Alta Marta Lecoutre, although the 'ILLICIT RADIO TRANSMISSIONS BETWEEN LONDON AND MOSCOW (1940)', otherwise known as the Venona transcripts, held at the Library of Congress Washington, describe Alta Lecoutre as having been Szymonczyk's wife, the secretary of Labarthe and at one time the mistress of French Aviation Minister Pierre Cot. See: www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/Venona-London-GRU.pdf , pp. 30, 40, 57, 93 & 125. These Venona cables make it clear that at the very least Lecoutre was passing information to Moscow in 1940.

54 TNA KV 2/2171 Memorandum signed R. Pilkington of MI5, 8 April 1941.

to penetrate into Germany, although later SIS reports state that he was effectively living as a 'pensioner' whilst in the UK, implying he carried out little work for SOE.[55]

It is not clear to what extent, if any, Groehl maintained contacts in France where the German resistance association *Travail Allemand* was establishing 'extensive cooperation not only with German and Austrian anti-fascists, but with Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Rumanian, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian patriots who happened to be in France'.[56] According to Rieber, 'the immediate purpose of this international network was to protect the remnants of Communist organizations against Nazi persecution.'[57] Following instructions from Dimitrov, Belgium-based Eugen Fried informed national communist parties in the summer of 1941 that they should secure themselves a place at the forefront of resistance activity by engaging in extensive sabotage of factories, railways, roads, and telephone lines.[58] The next step was to re-assert Moscow's control over these groups.

Intelligence pointing to a 'drift towards extremes – fascism or communism – by the younger generation' in France provoked a detailed British analysis of the political situation in the country, with a focus on the political groups to whom HMG might feasibly provide support.[59] The resulting report suggested that the monarchist movement in France lacked all credibility and that only the Radicals, Socialists and Trade Unionists appeared to have 'saved from the wreck some faith in the ideals of the Third Republic.' However, echoing fears raised when Grand and Dalton had promoted such links, some within SOE argued that if the British were found to have encouraged these groups, it could not only embarrass the efforts of HMG to

55 O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil*, p. 18.
56 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party,* p. 21.
57 Ibid.
58 Annie Kriegel & Stephane Courtois, *Eugen Fried: Le Grand Secret du PCF* (Paris, 1997), p. 370.
59 TNA HS 6/309 Untitled, undated Minute which, from its position in the files, is likely to have been written in September or October 1941.

reach an agreement with Vichy or Weygand, but might also 'antagonise sections of the community who, while opposed to Left-wing ideas, may one day be prepared to help…against Hitler.'[60] SOE concluded that the wisest course of action would be to 'appeal to the industrial workers as such, and to avoid taking any positive line in internal politics.'[61]

Keeping abreast of developments from London, and keen to cement his position as the primary representative of those who wished to take up arms for France, de Gaulle ordered Free French representatives in Moscow to broach the subject of establishing formal relations between his movement and the Soviet Union.[62] Having been briefed by the British ambassador that any Soviet recognition of the Free French leader that differed to that offered by Britain would cause great embarrassment, Stalin indicated he would be willing to establish relations along the same lines as those agreed between the Free French and the UK and on 26 September 1941, the USSR recognised de Gaulle as 'chief of all the Free French.'[63]

From Moscow's perspective, the political control exerted by Stalin, the Comintern and the NKVD over operations in France was worryingly diminished. Although by July 1941 Jacques Duclos had overseen the establishment of the clandestine PCF, Charles Tillon had established the *Organisation Spéciale* (later to become the FTP), and some small Red Army intelligence networks continued to operate in the country, communication between these entities and Moscow was limited. The question of how to inspire and incentivise French youth to join the PCF or the *Organisation Spéciale* (OS) instead of any other of the myriad other resistance organisations springing up across France preoccupied Raymond Guyot, who from Moscow

60 TNA HS 6/309 Untitled, undated Minute which, from its position in the files, is likely to have been written in September or October 1941
61 Ibid.
62 Charles de Gaulle, *Call to Honour: 1940 – 1942* (London, 1955), p. 229.
63 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, p. 7.

oversaw communist youth activity in France, with a particular focus on active hubs in Paris and Lyon. That Moscow and the underground PCF wished to harness this pool of potential propagandists and saboteurs is reflected in the fact that communists closely involved with the *Jeunesses Communistes* featured prominently among the NKVD agents sent to France under the SOE-NKVD agreement.[64]

It is likely that, even before the ink had dried on the SOE-NKVD agreement, the NKVD settled on Guyot as one of the first agents to be sent back to France. But he was not *the* first. The woman in question, who arrived in Scotland by the boat 'Ijora' on 19 November 1941 alongside two male agents destined for Germany, carried documentation in the name of an Anna Ouspenskaia. Ouspenskaia was in reality Szyfra Lypszyc, a Polish member of the PCF who had been tasked with reinvigorating a Paris-based Soviet intelligence network. Lypszyc and the two Germans, who had travelled to the UK under the aliases Petr Kousnetsov and Pavel Koubitsky, were accompanied by a British NCO to Inverness, from whence they were escorted on to London by an SOE representative. In the evening of 23 November Lypszyc was driven to the Drokes, an SOE 'finishing school' at Beaulieu in Hampshire, where she stayed for an indeterminate number of days before returning to London.[65] The purpose of her visit is not clear - the school having not yet accepted any students. Denis Hendy, who as a boy lived in a cottage on the grounds of Beaulieu, was later adamant that the first students housed at the Drokes had been a group of Spaniards who arrived in February 1942.[66] A different account states that British troops arrived to take over the house a few weeks prior to the arrival of the

64 Giovaninetti, *Raymond Guyot*, p. 17. Despite its prominent role in the French Resistance, the *Fédération des Jeunesses Communistes* or *l'Internationale Communiste des Jeunes* (communist organ of Zone Sud during the Occupation) in the French resistance has received relatively little attention in the historiography of the French resistance.
65 HS 4/340 PICKAXE 1 – Anna Ouspenskaya. Detail of UK itinerary.
66 Cyril Cunningham, *Beaulieu: Finishing School for Secret Agents 1941 - 1945* (Barnsley, 2005), p.23.

Spaniards. Both fail to acknowledge that Lypsyzc appears to have beaten them all to be the first agent to use the house that is now so inextricably linked to British sabotage and spy craft.[67]

On arriving back in London from Hampshire, Lypsyzc was interviewed by MI5 and SOE who ascertained that she had 'definitely worked for the Soviet government as an agent on some previous occasion', that there was no doubting her commitment to the communist cause, and that as far as France was concerned she believed that the country 'could only survive as a national entity if the communist party came to power'.[68] As far as the details of her mission were concerned, SOE gleaned that Lypszyc was to make contact with Soviet intelligence agents in Paris to pass on instructions, cash and codes that would assist in the re-establishment of wireless communications between Occupied France and the USSR.[69] Opinions as to the potential for the mission to succeed were mixed: one SOE report noted that Lypszyc's 'insignificant' demeanour and previous experience as an agent suggested she had a reasonable chance of reaching Paris. Another, however, considered her chances of reaching the French capital were 'remote, failing the most extraordinary luck'.[70] Despite her strong Polish accent and the fact that she had been assessed by a British doctor to have 'threatening Basedow's' (an auto-immune disease that causes hyperthyroidism) SOE ultimately concluded that the cover story they had created for her was robust enough to

67 Cunningham, *Beaulieu*, p.82.
68 TNA HS 4/340 Untitled, undated report on Anna OUSPENSKAYA likely prepared by SOE (possibly her conducting officer Charles Milnes Gaskell) between 1 and 4 January 1942.
69 TNA KV 2/2827/2 'Recent analysis of services known to have operated or be operating to France' drafted in March 1946 reveals that SIS was aware of these details at least.
70 TNA KV HS 4/340 Detail provided in an untitled, undated report on Anna OUSPENSKAYA likely prepared by SOE between 1 and 4 January 1942 contrasts with the opinion given in a note dated 3 January 1942 fromL/PS1 (possibly L/Cpl Kratzoff) to John Senter, Director of Security and SOE liaison officer to SIS (AD/P).

support her in achieving the aims of her mission.[71] Destined to depart the UK at the beginning of 1942, the success of Lypszyc's mission became of vital importance to SOE when the first NVKD infiltration – involving the two men with whom Lypszyc had travelled from the Soviet Union – met with disaster. On returning from an aborted drop on 29 December 1941, their plane crash-landed at Stradishall airfield, with the resulting fire killing one of the agents and all of the crew.[72] The second agent was so severely injured that he had to spend several months recovering and learning to walk again.[73] The Soviets were convinced for some time that the disaster had been orchestrated by the British.[74] For Churchill, who had met both Koubitsky and Kousnetsov – although, strikingly, not Lypszyc – before their ill-fated departure

71 TNA KV HS 4/340 Undated note on Anna OUSPESNKAYA, likely written between 1 and 4 January 1942. Both Bourgeois and O'Sullivan have claimed that 118 Boulevard Raspail, which featured in Lypszyc's cover story, was the contact address of a major Soviet Intelligence Network. If this was indeed a meeting place for members of an NKVD or GRU intelligence network in France, it follows that SOE could not, and would not, have supplied this address for her story. The actual wording in the SOE report is imprecise, stating only that Lypszyc was 'given address 118 Boulevard Raspail'.

72 TNA HS 4/336 Secret memo from MO to DP1 of 29 December 1941 states that 'one of the Pickaxes was pinned underneath the wreckage and no doubt killed instantly'.

73 Petr Kousnetsov, the agent severely injured in the 29 December air crash, was eventually dropped into Holland in 1942. Later MI5 reports connect him with the Soviet intelligence communications service ISCOT Service 8. Contradictions and ommissions in the official records add to the secrecy surrounding this first, unsuccessful, mission codenamed SAUTERNE I with discrepancies between SOE documents and the RAF Operations Log for 138 Squadron. It is possible that the RAF Operations Log was deliberately falsified. Stafford, working from documents in the PICKAXE files in the National Archives at Kew, claims that, in order to avoid difficult questions about the burial of an unknown agent, Koubitsky's body was jettisoned at sea. TNA AIR 27/956/1; David Stafford *Churchill & Secret Agents* (London, 2013), 296 (Kindle edition); International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln: www. https://losses.internationalbcc.co.uk/loss/223505. It is possible that the disastrous end of this first PICKAXE mission prompted the KPD leadership in Moscow to urgently activate alternative plans as, shortly after news was received of the plane crash, senior KPD cadre Wilhelm Knöchel was ordered to leave his base in Holland and make his way to Berlin to establish a base for the heads of a secret KPD secretariat and to provide Moscow with 'mood reports' on Germany

74 The disastrous end of this first PICKAXE mission may have prompted the KPD leadership in Moscow to urgently activate alternative plans as, shortly after news was received of the plane crash, senior KPD cadre Wilhelm Knöchel was ordered to leave his base in Holland and make his way to Berlin to establish a base for the heads of a secret KPD secretariat and to provide Moscow with 'mood reports' on Germany. Knöchel was preceded on this dangerous mission by three couriers, Willi Seng, Alfons Kaps and Alfred Kowalke, who were charged with finding suitable quarters for the group. See Dunke, *Die KPD*, p. 357.

in what has been described as 'the only time a Prime Minister has knowingly met Soviet operatives on duty', it was imperative that the next infiltration proceed without a hitch.[75]

MI5's Guy Liddell, who may have been involved in interviewing agents, considered the first two agents bound for Germany to have been tame 'Russians', who might usefully be pressed to reveal information about Russian knowledge of German intelligence.[76] Such interrogations, subtle or otherwise, were expressly forbidden under the terms of the secret agreement, but both sides attempted to circumvent the prohibition. Doubtless SOE officer Douglas Dodds Parker, who hosted Chichaev in the countryside around this time, sought to get his 'temporary friend' to divulge information of value, but handling officers also attempted to elicit useful intelligence from the agents themselves.[77] After a lengthy recovery, and prior to finally departing the UK in 1943, the surviving agent, Kousnetsov, reportedly stated that he had fought with the International Brigades in Spain and requested that his papers be prepared in the name of Bruno Kühn.[78] Through extended conversations a large measure of mutual respect developed between the German NKVD agent and his SOE handlers, with one SOE report describing Kousnetsov as 'a very extraordinary personality', calm, intelligent, and in possession of an 'astonishing' understanding of the arts. The report, which refers to multiple discussions about dialectical materialism, glowingly concluded that as an agent he 'would be a credit to any country for which he worked'.[79] What happened to Bruno Kühn, the

75 Donal O'Sullivan, 'Dealing with the Devil: The Anglo-Soviet Parachute agents ('Operation Pickaxe')', *Journal of Intelligence History,* 4/2 (2004), p. 55.
76 West, *Liddell Diaries*, p. 198. Diary entry 28 November 1941.
77 MC P2/2/2MS/24 Notes on Operation Whiskey written after the war, in which Dodds Parker also reported that he had 'kept in touch with his successors ever since; pulling their legs by saying that the KGB are always the best dressed, speaking perfect mid-Atlantic English'
78 A Lotte Kühn, who had a brother called Bruno, had worked closely with senior KPD member, Walter Ulbricht, whom she later married in 1953.
79 TNA HS 4/341 Most Secret note on 'Pickaxe Operation No.2, p.2 from D/P1 to D/CE dated 29 December 1942 and undated report on Pyotr KOUSNETSOV, i.e. Ivan Robert drafted prior to his initial, unsuccessful mission.

pseudonym of the only surviving Soviet agent to have met Winston Churchill while on active duty? Official histories of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) claimed that he died in 1941, perhaps mistaking him for his fellow agent who perished in the aircraft fire, or perhaps deliberately misleading readers to cover up his real fate.[80] Others have suggested that Kühn was arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam in 1943 and shot in 1944.[81] Whether Kousnetsov (or his comrade Koubitsky) was indeed called Bruno Kühn (which is unlikely), and what his actual fate was may never be known for certain. SOE claimed that NKVD representative Chichaev burned many of the documents relating to the men.[82] What is clear, however, is that at the outset the NKVD (likely with strong assistance from Moscow-based Comintern representatives) had selected higly intelligent, articulate and brave individuals, who were probably senior KPD cadres, to reinvigorate connections with intelligence networks and the underground communist resistance in Germany. This is important given claims that subsequent agents were of poor quality and unwilling to take on their dangerous missions.

With the body of one NKVD agent reportedly buried at sea to avoid awkward questions, and the surviving agent in a terrible state in an English hospital, Sonia Lypszyc became be the first NKVD agent to be infiltrated into Europe under the SOE-NKVD agreement. As she was physically unable to undertake a parachute jump, it was decided that she should be landed by boat on the coast of Brittany in the New Year. Lypszyc's arrival in France had become all the more urgent following the arrest of most of the agents involved in Moscow's radio service

80 Horst Dunke, *Die KPD von 1939 bis 1945* (1972), p. 367 claims that Kousnetsov was arrested by the Gestapo in around September 1941, possibly while trying to get in touch with the Schulze-Boysen network in Germany.
81 Hans Schafraneke, 'Im Hinterland das Feindes Sowjetische Fallschirmagenten im Deutschen Reich 1942–1944', in *Jahrbuch 1996: Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes* (Vienna, 1996), pp. 10 – 40.
82 TNA HS 4/341 Note from A.L. McLaughlin, NKVD liaison officer (D/P4) to Major J.D. O'Reilly, SOE General Section (D/CE 4) of 9 February 1943 stating that Chichaev had 'destroyed by fire' identity papers belonging to Ivan Robert which were handed to the NKVD lead directly and not taken by the British accompanying officer. The note states that 'steps are now being taken to see that this does not occur again.'

in Belgium during raids on their *rue des Atrébates* headquarters on 12-13 December 1941. Two of those arrested were coder Sofia Posnanska and radio operator Anton Danilov, both of whom had just finished their training and were about to move on to set up a Paris radio team.[83] In addition to setting up Lypszyc, Posnanska and Danilov in Paris, on 14 December Moscow had also instructed the Comintern lead in Belgium, Eugen Fried, to render additional assistance to Leo Trepper in operating an NKVD intelligence network running across Belgium and France.[84] Given Moscow was reportedly unaware of the Atrébates arrests until the end of January, this suggests a several-pronged push to reinvigorate a variety of intelligence networks in France during the winter of 1941/42.

While the Soviet Union focused on reasserting political control over Western European communist resistance groups before the opening of a 'Second Front', SOE was prioritising incitement to revolt in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Much of this was based on their appreciation of the state of internal resistance in those countries. In early August 1941, an SOE minute 'on the whole subject of revolt' suggested that, as far as the British were concerned, France still only ranked sixth in the order of organised resistance and preparation in occupied countries, behind Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium.[85] André Dewavrin, the head of the Gaullist BCRA, later claimed that the fact the British had become involved in the French resistance at all was due to a desire to prevent de Gaulle from having complete control over resistance movements in the country. SOE argued, however, that they had only set up a separate section for France because of a 'lack of progress made by the Fighting French in deciding on what policy to pursue over the development of

83 Bourgeois, *Véritable Histoire*, p. 116. The arrests took place on on 12 – 13 December 1941.
84 Ibid, p. 376. Trepper later availed of Jacques Duclos' communications links with Moscow.
85 TNA HS 6/309 Minute by R.H. Bruce Lockhart dated 4 August 1941. Information on the resistance in Greece and Yugoslavia was lacking at the time.

the French Resistance.'[86] Arguably, the British decided it was in their interest and their gift to oversee sabotage and subversion in France while the French were not united behind a single leader, while the Germans threatened to use a divided and defeated France as a launching site for attacks on the UK, and in the face of evidence that Moscow was looking to strengthen its own oversight of resistance in the country.

Due to SOE's late appreciation of the importance of supplying and organising resistance movements in France, the scale of material support in the summer and early autumn of 1941 was vastly inferior to that afforded other target countries. In September, for example, while Norway received 4,800 sten guns, 67,200 Hand grenades and 43,200 sticky bombs, France was sent roughly a third of that amount: 1,500 sten guns, 21,000 hand grenades and 13,536 sticky bombs.[87] This was largely due to the very limited reception committee in country. By October 1941 SOE's French (F) section had just 33 'bodies' in France. The final months of 1941, however, witnessed the start of a veritable scramble among the Allies for control of the nascent resistance movements in France. In November SOE declared that an internal reorganisation meant it now had 'a reasonably adequate machinery covering practically the whole of the world' and that it was, in particular, 'now ready to play a more important role in occupied Western Europe.'[88] Having started the year 'without a friend in the world', SOE had negotiated an unprecedented secret agreement with the NKVD on sabotage and subversion, recognised and responded to the Free French desire to coordinate resistance in France by establishing two separate entities – SOE F (SOE run) and SOE RF (Gaullist, but supported

86 TNA HS 7/1 Brief History of SOE: First draft of lecture notes for a course presumably aimed at briefing members of the military and other government departments, p.5; Passy, *2e bureau*, p. 63.
87 TNA HS 6/309 Undated spreadsheet titled 'Arms and Equipment Secret Army Groups'. This situation changed drastically in 1942. On 1 April 1942, for example, Norway received nothing and France took the lead with 4,500 sten guns, 63,000 hand grenades and 40,536 sticky bombs.
88 TNA HS 8/334 Note on reorganisation of London Headquarters, 12 November 1941.

logistically by SOE), and strengthened its internal organisation to the point that the Prime Minister was now fully on board and pushing for results.

Chapter V: Introducing NKVD agents into France

British logistical support to NKVD agents facilitated the successful re-establishment of wireless communication between a key network in Occupied France and the USSR in early 1942. As an indication of how important the Soviets considered this new avenue of infiltration to be, several more agents were rapidly prepared and sent from Russia to the UK. Neither de Gaulle, Giraud, nor British contacts in Vichy intelligence were informed at this point about SOE's involvement in the infiltration of communists into France, but as the Red Army achieved important victories in Eastern Europe, SOE became increasingly nervous about the activity of Soviet-backed agents in Western Europe and, seeking a way of rowing back on their support, began to argue that de Gaulle had a right to be informed and that the de Gaulle's French French government in exile, the *Comité National Français* (CNR), had a right to veto drops. However, de Gaulle's need to maintain Stalin's support for his position as leader of the CNR and to secure Soviet backing for his policy of rejecting Anglo-American involvement in running any post-war French administration prevented him from formally objecting to NKVD infiltrations no matter how incensed he may have been when he was eventually apprised of them. With de Gaulle playing the political long-game, which included reaching out to the PCF and the FTP, SOE began to question its own assistance to communist resistance groups and Churchill himself began to ponder the ramifications for post-war Fench politics. Generally, however, SOE agents in France continued to be given the latitude to decide who to train and arm with a view to carrying out sabotage attacks against the Nazi occupying forces.

Two of SOE's very first actions in 1942 serve as a neat illustration of the organisation's attitude towards operations in France at the time. On 1 January, a British plane manned by a crew from SOE's RAF 138 squadron dropped Jean Moulin, de Gaulle's emissary to the French

resistance, into the south of France. A little over a week later, NKVD agent Sonia Lypszyc boarded a boat bound for the Brittany coast.[1] Although she had spent six weeks in the UK, SOE had learnt very little about her beyond that she had worked as an agent of the Soviet Union on at least one previous occasion. It would be over seventy years before researchers, working from recently released documents in Soviet and French archives, were able to discover anything about her background. After studying medicine in Caen, Lypszyc had taken a job as a waitress in a bar in Toulouse, whilst at the same time carrying out unspecified work on behalf of the Comintern. French historian Guillaume Bourgeois has also suggested that Lypszyc served in the Pozo Rubio detachment of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. There is no evidence of a specific Pozo Rubio detachment, but it is possible she worked either at a field hospital of the same name, or for the Pozo Rubio training facility where Welshman Will Paynter ran a course for prospective officers.[2] After travelling to Russia from Spain, Lypszyc was reportedly arrested and imprisoned as a 'deviant element'. At the time, Polish communists were being ruthlessly purged from the Comintern. Several returning volunteers and observers alleged that André Marty had overseen the liquidation of hundreds of volunteers accused of Trotskyist espionage or deliberate sabotage although Carlos Serrano and Claude Pennetier have argued that these reports should be viewed with some circumspection, citing the falsification of the date and content of one of the key documents used by historians to justify claims of Marty's brutality.[3]

1 TNA HS 4/336 Most Secret message from Slocum re: Pickaxe I, dated 12 January 1942. See also TNA HS 4/340 Operation orders for' Operation Pick-Axe', 4 January 1942.

2 The suggestion that Pozo Rubio was in fact a school for officers is supported by testimony given by John G. Honeycombe in 1940 to the United States Committee on Un-American Activities *Hearings before a special committee on Un-American Activities, Vols 12 - 14* (Washington, 1940), p. 7744. See also Guillaume Bourgeois, V*éritable Histoire,* pp. 162 – 164 and O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil*, pp. 73 – 74 for their account of Lypszyc's early communist activity.

3 Carlos Serrano, *L'enjeu espagnol: PCF et guerre d'Espagne* (Paris, 1987); Paul Bolland, Claude Pennetier & Rossana Vaccaro, *André Marty: l'homme, l'affaire, l'archive* (Paris, 2005), pp. 30 & 172; Claude Pennetier's

Bourgeois claims that it was whilst Lypszyc was languishing in a Soviet prison that the NKVD identified her as a potentially suitable candidate to infiltrate back into France in order to make contact with a French GRU-NKVD intelligence network run by Robert Beck.[4] It was not uncommon for arrested members of the International Brigades to be offered a choice between frontline duties or facing social and political ostracism (or worse). Max Hastings has highlighted how, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, many former intelligence officers who had been charged with 'political' offences, were released on the understanding that they would spy for the NKVD[5] and MI5 interrogations have also revealed that both prisoners of war and veterans of the Spanish Civil War were used to infiltrate Germany.[6] Yet the importance attached to re-establishing communication between France and Moscow suggests it is unlikely that the Soviets would have taken a gamble of this magnitude on someone they genuinely distrusted. This points to Lypszyc having been more important to the NKVD than has previously been suggested. As Barry McLoughlin has noted in his history of the Austria-bound mission codenamed COFFEE, the profile of the agents generally involved: 'a working class background, political activity from an early age, a good communist party record, participation in the Spanish Civil War and/or attendance at the Comintern's International Lenin School.'[7] A large question mark, therefore, hangs over Lypszyc's true

entry for André Marty in the Maitron Ouvrier Mouvement Social: www.maitron.fr/spip.php?article24200. For an alternative view, see Oliver Todd, *André Malraux: Une Vie* (Paris, 2001), p. 237 – 238.

4 This has later been referred to as a French Red Orchestra network although, as Bourgeois has shown, the Gestapo referred only to the German NKVD network as the Rote Kapelle.

5 Max Hastings, *The Secret War: Spies, Codes and Guerrillas 1939 – 1945* (London, 2015), p. 174. For examples of the treatments meted out to alleged 'Trotskyists', see R Dan. Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington, 1982), pp. 171 – 172.

6 For an MI5 interrogation report on the subject of German NKVD agents, see KV 2/2827 Extract from Interrogation Report of Johann Sanitzer on the Komintern Funkspiel, dated July 1945. Interestingly, this report notes that any claims the Comintern had been disbanded were false and that the preparation of agents sent by the Comintern was considerably worse that the training received by the 'true NKVD'.

7 Barry McLoughlin, 'Proletarian cadres en route: Austrian NKVD agents in Britain, 1941 – 43', *Labour History Review,* 62/3 (1997), pp. 296 – 317.

relationship to the NKVD or Comintern – a leftist deviationist recruited to atone for her ideological 'sins' or a close and respected contact of the Comintern leadership?

In the event, Lpyszyc was able to quickly establish contact with Beck (alias ROMA), enabling the reinvigoration of a vital intelligence network which had lost contact with Moscow during the German invasion of France in May 1940.[8] Lypszyc was eventually apprehended by the Gestapo on 1 July 1942, having survived six months of underground work. Her fate has never been conclusively determined but it is likely she was shot following interrogation. Beck's network was destroyed shortly after, when he and eleven other Soviet agents were arrested and later executed. Many have taken the fact that Beck's arrest came shortly after Lypszyc's interrogation as evidence of her having betrayed the group under torture. It is equally possible that her movements and contacts were monitored prior to her arrest. The Germans did find out that she had made her way to France via the UK, but there is no indication that she provided them with any detailed information about her experience in the hands of SOE.[9].

But this is to get ahead of the narrative. Back in January 1942, an ebullient Chichaev claimed that the NKVD had great hopes that Lypszyc's and future PICKAXE missions, as the SOE-facilitated infiltrations came to be collectively called, would help breathe new life into Soviet intelligence in a year of decisive battles. Given Stalin's convinction that Britain was holding back on a Second Front from a desire to see Russia 'bled white', securing NKVD goodwill meant SOE could place a small but visible plaster on the weeping sore of Anglo-Soviet relations.[10] In fact, relations between Britain and the Soviet Union had reached such a critical

8 Beck's communication with the PCF leadership in Moscow had originally been assured by the Pole Jacques Kaminski.
9 TNA HS 4/336 SOE/Russia PICKAXE Projects November 1941 – December 1942; Bourgeois, *Véritable Histoire,* pp. 162 – 164.
10 Gorodetsky, *Maisky Diaries,* p. 414.

low in January 1942 that a few days after Lypszyc landed in France, British Ambassador Sir Stafford Cripps was recalled from his post in Moscow. A formerly sympathetic observer of the Soviet socialist experiment, Cripps' faith had been shattered by direct observation of life in Stalinist Russia.[11] For his part, Stalin found the British Ambassador dull and irritating. Cripps, describing Stalin's refusal to see him, and the Kremlin's failure to put on any farewell reception suggested, in a marvellous example of studied understatement, that these snubs had been designed to show that he 'was either slightly in disgrace or else that relations were not good between the two countries.'[12] But Cripps was not recalled just to re-set the Anglo-Soviet relationship. He was also the subject of Churchill's suspicions. In the hope of containing 'Britain's Man in Moscow' who some were suggesting as a potential leader for the next phase of the war, Churchill offered Cripps the posts of Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons.[13] Cripps, however, would not be silenced, giving a series of broadcasts and speeches on his return to the UK, which were credited with a surge in pro-Soviet sentiment in the United Kingdom.[14]

In his study of the British war cabinet Jonathan Schneer has claimed that 'in February 1942 it would have been reasonable to doubt [Churchill's] staying power, given that he was attempting to deal simultaneously with a world war, an increasingly doubtful and fractious parliament, and a public whose political sentiment was moving ever to the left.'[15] Indeed,

11 Schneer, *Ministers at War*, p. 120. Cripps to Monckton, February 2, 1941, Monckton Papers, New Bodleian Library, Oxford, Dep. Monckton Trustees 3.
12 TNA FO 371/32941 Letter from outgoing Ambassador Cripps to Sir Orme Sargent, 4 February 1942. Cripps' note was heavily commented upon by Foreign Office with one suggesting that His Majesty be informed and that the message be sent to Stalin that the new British ambassador should not be treated with such discourtesy. For more on Cripps' time in Moscow, see: H. Harnak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps', pp. 332 – 344.
13 Churchill would later choose the opposite tack, sending Cripps to Washington.
14 See, for example, Pathé newsreel *Allied Greetings to Russia*, 16 February 1942 www.britishpathe.com/video/allied-greetings-to-russia.
15 Schneer, *Ministers at War*, p.128.

towards the end of February Churchill was reported to be 'in a state of great depression and mental agony.'[16] With the Prime Minister facing a potential challenge from a left-wing rival at home, Anglo-Soviet relations in a state of flux, and five NKVD agents housed in secret locations in the UK awaiting onward infiltration into occupied Europe with further arrivals slated in the coming months, this would appear an odd moment for the British to deliberately seek to employ, or make contact with, Trotskyist agents in France.[17] Yet a document located in the French military archives at Vincennes claims that SOE – or SIS - was doing just that.

The report in question, produced for the BCRA in 1944, suggests that, on 10 January 1942, a 34 year old Czech parachutist going by the name of Félix Stargart (alias Shutz), '*se disant capitaine de la R.A.F. et envoyé par le service secret britannique en zone non-occupé, fut arreté par les services de la Surveillance du Territoire...alors qu'il se disposait à entrer en contact avec la femme BRAUSCH, épouse VAN HEIJENOORT...*'[18] Gabrielle Brausch, whose address was found on Stargart at the time of his arrest, was a lifelong communist activist and member of the Central Committee of the Trotskyist *Parti Communiste Internationaliste* (PCI). Her husband, Jean van Heijenoort, had been Trotsky's personal secretary, translator and bodyguard in Mexico.[19] After the fall of France, Brausch became one of the leaders of the underground PCI, travelling widely in the south of the country in an attempt to galvanise dispersed militants and publish communist tracts. By the time Stargart was picked up by the

16 Kenneth Young (ed), *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart II: 1939 – 1965* (London, 1980), p. 147.
17 In February 1942, one agent was recovering in hospital and a further four who had arrived in December 1941, were awaiting despatch to the neighbourhood around Vienna.
18 SHD Vincennes, GR 28 P 2/105 Parti communiste. – Situation, activité et propagande: notes, bulletins de renseignements, listes de membres. 1942-1944.
19 Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, *Biographical data on Jean van Heijenoort* (2004) https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/heijen/bio-bibl_vanheijenoort.pdf.

police, Brausch had already been arrested. The circumstances of her arrest have never been entirely explained.[20]

Who was Félix Stargart? What was he doing in the south of France, and what was his connection, if any, with British intelligence or SOE? A 2011 paper by Czech historian Petr Mallota has revealed that Félix Stargart was in fact Miroslav Jebavý, a Czech former French Légionnaire who claimed during a 1944 interrogation in Britain that he had been recruited by the British after the fall of France for missions in North Africa before being sent for training in the UK.[21] Jebavý's description of the training course closely matches those provided at the time by SOE but the National Archives in Kew have released no SOE personnel file (PF) for anyone by the name of Jebavý, Stargart, or Shutz (his supposed mission alias). Jebavý further claimed to have been infiltrated into France by the British in January 1942, but Pierre Tillet's excellent record of ex/infiltrations into France contains no mention of his journey. The fact that there is no SOE PF for Jebavý, or any available interrogation report that matches that found by Mallota in the Prague archives, points to his possible employment by SIS.[22] He may well, however, have had some involvement with SOE as it was reportedly SOE officers who held him for a fortnight in Brixton Prison after he returned to Britain in 1944, questioning his story that he had escaped from a French prison. For some, the rapid failure of his mission, and his subsequent escape suggested he had been turned by the Germans and sent back to

20 Entry in the *Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier et Mouvement Socialiste* for BRAUSCH, Gabrielle states that '*on avait trouvé son nom sur une liste d'adresses saisie sur un officier tchèque parachuté par Londres*.' https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article17821.

21 Petr Mallota, 'Voják druhého a třetího odboje Miloslav Jebavý', *Paměť a Dějiny*, Issue 4 (2011), pp. 108 – 124 in which he notes that many of the details in Jebavý's personal account of his wartime experience do not add up. An eight-page document recording Jebavý's interrogation by British authorities can be seen in the Czech National Archives in Prague – file number not known. Jebavý's first name is noted in some documents as Miroslav, and others as Miloslav.

22 Tillet's infiltrations list includes certain SIS missions, but it is doubtful that this is comprehensive.

the UK as a mole.[23] Why was Jebavý aiming to contact Trotskyists in France, if indeed that had been a primary aim? If the original mission had been to make contact with PCI cells on behalf of SOE or SIS, Jebavý would seem an odd choice for lead agent. This was, after all, a man who would go on to lead the Czech anti-communist resistance in 1948, for which he was hung the following year.[24] If Jebavý's aim was to infiltrate or undermine the PCI, then there are equally few reasons why either SIS or SOE would have been involved. Without access to SIS files, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether indeed there was any connection between Jebavý and British intelligence and, if there was, what the exact chain of events were that brought about his mission to France, its aim, or the precise circumstances that led to its apparent failure.

Shortly after Sonia Lypszyc and Miroslav Jebavý were infiltrated into France, arrangements were made for Cripps' replacement, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, to transition to Moscow. Clark Kerr had already proven his mettle as ambassador to China, developing positive relations with Chiang Kai Shek despite endless Foreign Office vacillation over committing financial aid.[25] He was an inspired choice to resurrect Anglo-Soviet relations, but not necessarily because of his record of supporting Chinese communists in the face of Foreign Office opposition. After presenting his credentials in late March 1942, an air raid forced Clark Kerr to take shelter with Molotov and Stalin in a secret bunker. The conversation turned to sex and smoking – far removed from the stilted exchanges on Soviet ideology that Stalin had endured with Cripps.

23 See Petr Mallota's article and also Ivo Pejčoch, 'Chtěli vyjet s tanky Cromwell na komunisty? Proces v roce 1949' (7 July 2013) http://www.vhu.cz/s-tanky-cromwell-na-komunisty-absurdni-proces-v-roce-1949/ and Otakar Liška and colleagues, 'Vykonané tresty smrti Československo 1918-1989' (nezahrnuje rozsudky německé justice) www.policie.cz>subor>sesit-02-prvni-vydani-pdf.

24 By order of the new Czech communist state, Jebavý and four other leaders of what the State Court labelled 'Prague-Žatec Action' were hung in 1949.

25 Donald Gillies, *Radical Diplomat: The Life of Archibald Kerr* (London, 1999), p. 93 and Edgar Snow, *Journey to the Beginning* (London, 1959), p. 200.

Following this meeting, Stalin sent the new British ambassador a large amount of his own pipe tobacco - a gesture aides noted was previously unheard of.[26] Kerr's arrival in Moscow might have made a small contribution to setting the relationship between the two powers on a steadier course but Churchill still needed some concrete 'wins' as evidence of Britain's willingness to assist the Soviets in the absence of sending an invasion force into Europe. SOE, which despite the Prime Minister's backing still had little to show for its early support of resistance networks in Europe, was keen to offer its services – and possibly secure a stay of execution - by facilitating further NKVD infiltrations.

As Kerr made his way to Moscow, three further NKVD agents destined for France arrived at Loch Ewe in Scotland following a bitterly cold two-month journey from Arkhangelsk. SOE called their contingent the BRANDY mission before later changing the name to RUM.[27] It was immediately obvious to SOE that, despite their names, neither Grigory Rodionov, Anna Frolova, nor Ivan Danilov were of Russian origin and all three were immediately given French aliases – Georges Robigot, Annette Fauberge and Pierre Dandin - to avoid arousing suspicion as they moved around the UK. The agents were lodged for a brief period at the Rhodesia Court Hotel, 29 Harrington Gardens, London despite complaints from Chichaev about the lack of security. While internally admitting that other elements of the agents' reception had been badly handled, SOE dismissed the complaint about the hotel, claiming that it had been thoroughly vetted and that the NKVD agents came into contact with no-one other than their SOE handlers and a couple of policemen from Special Branch. SOE then returned fire with their own volley of complaints: None of the agents arriving from the Soviet Union had arrived

26 Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. 126 citing TNA FO 800/300/24 Archibald Kerr, Miscellaneous correspondence.
27 The agents arrived in the UK on 11 February 1942. Their mission was codenamed BRANDY almost up until departure when, on realising that an agent in Holland was using the same code name, the PICKAXE mission was changed to RUM.

with the appropriate kit, clothing, or even cover stories. Neither, it appeared, had they received the much-vaunted 'rigorous' Soviet sabotage and subversion training about which the SAM mission had heard so much. In an attempt to provide the agents with some form of preparation, they were sent for four days' parachute training at Ringway aerodrome in Manchester[28] and were subsequently interviewed by an SOE officer who wove apparently personal details into cover stories designed to provide a plausible reason for the agent being in their given area of operation with a large amount of money in their possession. Cover names were agreed, and the relevant forged documentation ordered from SOE's in-house experts (although SIS raised concerns about – and at times actively sought to stop – SOE providing the NKVD agents with high-quality forgeries which could be used after the war).[29] Thus it was that SOE arranged for Rodionov/Robigot to become Marcel Menard, a travelling salesman from Dijon who had been demobilised from the French army in 1940 and was currently living in Lyon after having left an unhappy marriage, taking with him all the money and possessions that he could carry. Frolova/Fauberge was to slip into the role of Claude Jeanne Garnier, a young stenographer from Paris who had eloped with Menard. Danilov/Dandin, meanwhile, was to take on the character of Louis Pierre Dupré, a printer from Paris who had crossed the demarcation line in order to prevent a young lady from making the same hazardous journey to come and find him.

Partly because they made no request for sabotage material, but also due to their conversation and overall demeanour, SOE officers were convinced that the RUM agents were destined for political as opposed to operational work. Frolova/Fauberge/Garnier was the only one of the

28 All SOE training sites were given code-numbers. Ringway was STS 51. The site was in use between 1939 and 1957 and is now the site of Manchester airport.
29 TNA HS 4/336 Letter to Colin Gubbins, SOE Director of Operations (M) from Frank Nelson, Head of SOE (CD) dated 7 April, 1942.

three that SOE officers considered to be a 'hard' militant. Danilov/Dandin/Dupré was thought unlikely to 'take seriously his duties as a Soviet agent'[30] with one observer marking him down in a series of clipped remarks as 'French. Not intelligent; little confidence…Small, insignificant.'[31] Rodionov/Robigot/Menard, it was felt, would not withstand strenuous cross examination. An SOE officer commented: 'It struck me that his nerve was not good and he was inclined to tell too many lies.' The same officer went on to write: 'Incidentally, he did not give the impression of being a good Communist; on several occasions, he recounted his experiences in Russia and repeated "*Que c'est dur, que c'est dur, là-bas*".'[32] Similar comments crop up repeatedly in British reports of encounters with NKVD agents at this time. Descriptions are often given of 'drawing room communists' who gave the impression of being positively Right-wing on certain subjects. Such comments suggest that many senior British officials had very fixed ideas about how a communist ought to behave and – more than anything – how willing they would be to talk about their political convictions.[33] Because of their silence or their skills in dissimulation, the three RUM agents were more or less written off by the British as uninspiring.[34]

A number of agents did divulge certain information to the British in the hope of gaining sanctuary in the UK or Canada, although none of these were destined for France. It is possible that some were 'turned'. SOE did wonder if some of the more obviously distressed individuals might be *agents provocateurs*, but nonetheless agreed to arrange the defection of one group

30 TNA HS 4/342 PICKAXE Operations: WHISKEY, RUM. Documents detailing movements of PICKACE Party IV (RUM).
31 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Table listing details of the first eight agents to arrive in the UK.The same description appears on hispersonal page and in various other reports throughout the file.
32 TNA HS 3/342 PICKAXE Operations: WHISKEY, RUM. Documents detailing movements of PICKACE Party IV (RUM).
33 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Letter from H.A.R. Philby of SIS to Miss Bagot of MI5, 27 February 1946.
34 Philby later sought to adjust this image by remarking in internal letters that Rodionov/Robigot/Menard had appeared knowledgeable, and fond of good wine.

via the USA.[35] Frustratingly, only one known record exists of an NKVD agent's personal impressions of their SOE handlers, or their time in the UK in general. In a rare interview given by Danilov/Dupré/Dandin in the 1980s he stated that, from his perspective, the British officers were '*très corrects mais leur attitude était froide. Ils donnaient l'impression d'accomplir un devoir militaire qui requérait pas de rapports de sympathie.'* Danilov concluded by offering the somewhat disingenuous coda: *'Peut-être devions-nous çela du fait que nous étions des communistes*.'[36]

Beyond general conversation, which was closely observed by NKVD handlers, the Anglo-Soviet agreement expressly forbade SOE staff to question the NKVD agents about their background or the purpose of their missions. This does not appear to have prevented officers from trying to extract information by plying the agents with drink, taking them to the cinema to facilitate private conversation out of earshot, or rifling through an agent's belongings whilst they were out on training or in meetings. One such early episode in August 1942 revealed a book of names and addresses, which included contact details of one Oliver Green, a British former international brigader who was later found to have been collecting British military intelligence on German armaments on behalf of the Soviet Union.[37] More often than not, however, SOE officers had to content themselves with piecing together information from the apparently personal details provided by agents for the purposes of cover stories. This was the case for Frolova, whose SOE conducting officer noted she had in her possession a photograph of a

35 See reports on the COFFEE mission to Germany in TNA FO 371/36919 and TNA HS 7/278 SOE War Diary Russia, pp. 28 – 30 & 52.
36 AD SSD 283 J 69 GUYOT Raymond transcript of interview with Daniel Georges, page 15.
37 TNA KV 2/2827/3 A letter addressed to CSS Stuart Menzies, dated 31 August 1942, reveals that the purloining of an NKVD agent's kit provided SOE and MI5 with some vital leads to Soviet agents working in the UK. Oliver Green's MI5 file, KV 2/2205, notes that he claimed to have been recruited by the NKVD whilst in Spain but had lain dormant for two years. He reportedly refused to divulge any information about any sub-agents.

young boy, dated 10 July 1940, on the back of which was written the following message: '*Notre petit Jean Claude à Zata Francine en souvenir de notre grande amitié que rien ne pourra jamais effacer*'.[38] Perhaps believing the reference to 'Zata' (auntie) was a ruse, the SOE officer concluded that Frolova must have left a small son back in France and provided her with the cover name Claude Jeanne in his honour. This, at least, was the conclusion arrived at by SIS during a post-war review of the SOE files – an obfuscation possibly encouraged by Philby. Had SOE been able to find out more about Frolova's identity, they may have reached the more plausible conclusion that the note was penned on behalf of the son of her close communist comrade, senior PCF cadre Giulio Ceretti. While Frolova's mission name Claude-Jeanne Garnier may well have been a nod to young Jean Claude Ceretti, it is equally possible that Frolova was paying homage to Périni Vincentella Casanova, otherwise known as Danielle Casanova, leader of the *Union des Jeunes Filles de France* who, a matter of days after the NKVD agents' arrival in the UK, had been swept up in a wave of arrests of communists across Paris and the French provinces. At the time of her arrest on 15 February, Casanova was carrying a false identity card in the name of a Jeanne Garnier.[39] News of this devastating blow to the communist resistance in France may well have reached the RUM agents in the UK via Chichaev, prompting Frolova to choose a cover name that honoured a dear friend and highly respected comrade.

With their new cover and relevant documentation prepared, the three RUM agents were deemed ready to be infiltrated into France by the end of February. At 14:00 on 1 March 1942

38 TNA HS 4/342 PICKAXE Operations: WHISKEY, RUM. Documents detailing movements of PICKACE Party IV (RUM): FROLOVA Anna (Annette Fauberge), arrived UK 11 February 1942.
39 Casanova was arrested at the house of Georges Politzer, the man thought by police to be '*l'auteur principale de toute la literature communiste éditée et diffusé clandestinement'.* Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris 221 W 3 dossier 1.

they left their accommodation in London accompanied by Miss Jackson, a FANY officer, and three other SOE representatives. By 15:30 the party had arrived for a meal at Gaynes Hall, a Georgian mansion near the village of Perry in Cambridgeshire that operated as a 'hotel' for SOE agents about to be dropped into occupied Europe.[40] Special mention was made in telegrams preparing for their arrival that the mission included a 'girl' who, it was said, should be introduced as the secretary for the group and on no account be referred to as a passenger. Why this was is not clear, although it may have been because she was the first ever female agent to be parachuted by SOE into France.[41] Great care was taken that the group be kept apart from all other staff and agents and Miss Jackson was specifically instructed not to speak French to the female agent in earshot of anyone who was not aware she was a passenger. The agents were driven to RAF Tempsford in nearby Bedfordshire at 17:30 on 3 March, two hours before their scheduled take-off.[42] For an unknown reason, possibly last-minute jitters experienced by the Foreign Office, the flight was cancelled half an hour before take-off. Immediately after the RUM infiltration Gladwyn Jebb, by this point the soon to be outgoing CEO of SOE, wrote to the Foreign Office to say 'how grateful we are in regard to your decision concerning operation RUM. I feel pretty sure a decision in the contrary sense would have made our relations with the NKVD almost impossible, and would, therefore, probably have necessitated the withdrawal of our Mission from Moscow', which suggests that a decision to cancel the flight was overturned at the last minute following some frantic exchanges.[43] At 19:15, after notice was received that the cancellation had been reversed, the agents were

40 Gaynes Hall is referred to in SOE literature as STS (Special Training School) 61.
41 The Chilean Giliana Balmaceda, American Virginia Hall, and the Polish NKVD agent Szyfra Lypszyc who preceded Frolova had all reached France by boat.
42 The SOE file HS 4/342 notes that the agents departed RAF Tangmere, West Sussex but this does not tally with being lodged in Cambridgeshire, suggesting that the agents in fact departed from RAF Tempsford.
43 TNA HS 4/336 SOE Russia/PICKAXE Projects.Letter of 4 March 1942 from Gladwyn Jebb of the Ministry of Economic Warfare to Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

'dressed'. During this process, their clothes were checked for any compromising items such as receipts, coins and laundry marks, and the agents were provided with money, suicide pills, and a precious wireless set disguised as a suitcase.

Exactly an hour later, the three agents, transformed now into their mission characters Menard, Garnier and Dupré, and exhibiting what was described as 'excellent' morale, boarded a Whitley bomber.[44] The crew, all of whom were Czech nationals, guided the plane and its three passengers through low cloud and rain to the drop zone near Montpellier in the Hérault region of the z*one non-occupé*, otherwise known as the *zone libre*.[45] The plane arrived over the target area just north of the Mediterranean at 01:10 and, from a height of about 600 feet, the three jumped out over open country, within an estimated five miles of their chosen target area. By 05:36 the aircrew had returned to base.[46] This, for the British at least, marked the successful conclusion of an intense 3-week programme. As with the Lypszyc mission, NKVD representative Chichaev made several minor grumbles about SOE's general incompetence, but RUM had by all accounts gone very much to plan. Senior British officials were hugely relieved but now began to express the hope that any further missions to infiltrate 'Soviet' agents into Unoccupied France could be avoided. In his letter to the Foreign Office, Jebb, while delighted the RUM infiltration had concluded without any major hiccoughs, suggested that SOE's representative in Moscow be pressed to 'dissuade the NKVD by applying such arguments as he may think best, from sending over agents to this country destined for Unoccupied France and (to a lesser extent) for Occupied France, Belgium or Holland, and on

44 For details of the flight see TNA HS 3/342 PICKAXE Operations: WHISKEY, RUM. Daily Operations Report for 3/4 March 1942.
45 It had been agreed within SOE that Polish nationals should not be asked to fly Soviet agents – a decision which became even more important following the discovery in 1943 of the mass grave of Polish officers at Katyn.
46 TNA HS 4/342 Daily Operations Report for 3/4 March 1942.

the other hand, to encourage them, by all means in his power, to send over agents destined for Germany or Austria….'[47]

Very little has been written about the RUM mission's activity in France but a review of files in the Archives Départemental de l'Hérault in Montpellier has revealed that, as SOE discussed preventing further drops into France, the RUM agents landed safely in the grounds of the Domaine de Madone, a vineyard bordered by areas of scrub and hedgerows. Here, they set about burying their parachutes, rubber helmets, flying suits, strong fabric bags, empty munitions bags, gloves (one pair in beige leather and another of white silk), and five rubber shock absorbers. About a metre away, at the foot of a pine tree, they covered the torn, camouflaged parachute that had been attached to a collapsible container with branches and soil.[48] With several hours to go before dawn, they then embarked on a 27 km journey to the coastal town of Agde, where they separated – Dupré making his way to Toulouse and Garnier and Menard heading for Lyon.[49] Despite the low altitude of the plane, none of the villagers of nearby Montagnac reported to the police hearing any planes overhead. In fact, the alert was not sounded until a month later when, on 5 April, a Monsieur Benezech came across the torn parachute whilst checking over the vineyards and alerted the Montagnac police. A subsequent police investigation concluded that the parachutists must have landed at some point between 21 Feb and 1 March as locals vaguely recalled having been being woken around that date by the sound of an aeroplane flying overhead. Neither the regular (and often quite detailed) police reports sent to the Préfet of Montpellier, nor any of the urgent *notes de*

47 TNA HS 4/336 Most Secret message from Gladwyn Jebb of the Ministry of Economic Warfare to Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 4 March 1942.
48 AD Hérault 18 W 244 Report of 8 April 1942. The container bore marks suggesting it was packed on 28 February by an A BRUTON CPL.
49 Interview given by Daniel Georges in 1987, reproduced in Jean Crémieux-Brilhac*, Les Prisonniers de la Liberté* (Paris, 2002), p. 383. Also filed in AD SSD 283J 69 GUYOT Raymond.

renseignements from the period record any sightings of parachutes on the night of 3 March.[50] This is particularly surprising given the proximity of the drop zone to the Vichy internment camp at Agde, which housed thousands of political refugees and which would have been under constant surveillance.[51] The RUM party had clearly benefitted from either local complicity or a large dose of good luck.

Although SOE was aware that the RUM mission had been tasked with setting up wireless communication between Lyon and Moscow, followed by Paris and Moscow, and had even provided a wireless set for that purpose, SOE never established with any great certainty what it was that these three agents did in France. Even within the PCF to this day there is little clarity about the detail of their wartime activity.[52] SIS did not discover the real names of any of the agents dropped into France by SOE until after the war when Miss Small of MI5 wrote to Kim Philby, by then Head of the Russian section in SIS, to enquire about the true identity of the members of RUM. By way of response, Philby suggested in a non-committal way that Rodionov/Menard might possibly have been the French Communist politician Raymond Guyot, but he had no proof of this one way or the other. Philby offered little information about Danilov/Dupré although he did provide some useful clues as to the identity of Frolova, noting that she had joined the *Union des Jeunes Filles de France* in 1933, after which she had rapidly risen through the ranks, entering *École Leniniste Internationale* in 1935 under the alias of Madeleine DUPUY. Philby also offered that Frolova's brother Marcel, a Communist, had reportedly been killed in Spain in 1938 and that shortly after this, Frolova had moved to

50 Archives Départementales de l'Hérault, Montpellier. See especially: 18 W 244 Préfecture régionale (1941-1944): Notes de renseignement, correspondance, rapports, tracts 1942 – 1944.
51 Julian Jackson, *France: the Dark Years, 1940 – 1944* (Oxford, 2001), Appendix: The Vichy Camps of France, pp. 633 – 636.
52 Personal conversation with Marc Giovaninetti, 4 February 2020.

Belgium where she worked briefly with the head of the Comintern for Western Europe, Eugen Fried.[53] Whether any of this information was followed up, or passed on to the French, is not known. Following the defection of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean to Moscow in 1951, MI5 and the French *sûreté* once more began asking SIS probing questions about the PICKAXE operations, voicing a concern that the wartime agents might still be at large and working against British and French interests. It is not clear from the files that either received any more detailed information from SIS.[54]

Thanks to the opening of Soviet and French archives from the 1990s onwards it is now well established that Anna Frolova was in fact Francine Fromond, a 25-year-old French stenographer from the Seine St Denis area of Paris who had risen to become a leader in the *Union des Jeunes Filles de France*. Confirming Philby's earlier communication to MI5, the files show that Fromond had indeed spent several months in 1939 working closely with Fried, before she was arrested in Denmark along with Italian communist Giulio Ceretti, who had himself been involved in providing personnel for Beck's Paris-based GRU network (to which the previous agent Lypszyc had been sent).[55] Following an intervention by the Soviet ambassador to Denmark, both Fromond and Ceretti were released and made their way to Moscow, along with Ceretti's wife and two young children - one of whom was likely the Jean Claude of the photograph. The new arrivals were housed in Comintern residences alongside Maurice Thorez, André Marty, Raymond Guyot and their families. Ceretti later described Fromond thus:

53 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Letter from MI5 addressed to Kim Philby, 23 April 1946.
54 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Letter dated 1 March 1950 from K Morton Evans (MI5) to unknown recipient in SIS reporting French Sureté enquiries about Russian agents despatched to Western Europe during the war. See also letter dated 30 May 1956 from Miss F.W. Small (MI5) to unknown recipient (presumably in SIS) referring to French information concerning a suspected network of Russian agents operating in France.
55 Ceretti had, for example, suggested the Pole Kaminski as Beck's first wireless operator.

> '*toujours avec sa modestie naturelle, elle remplit les taches comme s'il s'agissait d'un travail quelconque…c'était une militante disciplinée, sans la moindre malice, sans le moindre machiavélisme, qui acceptait n'importe quelle tache qu'on voulait bien lui confier. Cette naiveté parfois m'inquiétait et je la voyais tellement confidante que je me demandais si je n'avais pas devant moi une inconsciente ou une simple d'esprit. Mais j'avais tort! C'était sa manière à elle d'être fidèle: faire absolument confiance aux dirigeants et faire le travail qu'on lui demandait, quel que soit le travail. Le Parti était pour elle une grande famille….*'[56]

Far from being a leftist deviationist plucked from a Soviet prison cell, as the first agent Sonia Lypszyc has been referred to, Fromond was right at the heart of the clandestine PCF structure and, from her base(s) in Lyon, she played a key role in assuring communications between France and the USSR until her eventual arrest in July 1943.

According to his SOE-sponsored false identity 'Marcel Menard' lodged at 9 rue St Georges, Vieux Lyon, a few paces from the address supplied to Fromond.[57] Contemporary maps indicate that number 9 was owned or occupied by a *Société de la Brèche,* the origins and activity of which appear to have been lost to local history.[58] The building, which still stands, is located in close proximity to a number of *traboules*, hidden covered walkways that allow pedestrians to pass from one building to another without the need to exit onto the street, an asset which Menard and other militant communists doubtless made the most of when moving from place to place, arranging meetings with members of the clandestine PCF. As those senior officials with whom he came into contact would have recognised immediately, Menard was in fact Raymond Guyot, the former French Communist *Député* who, as Secretary of the *Jeunesses Communistes* and a key figure in the Comintern with contacts in both the French and British communist parties had been of interest to the French and British intelligence

56 Giulio Ceretti, *À l'ombre des deux T: 40 ans avec Palmiro Togliatti et Maurice Thorez* (Paris, 1973), p. 211.
57 Fromond's address was given as 2 rue de Doyenné.
58 Lengthy research in a variety of archives, and conversations with local historians in Lyon as part of this research failed to reveal any information about the Societé de la Brèche.

services for many years.[59] His name had been put forward by Manouilski as early as 1940 as part of a group of PCF leaders who should be infiltrated back into France, and in 1941 a request to the British to that effect had been rejected outright. In 1942, however, he found his way back to France as part of an NKVD mission, going on to become one of the PCF's main organisers in the *zone Sud*.

The third agent, Louis Dupré, was in fact Daniel Georges, older brother of Pierre Georges who in August 1941 had carried out the first assassination of a German soldier on French soil during the occupation.[60] Georges had joined the *Jeunesses communistes* in 1928 at the age of seventeen. A printer by training, between 1936 and 1938 he had fought alongside his younger brother with the International Brigades in Spain. Like Guyot, he had enlisted in the French army at the outbreak of war with Germany but, unlike Guyot, had been sent to the Maginot Line where he had been taken prisoner by the Germans and put to work in a labour group near the Lithuanian border. Georges managed to escape and, along with fellow escapee Marius Villeroy, made his way to the Soviet Union in November 1940. A similar route was taken by several escaped soldiers, including the historian Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac. Georges and Villleroy were held in a series of prisons and camps alongside over 200 other - predominantly French - escaped prisoners of war, the majority of whom demanded passage to the UK after the Soviet Union entered the war on the side of the Allies in June 1941. Those POWs who declared their intention to make contact with de Gaulle's Free French forces were taken in hand by the British delegation to Moscow. Fourteen, including Georges, volunteered instead to serve the USSR. To their number was added a small group of soldiers who had

59 Geoff Andrews, *The Shadow Man: at the heart of the Cambridge spy circle* (London, 2015), p. 81.
60 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, pp. 88-89.

volunteered to join the Free French but had been rejected as 'undesirables' by Pierre Billotte, the de facto leader of the pro-Free French group of internees.[61]

Having elected to stay in the Soviet Union, Georges and his dozen or so companions were given rudimentary military instruction as well as lectures in communist politics and economics. It was at this point that Raymond Guyot reportedly visited Georges, providing a sketchy outline of the proposed PICKAXE mission to which Georges readily agreed. After the war, Georges recalled a meeting with Comintern head Georgi Dimitrov prior to his departure for the UK:

> 'On 9 October I was called to Moscow, to the headquarters of the Comintern, where I once again met Raymond Guyot. He escorted me to the office of Georges Dimitrov, who wanted to meet with us before we left for France. It happened to be my 30th birthday, which gave the interview a certain solemnity. I will remember it all my life…Speaking solemnly, he did not hide from us the difficulty of the situation facing the Soviet armies. If we were to be victorious, we would all have to fight. He spoke of his high regard for the French people and its communist party who, already, under the most terrible circumstances, was carrying on the fight in France. He wished us well, with a smile that gave us confidence. There was a young girl who was to go with us, Francine Fromond. She knew how to work a radio set and would be able therefore to maintain contact between us and Moscow. She never stopped transmitting throughout the war.'[62]

Georges later claimed that, after parachuting into the Hérault region, he made his way to Toulouse before moving back to Lyon, where he worked for a time as a printer before entering completely into a clandestine existence. While it is not known exactly where he lived, Georges' false ID, provided by SOE, listed his home address as 4 rue des Farges, situated in the hills of the 5ème arrondissement of Vieux Lyon between two important centres of resistance activity – the local Convent and the school.[63] According to some reports, Georges

61 Pierre Billotte would later become de Gaulle's Chief of Staff.
62 AD SSD 283 J 69 Raymond Guyot. Translation author's own.
63 Map provided by Régis Le Mer, Centre de la Résistance et la Déportation, Lyon.

acted at this time as a political liaison and instructor for the Front National in the Southern Zone, reporting to Georges Marrane (code name 'Gaston'), a communist former mayor and consummate networker who was instrumental in forging links between the communist and Catholic resistance.[64] Far from being a 'small, insignificant' figure who did not take his communist directives seriously, Georges is regarded by many within the modern-day PCF as a profoundly loyal communist who exhibited extraordinary bravery whilst working tirelessly for the French communist resistance.[65]

Shortly after the arrival of Guyot, Fromond and Georges in France, the Soviets floated the idea of linking up NKVD agents in France with SOE's own resistance networks. For the British this was unconscionable. A strongly worded note from SOE headquarters to the SAM Mission in Moscow read: 'We consider it highly dangerous and undesirable to establish communication between Russian agents and our organisation in France. We shall break the agreement in not so doing but, in the interests of our own agents' safety, we must adhere to this refusal.'[66] Many mistakes had been made in SOE's French operations as a result of major security lapses on the part of early agents and, as SOE broadened its operational experience, the organisation was determined that facilitating Soviet infiltration would not be added to the list of its disastrous miscalculations.

64 Crémieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers de la Liberté*, p. 334; Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, pp. 93 – 94; Conférence de Monique Georges, 'La famille Georges: Une famille de résistants pendant l'Occupation', 12 December 2009.
65 Private conversation with Marc Giovaninetti, 4 February 2020.
66 TNA HS 4/327 SOE/Soviet Policy D/P (Russia) Section and the Moscow Mission. Note dated 9 April 1942. See also note of 15 May 1942. Contrast this with the activity of Milton Wolff's American Committee, which in 1942 proposed recruiting communist veterans of the International Brigades for British and American operations behind German lines. Wolff was recruited by the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and helped recruit veterans until the ban from Moscow. On learning of Wolff's activity Dimitrov instructed the CPUSA to cease and desist for fear such cooperation would facilitate foreign infiltration of Soviet operations. Ivo Banac (ed), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933 – 1945* (New Haven, 2003), p. 216.

It was not just early SOE networks in France that had been severely compromised by waves of debilitating arrests: communist networks were also suffering. Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar have described the PCF in the summer of 1942 as being '*tellement affaibli..que l'action armée se limite sur Paris à un group d'une vingtaine de combattants*.'[67] The apprehension in February of Arthur Dallidet, the Head of Security for the newly established communist *Franc Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP) was a desperate blow for an organisation which had only just been formed from a merger of Charles Tillon's *Organisation Spéciale* (OS), the *Bataillons de Jeunesse* and the multi-national *Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* (MOI) with the aim of forming a more cohesive military wing of the communist-backed political resistance movement, the *Front National*. Although they would later gain a reputation for expert knowledge of clandestine operations and superior security protocols, in the early months of 1942, Tillon's attempts to rally disparate, communist-affiliated rural guerrilla groups into a more controlled, hierarchical structure were frustrated not only by the wide margin of independence enjoyed by communist-affiliated maquis but also by Moscow's concern that plans for a large underground communist army would concentrate too much political control in Tillon's hands.[68]

The arrival of the NKVD agents in March signalled Moscow's desire to reassert control over the clandestine PCF and the FTP, thereby ensuring the dominance of the Soviet foreign policy goal of 'unity of action' in France over the desire of domestic resistance groups to prioritise 'action over unity'. Dimitrov and Thorez, using lines to France established through Guyot and facilitated by Fromond and Georges, passed on strict and clear instructions that French communists should seek to coordinate action with other resistance groups, while at the same

67 Stéphane Courtois & Marc Lazar, *Histoire due Parti communiste français*, (Paris, 2000) p. 189.
68 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, p. 32.

time prioritising communist representation on any oversight bodies. The disconnect between Tillon's plans for a communist army and the instructions emerging from Moscow in the spring of 1942 caused no small amount of confusion. In March 1942, communist maquis leader, Georges Guingouin, who had issued his own personal call to resistance in 1940, refused to comply with the latest Party instructions to cease unilateral sabotage operations in the Limousin countryside, arguing that only the previous December the PCF had ordered him to form a group of men to work secretly for the resistance.[69] Guingouin was unwilling, he said, to order his comrades to stop just as they were getting going. Despite rumours circulating that the underground apparatus had ordered Guingouin's elimination for indiscipline, his reaction was echoed by many similar groups across France.[70] Had not, it was asked, *L'Humanité clandestine* published an appeal from Stalin in February 1942 '*invitant les patriotes français à constituer des unités de francs-tireurs et partisans pour mener la guérrilla contre les Allemands*'?[71]

In order to encourage local resistance groups, coordination had to start at the top. Accordingly, in March 1942, the FTP responded positively to an invitation from de Gaulle's emissary Jean Moulin to participate in a meeting in Avignon at which members of the two of the most influential resistance networks, the pro-Gaullist *Confrérie de Notre Dame* (CND) and *Libération* discussed drawing representatives of the major resistance groups into a joint national resistance committee. Following the Avignon meeting, an FTP intermediary was appointed to pass on a communist proposal for collaboration with the Free French, which was

69 Stéphane Courtois *Le PCF dans la guerre* (Paris, 1980), pp. 141 & 152; Georges Guingouin *Quatre ans de lutte*, 61. Guingouin claimed the PCF demanded he focus on developing urban as opposed to rural resistance groups.
70 Grenard, *Légende du Maquis,* p. 109.
71 L'Humanité Clandestine, 23 February 1942. See also Serge Cuvat, Denise Domenach-Leillich, Chantal Duprat-Odet, Francois-Yves Guillin & Henri Hours (eds), *Les lieux secrets de la Resistance Lyon 1940 – 1944*, (Lyon, 2003) and Jean Chaintron, *Le vent soufflait devant ma porte* (Paris, 1993), pp. 232 – 236.

subsequently taken to London by representatives of the CND and the predominantly socialist *Libération Nord* on 27 March. These first tentative steps ushered in a period of more routine contact between the Free French and the underground communist movement, to which de Gaulle initially responded positively, ordering, for example, one of his officers to ensure the communists received twenty wireless sets.[72] With relations established between the BCRA and the communist *Front National* in France, the Free French approached the British with a request to finance communist paramilitary forces as well as a nascent BCRA-FTP network which needed arms, ammunition and military specialists. In response, on the night of 28/29 May, an SOE-sponsored Free French mission parachuted three agents into the Aisne region of France with the aim of supplying the *Front National* with the wireless sets it was urgently demanding. The mission was a disaster. The organiser of the reception committee and one of the agents were arrested the very next day. The two other agents managed to evade capture but contact between de Gaulle and the underground PCF was delayed until November, when two further agents parachuted into France along with 12 wireless sets.[73]

Observing FTP moves to solidify contacts with the BCRA, non-communist resistance groups sought to check communist influence and galvanise their own role within coordination bodies in the northern and southern zones by warning the BCRA of communist plans to seize power following the Liberation of France. In one message from April 1942, information from a source judged '*bonne*' claimed: '*Récemment un des chefs du parti communiste de Paris, après arrestation a fait les aveux suivants: 1. Le parti Communiste de Paris s'est organisé de façon à*

72 Henri Noguères**,** Marcel Degliame-Fouché & Jean-Louis Vigier, *Histoire de la Résistance en France Tome 2 juillet 1941 – octobre 1942* (Paris, 1969), p. 371; Guillaume Piketty, *Pierre Brossolette: un héros de la Résistance* (1998), p. 176.

73 Foot, *SOE in France*, pp. 228 – 229 has Paimblanc arriving in October but Pierre Tillet's *Tentative of History of In/Exfiltrations into/from France during WWII from 1940 to 1945* (Parachutes, Plane & Sea Landings) notes that Paimblanc landed on the 25 November 1942.

prendre le pouvoir…'[74] De Gaulle, however, had limited room for manoeuvre. Keeping the FTP on side was essential not only to strengthen his hold on the resistance in France, but also to bolster his image in Britain and, increasingly importantly, in the Soviet Union as the leader of a combined resistance force. During talks with Stalin about an agreement on post-war Franco-Soviet cooperation, de Gaulle repeatedly emphasised French public support for the Soviet Union, hoping that an alliance with Moscow would act as a counterweight to British and American influence on the continent.[75] As part of this calculated charm offensive, the Free French representative in Moscow Roger Garreau openly declared to his counterparts at the British mission that the communists in Occupied France were the 'best organised and most active opponent [of the] Axis', insisting that the Allies 'must utilize them.'[76] Garreau was also authorised by de Gaulle to make contact with senior PCF cadres in Moscow. His first meeting was with André Marty, who used the opportunity to request his own passage back to France. De Gaulle side-stepped this request by paving the way for Marty to be sent instead as PCF representative to Gaullist forces in Algiers.[77]

Ultimately, however, de Gaulle's posturing was met with a cool reception in Moscow. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov reassured him in May that 'the Soviet government wished to see the sovereignty of the French people fully re-established and France restored in all its former greatness and glory', but Stalin rejected the idea of signing a formal post-war agreement, urging the leader of the Free French instead to look to strengthening his relations with

74 Albertelli, *Services Secrets*, p. 264 Telegram dated 7 April 1942.
75 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, p. 9.
76 TNA HS 4/349 Cipher telegram dated 6 April 1942.
77 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, pp. 16 – 17.

Britain.[78] Some saw in Stalin's unwillingness to recognise de Gaulle as the representative of a French government in exile signs of communist preparations for a take over of power in France. As a consequence, the BCRA, after having only recently lobbied the British for increased support for the FTP, began to pull back from its liaison with the communist resistance.[79] Observers in France reported a growing sense of the inevitability of a post-war conflict on French soil engendered by competing national and international interests. French essayist Jean Guéhenno wrote in his diary: 'We talk of the war that's coming, inevitably – civil war – and of this one and that one, too, who will have to be killed so they won't kill us.'[80]

If the BCRA was beginning to have second thoughts about working closely with, and even arming, communist resistance, SOE was equally unclear as to the direction it should provide its own agents heading to France. This lack of clarity resulted in a very mixed operational approach, with some SOE agents making great efforts to engage across political lines while others sought to avoid any contact with overtly political groups. Even when an agent was willing to establish a framework for cooperation, success depended upon a number of variables, including the personality of the local communist leaders and the SOE agent's ability to secure delivery of arms and equipment from the UK. Although deliveries were restricted for a number of reasons, including competition with RAF Bomber Command over the use of aircraft, bad weather, and a reliance on a full moon, any delay in arranging the supply and distribution of weapons, ammunition and even cash was frequently interpreted by the FTP as a sign of a deliberate attempt by the British to deny material support to the communist

78 Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, pp. 14 – 15 citing *Ministerstvo Innostranykh Del SSSR. Sovetsko-frantsuzskie otnosheniia vo vremia velikoi otechestvenoi voiny, 1941 – 1945: Dokumenty I materialy* (SFO) No. 29 Notes on the conversation of Molotov and De Gaulle, May 24, 1942, 80.
79 Albertelli, *Services Secrets*, p. 276.
80 Jean Guéhenno *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940 – 1944: Collaboration, Resistance and Daily Life in Occupied Paris* (Oxford, 2014), p. 154.

resistance and maximise divisions within the Resistance movement as a whole.[81] This did not mean that the FTP went without, however. A report submitted by Colonel Frederick Sharp, Military Attaché in Madrid in 1944 claimed that the majority of the FTP's weapons had been manufactured in Britain – although these were not always sourced directly from SOE.[82]

Some communists, in an attempt to secure weapons without establishing any form of direct contact with the British, purloined material by infiltrating Gaullist resistance groups. Var communist Yvon Verne admitted in his unpublished memoirs that '*Certains Communistes avaient noué des relations avec les Gaullistes, et cela nous était bien utile. Ça nous permettait de profiter parfois de parachutages d'armes, qui sans ça auraient été cachées dans des conditions plus ou moins bonnes, en attendant le débarquement allié…des armes transitaient chez nous avant d'être dirigés vers le maquis*.'[83] Others resorted to raids on 'rival' camps. Much FTP equipment was, however, willingly and knowingly distributed through SOE networks. SOE officer Ben Cowburn later remembered that 'as a rule the Communists wanted no truck with us, but would accept explosives and weapons.'[84] The prevalence of reports such as this have often obscured the fact that there was regular on-the-ground cooperation between British agents and communist *résistants*, as well as between French democrats and communists within resistance groups. Cowburn himself recognised this when he recalled the reception committee that welcomed him back to France in April 1943: 'Our hard night's work was enlivened by a political argument between two farmers. They were friends, but one was a democrat and the other a Communist. It was funny to watch them lifting a container

81 George Kundahl, *The Riviera at War: World War II on the Cite d'Azur* (London, 2017), p. 134.
82 TNA WO 204/12725 Communist organisation in the Ile de France area, Report from unspecified source, 25 May 1944.
83 Yvon Verne, *Lettre d'un homme ordinaire* (unpublished memoir provided to the author), pp. 10 -11.
84 Ben Cowburn, *No Cloak, No Dagger* (London, 1960), p. 47.

together and hoarsely gasping doctrinaire broadsides at each other…At dawn we went to the Communist's farm. His wife was waiting and gave us a huge breakfast.'[85]

If SOE attempts to engage directly with communists drew a negative reaction from the BCRA, by the summer of 1942 the Free French were also resisting British attempts to work with non-communist resisters in France. In August, the BCRA handed the British a formal letter from representatives of the Lyon-based resistance group *Franc Tireur* (in no way affiliated to the communist FTP, but nonetheless comprising some communists) entitled '*Rapport de Franc-Tireur au gouvernement britannique*' which, while noting the excellent relations between *Franc Tireur* and British agents, called on the British government to recognise the overarching authority of General de Gaulle over all the resistance movements. '*Nous croyons*' the note said, *'qu'il serait possible d'améliorer ces rapports et d'obtenir une plus grande efficacité du travail des agents anglaise en modifiant parfois la forme des contacts, que ceux-ci prennent avec les mouvements de résistance français*.'[86]

With de Gaulle increasingly unhappy about the extent of SOE activity in France, it was all the more important that information about the NKVD arrangement should not be leaked to the Free French. Fears of the potential repercussions of such an eventuality weighed heavily on the minds of all involved. In November 1942 the head of SOE's Russian section noted that, while he had no pressing concerns about dropping NKVD agents into France, he was sure that:

> '[e]ventually, of course, there will be undesirable come-backs from these operations e.g.
> 1.) If F.F. Headquarters ever spot these droppings, they will accuse us of fomenting further division among French resistance groups;

85 Cowburn, *No Cloak, No Dagger*, p. 147.
86 AN 72 AJ/55 Pièce 22 Rapport de Franc-Tireur 'au gouvernement britannique' 20 Aout, 1942. Underlining as per the original text.

> 2.) After the war, the French regime is likely to bring it up against the British Government that Communists were imported by us…'[87]

These concerns were reiterated by Colin Gubbins, head of SOE operations, although in truth he was more concerned at the time about infiltrations into Holland as British relations with the Dutch were good but would deteriorate rapidly 'if they found out that we were introducing communists into their country'.[88] Although Gubbins was slightly more sanguine about risking a spat with de Gaulle, the Foreign Office pushed back hard against SOE accepting further PICKAXE agents for France. On a list of sixteen agents produced by the NKVD in March 1942, six were noted as destined for France. SOE sought urgently to find out from Chichaev whether these agents were destined for occupied or unoccupied territory. The reply stated only that the agents were to be dropped 'as soon as possible'. SOE then began to adopt delaying tactics, informing Chichaev that certain territories were 'no longer possible, owing to the shortening hours of darkness.'[89]

If the Foreign Office was becoming increasingly concerned about Britain's role in reinvigorating Soviet intelligence networks in France, the Home Office was equally exercised by pro-Soviet activism in the UK. Covert and overt home intelligence sources reported a significant uptick in public admiration for the Soviet Union, generated in great part in response to newspaper and radio reports highlighting the desperate plight of the civilians of Stalingrad, and the huge losses incurred by the Red Army in its defence of the city.[90] A report

87 TNA HS 4/336 SOE/Russia Pickaxe projects. This appears to reference Message from Mr A.P. Murray, exact position unknown D/CD (O) to R E. Brook, SOE Regional Controller for Western Europe (D/R), 12 November 1942. See also D/CD to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 14 November 1942.
88 TNA HS 4/336 SOE/Russia Pickaxe projects D/CD to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 14 November 1942.
89 Ibid. Most Secret from D/P 1 (name and position not known) to AD/O (possibly David Kewick), 21 March 1942.
90 In addition to covert intelligence obtained by MI5, the Home Office could avail of a rich new source of information courtesy of Mass Observation surveys in which certain individuals were asked to keep regular diaries, while others record their reactions to local, national and international events. Temperature checks on

by the Home Office's Intelligence section recorded on 3 February 1942 that '"Thank God for Russia" is a frequent expression of the very deep and fervent feeling for that country which permeates wide sections of the public.'[91] It has been said that in the autumn of 1942, 'opinion may have been further to the Left in 1942 than it was to be in 1945.'[92] Worryingly for the Labour Party, several Labour MPs and other dignitaries agreed to appear on Communist platforms during the summer of 1942.[93] As Labour membership almost halved between 1939 and 1942, the CPGB, benefitting from the reflected glory of the Soviet war effort, more than doubled its own membership to 56,000 in 1942 from 22,000 just a year earlier.[94] The overall numbers might still have been small but a Labour Party circular released in August called upon its members to guard against being 'led astray by the expensive propaganda of a very small political organization [the CPGB] mysteriously in command of very large funds.'[95] Despite government concern about the rise in popularity of the Soviet model, as Philip Bell has noted, the government could ill afford to promote anti-Soviet rhetoric and as a consequence public debate around the massacre of Polish officers at Katyn was suppressed.[96] Conscious of the political trade winds, Churchill instructed the Ministry of Information 'to consider what action was required to counter the present tendency of the British Public to forget the dangers of Communism in their enthusiasm over the resistance of Russia.'[97]

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public opinion towards engagement with the Soviet Union had also been carried out via Gallup polls conducted between September 1939 and April 1941. See Bell, *Bull & the Bear*, pp. 31 – 36.

91 Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 134.

92 Ibid, p. 15.

93 Thorpe. 'Locking out the Communists', p. 232. The Beveridge Report on 'Social Insurance and Allied Services' published that November harnessed the mood of the period, openly adopting revolutionary terminology, the first of the report's guiding principles stating: 'Proposals for the future should not be limited by 'sectional interests… a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for 'patching'. See Sir William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London, 1942).

94 Ibid, p.231.

95 Ibid', p. 233 citing Labour party circular, 'The Communist Party and Subversive Movements: Statement by the National Executive Committee', August 1942.

96 Bell, *Bull & the Bear*, p. 115.

97 Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 135.

With the military and political landscape shifting in favour of the Soviet Union following the Red Army's success at Stalingrad, SOE was even less inclined to proactively respond to NKVD demands for further assistance in infiltrating its agents into Western Europe. A request made around June 1942 referred to the urgent infiltration of five further agents for France, noting that these individuals were 'standing by' and that 'unless they could be used in the next few weeks the whole purpose of their work would be lost'.[98] It is possible that Moscow suggested that these agents be infiltrated into the south of France via North Africa as an internal SOE note from the time explained that 'the situation in North Africa was far from simple and [George Hill of the SAM mission in Moscow] must not expect a quick reply'.[99] The eventual status of this mission is unknown as much of the attendant information has been redacted. From the information available it would appear the mission in its originally proposed format did not go ahead.

A further reason for SOE's disinclination to respond to the NVKD's latest demands was the absence of any reciprocity in logistical assistance, as provided for in the original agreement. The NKVD's singular effort to facilitate SOE operations up to this point had been an offer to 'lend' the British the services of Bhagat Ram, a Hindu Pathan who spied for as many as five countries including for the Axis in Afghanistan - under NKVD orders.[100] To SOE's delight, the NKVD suggested the British 'use' Ram to compromise the Indian National Congress, which had been negotiating with Britain since March 1942 over the terms of an Indian constitution.

98 TNA HS 7/278 SOE War Diary: Russia, August 1942 – June 1944. Page 25 of this 115-page report is entirely redacted, as is half of page 26. The notes here refer to a paragraph entitled: Five further agents for France – NKVD's request.

99 Ibid, p.26. Although the German army was being bombarded by the Royal Air Force, it was not until November 1942 that the Allies launched Operation Torch.

100 Bhagat Ram has been called 'the most extraordinary spy of World War II'. Mihir Bose, *The Indian Spy: The True Story of the Most Remarkable Secret Agent of World War II* (2017). For information received from the NKVD in relation to Bhagat Ram and the instructions he had received from German intelligence see TNA HS 1/190 SOE/Far East.

The British intelligence services had for long been collating information on Indian nationalists, many of them communists or former communists – including through the monitoring of correspondence between Karl Groehl and his associates - but the alacrity with which they jumped at the NKVD offer suggests they had struggled to subvert anyone of importance. The NKVD also offered to facilitate SOE-NKVD collaboration in Afghanistan in return for intelligence on anti-Soviet activities on the Chinese/Russian frontier but this aspect of the SOE-NKVD relationship which, at certain points was reported as the most exciting development for the British, was effectively killed off when SOE and SIS proved unable (or unwilling) to produce the required information.[101]

With the British disappointed by the level of NKVD reciprocation, and the NKVD arguing that the British were providing insufficient logistical support to its intelligence networks on the continent, existing fissures in the relationship began to expand. The NKVD once more leveraged the Soviet Union's significant contribution to the war effort to ensure SOE accepted a further nine NKVD agents for drops into Holland (and thence to Germany), Germany and Austria. As far as France was concerned, Moscow was clear that, if the British were to further delay opening a Second Front, the Soviet Union would encourage the PCF to ignore SOE warnings to await the arrival of Allied troop before mounting pre-emptive attacks on German troops in France.[102] Despite these threats, when the SOE mission in Moscow (SAM) cabled London in October with an NKVD request for four 'fully trained' PICKAXES to be landed in the Marseilles district, SOE sat on the decision for almost three weeks before replying that the

101 TNA HS 4/328 Soviet Policy Notes from Moscow Mission on the achievements of the SOE-NKVD agreement.

102 MC P2/2/2MS/24 Notes on the relationship between SOE and SIS. The Soviet position may well have been partially informed by an SOE officer named Captain Uren who, according to Dodds Parker was caught passing to the Russians copies of the SOE brief for the Foreign Secretary to take to Moscow, to discuss the re-entry into the Balkans in 1943.

matter was still under discussion and no definitive answer would be given any time soon. A raft of reasons was provided in support of a refusal, including the shortage of available aircraft.[103] A document entitled Dropping Russian agents into Western Europe (which unfortunately contains a large, redacted paragraph in all likelihood relating to this episode) refers to concerns over dropping four 'trained parachutists' into occupied France and potentially others into unoccupied France. The request, it noted, 'raised the issue of whether the game was worth the candle on a bigger scale, since four agents was a large order by any standard…'[104] Interestingly, the October cables from London to SAM stated that the main opposition to such operations came from the Fighting French and it was extremely unlikely that consent would be given, although it was possible that pressure might be brought to bear through the Fighting French representative in Moscow.[105] This strongly implies that by October 1942 de Gaulle, and other members of the Fighting French had been fully apprised of the arrangement, although other SOE files appear to contradict this.[106] Correspondence between SOE and the head of SIS makes it clear that, by December at least, de Gaulle was fully aware of the 'Russian connection into which he has been forced owing to pressure of events' and for which he had 'little palate'.[107] A table produced at the end of November 1942 indicates that the mission was, however, provisionally accepted and SOE fully expected to be responsible for the agents' onward travel to France in January 1943. On 2 December 1942,

103 TNA HS 4/336 SOE Russia/Pickaxe project. Most Secret message (possibly from the Head of SIS) to Colin Gubbins (C/D), 9 December 1942.
104 TNA HS 7/278 SOE War Diary Russia: November 1942 – June 1943, p. 19 'Dropping Agents into Western Europe'.
105 TNA HS 7/278 PICKAXES for South of France: London 3570 to Moscow of 21 October 1942. See also Moscow 0523 of 3 October 1942, 3570 to Moscow of 21 October 1942, and Moscow 0598 of 21 October 1942.
106TNA HS 7/278 Cable London to Moscow, 16 July 1943.
107 TNA HS 4/336 SOE Russia/Pickaxe project. Most Secret message (possibly from the Head of SIS) to Colin Gubbins (C/D), 9 December 1942.

however, Gubbins informed the Foreign Office that a definitive decision had been taken to only drop NKVD agents into France *after* consultation with the Free French.[108]

Exactly what the Free French knew about the SOE-NKVD relationship, or what key SOE staff involved with the PICKAXES knew about Free French engagement, and from what sources is not clear as on 13 December a concerned memo to Gubbins read: 'You may have noted in the Evening Standard three days ago a German announcement from Paris that a Communist woman spy of Polish nationality, who had reached France through England in 1941 or 1942, had been arrested and was to be shot. This looks perilously like one of the PICKAXE party whom we landed by boat early this year.'[109] The author expressed the hope that 'the Fighting French will not believe the report in the Press' but acknowledged that the game was probably up and an urgent exercise in damage limitation was required.[110] Information published in the French paper *Gringoire* on 18 December 1942 under the heading '*Activité redoublée du communisme terroriste*' provided further details about Lypszyc, claiming that she had originally been sent to France in 1933.[111]

Gubbins fairly quickly received confirmation that de Gaulle was indeed aware of the PICKAXE operations.[112] When exactly, and by whom, was de Gaulle alerted to the NVKD arrangement, and why did the characteristically obstreperous Free French leader feel unable to make political capital out of this intelligence? Later reports from France indicate that information

108 TNA HS 4/336 Letter on the subject of 'Occupied France' from Gubbins to undisclosed recipient, 2 December 1942.
109 TNA HS 4/336 Mr A.P. Murray, exact position unknown (D/CD (O) to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 13 December 1942.
110 Ibid.
111 TNA HS 4/337 Telegram from D/P to D/HV for CD of 14 January 1943, referring to copy of Gringoire, published Marseille and dated 18 December 1942. For full text of Gringoire article, entitled '*Activité redouble du communisme terroriste*', see TNA HS 4/340 PICKAXE 1 – Anna Ouspenskaya.
112 TNA HS 4/336 Mr A.P. Murray, exact position unknown (D/CD (O) to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 13 December 1942.

about the NKVD agents had come from BCRA networks in the country, while internal SOE correspondence from October around the use of the Free French veto suggests that someone within SOE may have unofficially brought de Gaulle into their confidence over the summer, possibly after the leader of the Free French himself sought clarification from senior contacts within British intelligence. This would at least explain the anxiety felt around infiltrating the latest batch of NVKD agents. The fact is, de Gaulle had more to lose than gain by causing controversy around this particular issue. President Roosevelt, who already regarded the leader of the Free French as an objectionable and intransigent interlocutor and whose Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had also been employing communist agents, was unlikely to react kindly to de Gaulle's complaints and might use Free French threats to undermine Anglo-Soviet and US-communist intelligence cooperation as an excuse to push harder to isolate him.[113] By raising objections to SOE support for NKVD agents in France at this stage de Gaulle also risked embarrassing the British and encouraging Churchill to lend more enthusiastic support to General Giraud.

The year 1942, which had begun with multiple infiltrations of French, British and Soviet agents from the UK into France, was ending with the resistance *terrain* in France having become somewhat crowded. Recognising the need to exert some form of control over the multifarious anti-Nazi resistance networks in France, and in particular those sections which looked to Moscow rather than London or Washington for guidance and orders, Churchill and Roosevelt spent the closing days of 1942 attempting to cajole de Gaulle into joining forces with the American-backed French General Henri Giraud. A Giraud-de Gaulle alliance would, they

113 See, for example, William C. Spracher 'The OSS in support of Chinese Communists', *American Intelligence Journal*, 3/3 (1980 – 81), pp. 11, 14 – 20; 'The OSS in World War II Albania; Covert Operations and Collaboration with Communist Partisans' *Reference & Research Book News*, 22/3 (Portland, 2007);

hoped, ensure the bulk of French military and resistance forces would follow Anglo-American orders in North Africa and in Europe come D-Day. De Gaulle, however, was determined to tread the fine line between ensuring he maintained British backing in the face of American hostility and making a point of his (and his country's) political independence. To do this he would need to court the PCF while at the same time avoiding making too many concessions, or allowing the FTP to seize control of the resistance narrative through independent action, underpinned by pervasive, highly effective underground communications.

Chapter VI: Care to work with a Bolshevik?

The beginning of 1943 was a difficult time for British representatives directly interacting with or supporting communists in France, not least because of Churchill's anxiety about renewed Soviet oversight of underground communist parties and resistance organisations in Europe. While all actions were taken with a view to winning the war, politicians were cognisant of the post-war imperative to contain the influence of an increasingly powerful and assertive Soviet Union both in Europe and across the British Empire. Stalin, aware of Anglo-American nervousness, officially disbanded the Comintern in May 1943 as an outward sign of the Soviet Union's disinterest in directing and supporting post-war communist insurgencies in newly liberated countries. British intercepts of radio communications between Moscow and further NKVD agents parachuted by SOE into France showed, however, that Soviet direction of the communist resistance and communist parties in Europe continued unaffected, albeit under a slightly different structure.

As the Allies manoeuvred to maintain their crucial anti-fascist alliance ahead of a renewed assault against Nazi forces in Western Europe, SOE sought to gradually extricate itself from its wartime agreement with the NKVD, directing its agents in France to work only with resistance groups who agreed to accept Allied orders following the Allied landings. When the NKVD pushed for further infiltrations, the British attempted to exploit de Gaulle's fear of communist political influence to ensure he put a stop to the agreement. But de Gaulle could not be relied upon to exercise a reflexive anti-communism. In January 1943 relations between Churchill and de Gaulle reached their nadir following the latter's initial refusal to take part in power-sharing discussions organised in Casablanca. Such was Churchill's ire

that that when de Gaulle returned to London Churchill imposed a travel ban on the 'monster of Hampstead', which lasted several weeks.[1] Yet when the NKVD began pressing hard for the infiltration of a further five agents into France, SOE used the ongoing negotiations between Generals de Gaulle and Giraud as another excuse for delays, arguing that no action could be taken until a final agreement had been reached on the status of French representation.

On 8 April, NKVD representative Colonel Chichaev was informed that, following any agreement between Giraud and de Gaulle over the formation and oversight of an Algiers-based *Comité français de Libération nationale* (CFLN), the British would be obliged to consult the appropriate French authority before agreeing to further infiltrations. Interestingly, the head of SIS warned that Giraud would be furious 'if he learnt that any British organisation had facilitated the entry of Russians into France, without first consulting him', implying that, unlike de Gaulle, he had no prior knowledge of the arrangement.[2] As further evidence of his ignorance of the SOE-NKVD agreement, in April General Giraud warned Harold Macmillan, British Minister Resident at Allied Headquarters in North Africa, that de Gaulle's BCRA 'was flirting with communists' and running 'a communist organisation in France supported by war material dropped by English parachutes.' In response, Macmillan countered that Giraud 'was completely misinformed' and that 'De Gaulle had no longer any connection with the Communist movement in France.'[3]

1 A reference to de Gaulle's residence in London.
2 TNA HS 4/337 Report on Pickaxe Operations in France, dated 10 June 1943 citing SOE/ZP (Foreign Office) meeting, 8 April 1943.
3 Harold Macmillan, *War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean January 1943 – May 1945* (London, 1984), p. 71. Note of a conversation of 26 April 1943.

De Gaulle was demonstrably not running a communist organisation in France, just as he was not responsible for the infiltration of NKVD agents into the country, but he was determined that the PCF should be persuaded to participate in, as opposed to lobby against his designs for a French post-war political administration. As de Gaulle battled with Churchill over the leadership arrangements for a French government in exile, PCF representative Fernand Grenier, who had been operating in clandestinity since his escape from an internment camp at Châteaubriant in North West France, arrived in the UK accompanied by de Gaulle's agent, the conservative Catholic Gilbert Renault (Rémy).[4] This was the first of a string of visits to the UK by representatives of the PCF and the FTP that took place throughout 1943, during which they sought to increase the profile of the communist resistance within government and among the public more widely. The lobbying appeared to have an early positive effect as, shortly after Grenier's visit to the UK, the communist *Députés* who had been imprisoned since the start of the war at the Maison Carrrée in Algiers were finally released. Among their number was Waldeck Rochet, who joined Grenier in London in the summer of 1943.[5] Rochet's files at the Archives Départementales de la Seine Saint Denis show that he was in regular correspondence with Etienne Fajon, another former prisoner of the Maison Carré, and André Marty, who had finally received permission to travel from Moscow to Algiers as PCF representative to the Free French. Their correspondence reveals that Marty, Fajon and Rochet were all in agreement with the idea of promoting a national insurrection in France, arguing that the

4 Renault later claimed that it was Pierre Brossolette, the former left-wing politician and member of the Paris-based resistance network, *Groupe du musée de l'homme*, who had engineered Renault's introduction to the underground PCF.

5 AD SSD 314 J 1 - 7 Waldeck ROCHET. Rochet was released on 5 February 1943. He received his Ordre de Mission from Alger to go to London on behalf of the Interior Ministry on 6 September and secured his exit stamp for Marrakech on 22 October 1943.

message should be '*Union et Action*' as opposed to the Allied message of Unity *in* Action, otherwise described as a '*politique attentiste*'. The comrades were suspected, however, that the BBC and the Free French were working together to suppress any mention of the FTP in the UK press or broadcast media. Fom Algeria Marty reported that the Allied authorities there were fabricating stories about lack of paper in order to restrict the communist press. '*Il faut livrer chaque fois une véritable bataille',* he complained, *'où tout est mis en oeuvre pour nous empêcher de paraitre*'.[6]

SOE observed de Gaulle's continued cooperation with French communists with an uneasy mixture of anxiety and relief. Any promises the Free French made in terms of financing and weapons drops would ultimately have to be serviced by the British, but if de Gaulle was able to successfully coax the communists into a broader resistance organisation, and convince them to participate in a provisional government, he stood a chance of heading off any PCF plans for an uprising ahead of, or in the wake of, Allied landings.[7] If, as M.R.D. Foot claimed fifteen years later, PCF cadres were constantly manoeuvring to 'do what they could to create a communist France' how did SOE prepare its agents for the complex political situation they would encounter on deployment, and what advice or orders were given about contacts that could or could not be countenanced with the extreme Left?[8]

Following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office began to scrutinise 'SOE's attitude towards the increasing influence of

6 AD SSD 314 J 7 Letter to Waldeck Rochet from Etienne Fajon and André Marty in Algiers, 18 July 1944. Fajon and Marty also mentioned concerns about an alleged plot to assassinate Marty: '*préparé par un soi-disant Maudite espagnol*'. The men alleged the supposed assassin had previously worked for the French secret service.
7 Daniel Cordier, *Jean Moulin. La Republique des catacombs* (Paris Gallimard, 1999), pp. 334 & 335; Albertelli, *Services Secrets*, p. 284.
8 Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 138.

communist-dominated groups…more closely than previously'.[9] Maurice Buckmaster, head of SOE's French Section (F Section), was confident that British-employed officers could avoid entanglement in domestic politics as long as they stuck to the mantra that they were only interested in working with patriots who were prepared to carry out such tasks as were required to help liberate the country from German occupation. In a post-mission interview conducted over the course of three days between 16 – 18 January 1945, however, leader of the JOCKEY circuit Francis Cammaerts complained that 'Before going out to the field, agents were given no idea of the various resistance movements, and what they represented, such as F.T.P, Combat and M.U.R.'. A more comprehensive political briefing, Cammaerts argued, 'would have saved much time and many embarrassing situations in the field'.[10]

Although SOE's directive to 'play it by ear' was followed with some success, many SOE (F) agents were frustrated by the vagueness of the approach and, on their return to the UK for debriefing, complained that their work had been detrimentally affected by an inadequate overview of the situation in France, and insufficient briefing on how to behave when they inevitably came into contact with political groups. A subsequent evaluation of SOE activities in France supported the agents' allegations. While generally positive about the quality of operational training provided in the UK, the report was damning in its assessment of the quality of political briefings, which at the outset of the war were provided to officers at Cambridge University but were later taken over by SOE.[11] A headline conclusion was that

9 Wilkinson & Bright-Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, p. 133.
10 TNA HS 9/258/5 Interview by Captain Howard, 16 – 18 January 1942, p. 16 Criticisms of Mission, point V. Resistance backgrounds.
11 TNA HS 8/256 Appendix A to MI(R) report on The Coordination of All Irregular Operations and Special PActivities, 6 June 1940: 'Politico-military course at Cambridge University'. The course reportedly covered Systems of Government, Mob and Mass Psychology, Political, Economic and Ethnological History and Historical Geography.

what SOE ought to have completely disassociated itself from any political implications of the Resistance Movement by leaving all paramilitary tasks to the Free French (RF) section.[12]

Given the lack of direction from SOE HQ, it was inevitable that SOE agents adopted 'an individual approach to working with communist resistance groups in France'.[13] Foot found that some of F section's best agents, including Pierre de Vomécourt of AUTOGIRO, Francis Suttill of PROSPER, Harry Peulevé and Jacques Poirier of AUTHOR/DIGGER, Maurice Southgate of STATIONER, and Francis Cammaerts of JOCKEY actively 'armed and supported communists' while others such as Benjamin Cowburn of TINKER, Richard Heslop of MARSKMAN and Tony Brooks of PIMENTO 'tried to keep out of politics altogether'. Only a very few of SOE's 'strongest agents' - Foot singled out George Starr of WHEELWRIGHT as 'the outstanding example' – were able to 'weld communist and anti-communist resisters into a single effective fighting force.'[14] It is difficult to get a sense of what this meant in practice as most SOE biographies and memoirs pay only fleeting attention (if any) to SOE-FTP/MOI interaction in France. Glass, while recording some element of cooperation, focuses on Starr's anti-communist credentials.[15] Foot, among the most expansive of those writing on the subject, noted in *Six Faces of Courage* that Hastings-born Harry Peulevé had worked with a small, well-organised FTP group in the Corrèze, which he trained and armed with Sten machine guns, grenades and a few Bren light machine guns.[16] In his account of Peuleuvé's wartime work Nigel Perrin expands on this somewhat by describing Peulevé's close association with 'Romano', the head of a communist group which worked as part of

12 HS 7/135 Evaluation of SOE activities in France 1941 - 1944, p. 1 'Summary'.
13 Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 138.
14 Ibid.
15 See, for example, Glass, *They Fought Alone*, pp. 50, 154 & 228. Glass does, however, recognise Starr's positive relationship with Camilo, the commander of the Spanish republican forces in his area of operation.
16 M.R.D. Foot, *Six Faces of Courage* (Barnsley, 2003) pp. 64 – 66.

André Girard's CARTE organisation, providing logistical support as and when required. Romano had previously worked with another SOE agent, Peter Churchill, but relations had become strained, with Romano claiming Churchill's circuit was insecure and unreliable and Churchill countering that London had directed him to put some distance between himself and Romano's communist sub-circuit.[17] While the communists were not immune to security lapses, their heightened appreciation of security developed over the preceding two years had saved those with connections to British networks from a series of SOE disasters. For example, when Francis Suttill's PROSPER network, which stretched from Brittany across to Paris, collapsed during June and July 1943 'one whole segment…remained intact and untroubled: the communist-dominated groups.'[18] Tellingly, Peulevé, who had suffered from the unreliability of both SOE and CARTE operations, chose to place his absolute trust in his communist contact.

When Peulevé returned to France on his second mission in September 1943 he initially struggled to get in touch with the local FTP but was eventually introduced to the regional commander for the Dordogne, André Bonnetot (Vincent). Peulevé gained Bonnetot's confidence by offering to supply arms with no political strings attached as long as, in return, Bonnetot allowed him to personally verify the operational readiness of the camps under his command. Having been afforded access, and having observed the camps to be extremely well organised but severely lacking in weapons, Peulevé subsequently 'pledged to deliver some of his first consignments of arms to them.'[19] Peulevé's close associate,

17 Nigel Perrin, *Spirit of Resistance: The life of SOE agent Harry Peulevé DSO MC (*Barnsley, 2008), p. 51.
18 Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 319.
19 Interview with Roger Ranoux (FTPF en Corrèze et Dordogne), 19 October 2009 in Montrem, Dordogne: '*FTPF en Corrèze et Dordogne (1) and (2)',* sections '*SOE et FTPF dans l'organisation des sabotages*'. Mémoires de Résistances, un site du département de la Dordogne. *www.memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/temoignages-audio/1015-extraits-sonores/47-ftpf-en-correze-et-dordogne-1-roger-ranoux.html*

twenty-year-old Jacques Poirier, whom he had met at one of Romano's safe houses, also got to know André Bonnetot well, later referring to him as a man of 'courage and discretion'.[20] Like Cowburn, Poirier's first encounter with communists during his second mission to France involved listening in the dark to insults being traded between a local Gaullist and a communist volunteer as they worked together to collect parachuted containers. It was in that instant that the Frenchman Poirier determined he would always present himself as English in order to avoid being asked where he stood on questions of politics.[21] Poirier's relationship with the local FTP worked so well in fact that, after the war, a former FTP member invited Poirier to be the *Président d'Honneur* of a new centre dedicated to the memory of the resistance in the Dordogne, an invitation which Poirier accepted enthusiastically. Bonnetot, however, was not present. In an interview given in 2009 Roger Ranoux, a member of a militant communist family and *résistant* with the FTP in the Corrèze, recalled that Bonnetot had paid a heavy price for reaching out to Peulevé in defiance of FTP orders.[22] The fact that Bonnetot became FTP representative to the combined *Forces Françaises de l'intérieur* (FFI) of the 12ème région militaire/Région 5 ahead of the Liberation suggests he was not immediately sanctioned, although the move may have been arranged in order that the FTP leadership could keep an eye on him, while at the same time distancing him from his loyal supporters.[23] Poirier does not mention any

20 IWM 10446 Poirier, Jacques René Edouard (Oral History). In this interview, recorded in the late 1980s for the Imperial War Museum, Poirier recalled that he first became involved with the resistance in France by carrying leaflets and wireless sets: https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80010224; Poirier, *Giraffe*, pp. 69 – 70, 77.

21 Poirier, *Giraffe,* p. 6.

22 Interview with Roger Ranoux, 19 October 2009, Dordogne. Mémoires de Résistances, site du département de la Dordogne

23 Poirier, *Giraffe*, p. 158; Le Maitron: Dictionnaire biographique Mouvement Ouvrier, Mouvement Social, citing as sources: Jean-Jacques Gillot, Michel Maureau, *Résistants du Périgord, 1500 notices inédites et illustrées*, (Bordeaux,2011) & Jacques Lagrange, *Dictionnaire de la Résistance, Dordogne*, (Périgueux, 2007). The departments that formed the 12ème région militaire were later formed into a Région 5, with its headquarters initially in Brive and then in Limoges.

FTP reprisals, but suggests that Bonnetot's transfer was a sign of the communist leadership attempting to replace local leaders who were deemed too 'individualistic' with more 'political' Party cadres ahead of the Allied invasion. Interestingly, however, Poirier recalled that 'the communist authorities must have felt a certain liking for the peculiar Englishman known as Captain Jack, and their goodwill often simplified matters', a remark which suggests that Poirier's contacts with Bonnetot may at some points at least have had the blessing of party officials.[24]

For his part, Poirier was well known among his fellow French resisters, including the novelist and future French Minister for Information André Malraux, for his close association with members of the FTP. Unlike his fellow agents in SOE, Poirier made no attempt to conceal the strong personal bonds he forged with local communist maquis leaders, including 'Charles the Bolshevik' (real name Robert Brouillet) a carpenter from the village of Siorac in the Dordogne for whom Poirier felt a genuine affection. The 'hugely resourceful' Charles, who assisted with the identification of suitable landing sites, found accommodation for members of the SOE network, and secured hiding places for caches of arms, had originally introduced himself to Poirier by saying 'I don't know you but I'd better tell you, whether you like it or not, that I'm a Bolshevik and always will be'. With the information out in the open, 'Charles' then asked: 'Well, think you'll care to work with a Bolshevik?'[25] Poirier assured his collocutor he had no immediate interest in politics and the two became firm friends.

24 Poirier, *Giraffe*, p. 126.
25 Ibid, p. 100.

Poirier would also become central to supporting *Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* (MOI) operations in the Dordogne. He considered the MOI 'true fighters, brave and self-disciplined', and referred to their leader 'Carlos' as a '*gran señor*'. That the camaraderie was felt both ways was evidenced by Carlos inviting Poirier to join his Spanish comrades on a sabotage mission where they engaged in a bit of friendly competition to see who could perform the cleanest break of a railway line.[26] Reflecting in the 1990s on remarks made by André Malraux and others about his closeness to the FTP, Poirier wrote: 'I had shared a Spanish prison with communists, the Red Army was acquitting itself maginificently on the Eastern Front, and the maquisards of the FTP were brave men. I also possessed a friend in Charles the Bolshevik, and I was too young to have grasped the full implications of the Spanish Civil War or even of the German-Soviet Pact in 1939. My one, overriding idea was to cooperate wholeheartedly with all who were fighting the Nazis and their French confederates.'[27]

Unlike Poirier's account, published after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cowburn's memoirs, written at the height of the Cold War, report that he mostly kept his distance from the communist resistance. According to Cowburn's account, during his first mission he assured old friends that they 'need have no fear that we would allow the Communists to govern France.'[28] Like many of his fellow agents who went on to write accounts of their time in France, Cowburn asserted that communist groups were occasionally contacted but that, 'as a rule the Communists wanted no truck with us, but would accept explosives and weapons.'[29] SOE agent John Goldsmith, operating in northern France, also recalled that the communist-backed groups in his area of operations would only agree to receive guns,

26 Poirier, *Giraffe*, pp. 125 – 128.
27 Ibid, p. 126.
28 Cowburn, *No Cloak No Dagger*, p. 21.
29 Ibid, p. 4.

bullets, and money for food on the strict understanding that they would not be expected to follow British orders.[30] In contrast to the warmth of Poirier's recollections of contact with local communist leaders in the Corrèze, Goldsmith reported a deep suspicion of, and hostility towards Churchill and the British among French communists in the Amiens area.

Where a lack of trust developed between SOE and communist groups, it was often stoked by (honest or fabricated) perceptions of bias in the distribution of supplies. What was difficult to grasp at the time from positions on the ground, however, was that SOE weapons drops were often influenced by SOE's faith in its own agents and the quality of reception committees as opposed to political considerations. To cite one example, the PIMENTO circuit that operated across the south of France received a lot more material than its leader Tony Brooks needed because London felt they could trust him, and because the RAF liked his punctual and efficient reception committees.[31] In 1943, the exceptional 21-year-old Maurice Pertschuk, who ran the PRUNUS network around Toulouse, received 30 weapons drops – far too many for a circuit of his size – and was able at one point to arm each of his men with their own FM (light machine gun), an 'unnecessary luxury' at the time.[32] Rumours of these well-equipped, SOE-backed groups quickly reached the FTP and provided excellent propaganda for PCF political commissars determined to promote the idea that the British were attempting to drive a wedge between resistance groups.

Others still maintained positive relations with communist groups without being aware of their political affiliation. Anne Marie Walters, an SOE courier who worked for George

30 George Kundhl, *The Riviera at War: World War II on the Côte d'Azur* (London, 2017), p. 134.
31 Brooks was also one of the few SOE agents who knew how to use a EUREKA properly.
32 AD Haute Garonne 16 J 160 Témoignages et documents: Le réseau Eugène Buckmaster, circuit Prunus – Tome 1. Fonds Daniel Latapie.

Starr's WHEELWRIGHT circuit in the villages around Condom in the Gers, mentioned several close contacts with communists who had not only provided her with shelter, food and clothing, but also protected her during a tense altercation between her own resistance colleagues and an FTP patrol. Walters claimed, however, that most of the time she was completely unaware of the political affiliation of the individuals or groups to whom she was passing messages. To give one example, it was only after Marius Sorbé ('Monsieur Chénier') whose home SOE had used for several important rendezvous, rushed to her aid when she was confronted by an angry FTP patrol, that she realised he was in fact a local FTP leader. If Walters was left in ignorance, Starr was reportedly well aware of the convictions of the men he liaised with. Yet he was able to come to arrangements with communist groups, and even attract their personal support. Sorbé argued loudly with Starr about the role of the British and Americans in France, but he still lent Starr 200,000 francs in support of his activities in September 1943.[33] In his debrief, SOE circuit leader Francis Cammaerts, who worked in France from 1943 – 44 and would later be appointed Head of Allied missions in south eastern France 'recalled no anti-British sentiment' when dealing with communist resistance groups, although he maintained he had done his best not to become too involved for fear of coming up against conflicting directives. Cammaerts was in any case convinced that the FTP groups with whom he had come into contact were not made up entirely of communists and reported that they did not appear to be acting on directions from Moscow. Mirroring discussions between SOE officers and NKVD agents in the UK in 1942, Cammaerts reflected on the difference between his own appreciation of communist

33 Walters, *Moondrop to Gascony,* pp. 64-65 & 248.

policy and local interpretations: 'The rural communists I spoke to about collective farming, for example, just roared with laughter – share it with him down the road? Bugger off!'[34]

Such varied, ad hoc, and often personality-driven contact made it difficult for SOE HQ to make a proper assessment of the strength of communist resistance overall or to gauge the likelihood of FTP groups working in concert with SOE circuits in the event of the Allies opening a Second Front.[35] The underground communist press, able to produce and disseminate thousands of tracts calling for miners to come out on strike, for housewives to demand bread, and for winegrowers to refuse to supply the occupying army, pointed to a sophisticated support infrastructure, expert in targeted propaganda.[36] French police certainly claimed that '*les communistes poursuivent avec le même acharnement la préparation de la grêve insurrectionnelle, prélude de l'insurrection nationale*'[37] however, an intelligence report on communist activities in which this claim was cited noted: 'This is a remarkable statement from people who, for years now, have been primarily engaged in repressing the communist party and who claim, since July 1940, to have made 9,496 arrests.'[38] The inference being that claims of an impending communist-backed revolution were vastly exaggerated. On the whole, the bulk of information gathered from British and French intelligence networks convinced the British that the communist resistance in France

34 Ray Jenkins, *A Pacifist at War* (London, 2010), p. 216.
35 The SOE approach contrasts with that adopted by the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which, following its foundation in 1942, actively recruited former members of the International Brigades as well as members of the *Partito Communista Italiano* (PCI). The practice was only stopped when it was discovered OSS head William (Bill) Donovan was about to send former IB veterans to China to fight the Japanese.
36 The *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* holds examples of the main newspaper editions published during the war. ADHG 16 J 186 contains multiple tracts used as part of targeted campaigns. For an interesting overview of the genesis and style of clandestine publications produced in the southern zone, see H.R. Kedward *Resistance in Vichy France* (Oxford, 1978).
37 TNA WO 204/12725 Document received by French Intelligence Section PWB, 28 May 1944 but originating from some time in early 1943. Source PWE (Political Warfare Executive) London.
38 Ibid. Document received by French Intelligence Section PWB 28 May 1944 but dated sometime in early 1943. Source PWE (Political Warfare Executive) London.

in 1943 was nowhere near as strong, nor as militarily capable as the Party's considerable propaganda made out. 'The Communists are attempting to build up a legend that they are the only intact and well organised and really effective element' wrote one officer in October. 'This of course is entirely untrue'.[39] In fact, despite attempts by Charles Tillon to mould the FTP into a tighter, more secretive structure, in many ways it remained little more than a collection of disparate groups of untrained, predominantly young, militants among whom a relatively small core of politically motivated cadres struggled to instil discipline, and for whom the clandestine Party leadership was unable to secure adequate training, weapons, food or clothing.[40]

Towards the end of the year, as more and more young men fleeing Vichy's *Service de Travail Obligatoire* (STO) joined secluded camps in the forests and on the plateaux of France, the FTP became acutely aware of the risk these groups ran of alienating the local population not only through assassination campaigns against German soldiers, which generated vicious reprisals including the shooting of hostages and burning of homes, but also through regular descents into towns and villages to 'requisition' supplies of fuel, food and clothing. In contrast to the impression gained by many within SOE, serious concerns were also raised internally over lapses in FTP security. An alleged regional communist party circular distributed in October 1943 entitled '*trop de bavardage'* cited examples of partisans talking freely about secret work. The document, picked up by BCRA agents in February of 1944, read: '*Une première enquête rapide sur des évènements dont notre région a été le théatre nous a révélé une négligeance totale, même de la part de responsables assez élevés, des règles les plus élémentaires de la sécurité. Ce mal sévit*

39 TNA HS 6/319 Most secret note from P. Reilly, dated 6 October 1943.
40 See, for example ADHG 16 J 195 *Communiqués militaires* Sept 1943 – Sept 1944.

partout et si des mesures ne sont pas prises immédiatement pour y faire face, nous courrons à la catastrophe.'[41] Referring to a previous request of July 1943, local party leaders were instructed to take the matter in hand once and for all, with serious sanctions threatened against those who failed to comply. Francis Cammaerts later reflected that, as the FTP movement grew, its leaders had at times reminded him of 'the sorcerer's apprentice, who unleashed forces far too strong for his own control.'[42]

While the FTP worried about discipline among its growing forces in France, PCF representatives in the UK sought to publicise FTP anti-Nazi operations and lobbied hard for increased funds and material support. According to Crémieux-Brilhac, in 1943 the Free French disbursed 300,000 francs per month to the Front National and 1,500,000 francs per month to the FTP.[43] In December 1943, this was increased again by half by de Gaulle's *Commissiare national à l'intérieur* Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigérie. Further, in accordance with an agreement with the *Comité clandestine d'action contre la deportation* (CAD), '*plusieurs millions*' of francs were disbursed monthly to the FTP '*pour leurs réfractaires*'.[44] Nonetheless, Grenier complained after the war that the Free French had repeatedly obstructed PCF attempts to access funding and that obstacles were put in his way at every turn when he tried to publicise the actions of the FTP. The BBC, for example, returned Grenier's draft radio communiqués, asking that he excise all mention of the Francs-Tireurs. When Grenier challenged this, arguing that the Nazis had no problem in identifying Francs-Tireurs as the perpetrators of anti-Nazi attacks in their own radio messages, Val Gielgud at

41 SHD GR 28 P2/105 *Une Circulaire du Parti Communiste: Trop de Bavardage* 31 October 1943.
42 Foot, *SOE in France,* pp. 159 – 161 citing a conversation between MRD Foot and Francis Cammaerts, 4 July 1966.
43 Jean Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre, Tome II* (Paris, 2013 edition), p. 916 citing AN 3 AG2/397/2 Telegramme de Philip, 3 AG2/313; rapport Serreulles, 10 September 1943.
44 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre II*, p. 916.

the BBC replied that the request had originated from *France Combattante*. Turning then to the BCRA's André Dewavrin for an explanation, Grenier was assured de Gaulle had had nothing to do with it, and that the request had in fact come from the British.[45] Grenier faced similar issues when trying to ensure recognition of the clandestine PCF and FTP was included in Free French literature disseminated in the UK. Frustrated that all mention of *L'Humanité* was being suppressed in government-funded communications, Grenier published a number of French-language pamphlets in the UK through the CPGB. The CPGB's Tom Bell, for example, helped him source the necessary paper and translated Grenier's text into English.[46] As part of a PCF charm offensive, Grenier also made representations to Churchill's personal intelligence adviser Desmond Morton, who reported that the PCF delegate had been 'at great pains to explain to me the horror in which he held all the various economic or political forms of Government which I could think up and honestly describe as communistic'.[47] By way of reassuring Morton of the PCF's democratic credentials, Grenier indicated that wartime developments in Britain 'seemed to him to be going much too far on the road to the Left!', describing his views of the ideal British system as that which 'existed before the war, minus Baldwin and Sir Horace Wilson and plus a moderate State ownership of coal mines and essential services.' Rather than convincing Morton of the credibility of the PCF's political programme, however, Grenier's definition of the political Right and Left only served to make Morton 'feel as ambidextrous as a juggler'.[48] Grenier's comments did, however, give credence to intelligence emanating from multiple sources across France that suggested the 'communist resistance' in France

45 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre II*, p. 916; Grenier, *C'est Ainsi*, pp. 147 – 149.
46 Grenier, *C'est Ainsi*, pp. 142 – 144. For examples of Grenier's publications in the UK see Gavin Bowd, *Les communismes britanniques et français, 1920 – 1992: Un conte de deux partis* (Paris, 2020), p. 99.
47 TNA HS 6/319 Letter from Desmond Morton to Robin Brook, 29 September 1943.
48 Ibid.

was not communist 'in any recognisable interpretation of that term.'[49] This did not stop some arguing that SOE should cease to 'assist the entry of agents whose object will be doubtless to harness this [nationalist] Communism on to the Moscow wagon thereby increasing the difficulty of civil administration'.[50]

In addition to sourcing funds for the FTP, Grenier was instructed to ensure urgent delivery of weapons to the communist resistance. It has been widely argued that the Allies did not want their limited stock of weapons to fall into the hands of communists, but many at the time were convinced that SOE was determined to restrict weapons drops to the resistance in its entirety.[51] At the end of August 1943, FTP organiser Charles Tillon sent a delegate, René Houzé (code name Achard, or 'Cardinal'), to London to discuss the question of weapons deliveries with both the BCRA and the Allies. The British secret services watched him for a week, before sending him to the Royal Patriotic School in Wandsworth for questioning. Houzé corroborated Grenier's earlier claim that the Free French and Allies were each blaming the other for failure to support the communist resistance in France: '*Selon les Alliés c'était le BCRA qui désirait nous priver d'armes et selon le BCRA c'était les Alliés qui se refusaient a ce que du materiel nous soit attribué*' he complained.[52] The British, seeking to capitalise on the observable tensions between the BCRA and the FTP, then allegedly mooted the idea of the FTP working directly with SOE: *'Il me fut proposé à cette époque que les FTP travaillent directement avec le WAR OFFICE'*, Houzé recorded in his

49 TNA HS 6/319 Letter from Desmond Morton to Robin Brook, 29 September 1943.
50 TNA HS 4/337 This note from C.L. Roseberry, Head of SOE Switzerland, Italy, Sicily and Sardinia to E.E. Mockler-Ferryman, Director of SOE 'London Group' (AD/E) dated 4 November 1943 referred to the situation in Italy, but accurately reflected the opinion of many within SOE regarding the dropping of NKVD agents into France.
51 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, p. 327.
52 Centre d'Histoire Sciences-Po, Fonds Tillon CT3, dossier 1: Note sur la mission à Londres, 15 Sept, 1943.

report to Tillon, concluding that while this was '*une solution discutable*' he was not qualified to make a decision and had taken it no further.[53]

The delivery of weapons was one major concern, but there was also the question of training. In the autumn of 1943 BCRA chief André Dewavrin agreed to make a formal request to the British government on behalf of the FTP for the training of communist militants. Houzé was sent to the countryside for parachute training and courses on the SPhone and Radar but SOE held deep seated objections to giving known communists specialist clandestine operations training as opposed to paramilitary training. However, echoing the prevailing opinion that the FTP was a mixed bag politically, one officer remarked: 'I have in mind that a party member in the British sense should not be accepted, but it may be that, as things are going in France, those who are labelled Communists include many who are not politically conscious to any extent, but who have – in the Maquis and elsewhere – become adherents of groups trained by military heads who are Communists.'[54] The conclusion of the discussion came in the form of a note from SOE to de Gaulle's Intelligence chief Colonel Passy, dated 5 October 1943, which stated '… in general the attitude of the Security Authorities is quite clear: they make no distinction of politics but are not willing to accept any student who might be subject to pressure to divulge secrets of his training by reason of 'divided loyalties'.'[55]

Throughout the summer of 1943, SOE had used de Gaulle's increasing influence over the resistance in France as an excuse to push back against the NKVD. With domestic and foreign

53 Centre d'Histoire Sciences-Po, Fonds Tillon CT3, dossier 1: Note sur la mission à Londres, 15 Sept, 1943.
54 TNA HS 6/319 Letter from John Senter, SOE liaison officer to SIS (AD/P) to R E. Brook, SOE Regional Controller for Western Europe (D/R), 1 October 1943.
55 TNA HS 6/319 Note from unknown source addressed to Colonel Passy, 5 October 1943.

policy concerns about supporting communist agents in Europe troubling decision makers in Whitehall, SOE was unimpressed by Moscow's latest claim that the Soviet Union had one hundred highly-trained and motivated agents ready to make the journey to the UK for onward infiltration into Europe.[56] While a provisional French governing body for the liberation of France, known as the *Comité français de liberation nationale* (CFLN)[57], was now in place (SOE's recently introduced pre-condition for cooperation), SOE now argued that the CFLN had no equivalent SOE department with which the British could correspond.[58] That said, the British did arrange for the infiltration of one further NKVD agent into France on 12 May, possibly somewhere between Nantes and Vertheuil on the West coast. There is very little reference to this mission in the UK National Archives beyond the fact that SOE considered the agent, who arrived in the UK with the Russian alias Igor Feldman, would not last long.[59] It is possible that SOE records relating to this mission suffered from later culls, or that record keeping was kept to a minimum given the awkward fact that SOE had already determined not to carry out any further infiltrations without the prior knowledge and approval of the Provisional French Government. From the sparse information available it seems that the British believed Feldman (known as Ignace Fallières for the duration of his stay in the UK) was a Parisian of about 20 years of age. This raises questions as to how and when he originally reached the Soviet Union and came to the

56 TNA HS 4/349. This claim was reported in a telegram from Colonel Hill to Colonel Pearson, 20 May 1943. Handwritten notes on the document include the statement: 'Another headache for the Foreign Office!' The number of agents should be put into the context of total numbers of SOE agents air landed into Europe between 1940 and 1945, which amounted to 324 individuals for France but 2,500 for Yugoslavia (In total 1,446 were infiltrated into France by all means – air, sea and land - over the course of the five years).See TNA HS 7/1 Table II: Statistics for Period 1940 – 1945 UK and Mediterranean.

57 The CFLN was formed on 3 June 1943 from a merger of de Gaulle's Comité national de France and General Giraud's Commandement en chef français civil et militaire.

58 TNA HS 4/337 SOE note on Pickaxe Operations in France, 10 June 1943.

59 TNA HS 4/300 series. As has been shown in previous chapters, this was the general (false) assumption made by SOE officers in relation to most if not all of the previous four agents infiltrated into the country.

attention of the NKVD. As has been shown, those agents who had already been infiltrated into France had included members of the International Brigades, long term members of the Comintern intelligence network, a former French *Député*, and an active communist militant related to the famous communist *résistant* Pierre Georges. This points to Fallières/Feldman having been selected for his political reliability as well as his skill as a wireless operator. Stephen Tyas has suggested that Feldman had been slated to assist an already defunct Rote Kapelle network, although he provides no evidence for this assertion.[60] Kim Philby later suggested that all NKVD agents who were French nationals had escaped France at the beginning of the war but the profile of later agents, supported by commentary from Crémieux-Brilhac, suggests that he may have been one of the French internees who had escaped to the Soviet Union from a Nazi labour camp, and subsequently been persuaded to serve on behalf of the Soviet Union, undergoing months of political and operational training overseen by André Marty.

Although little is known about the purpose of Feldman/Fallières's mission, his infiltration appears to have been handled quite differently to previous infiltrations. The mission, code named ARARAT was the first of the French infiltrations, for example, to have potentially involved NKVD agents travelling alongside agents from SOE F or RF missions.[61] Pierre Tillet's detailed table of infiltrations into France notes that the ARARAT flight took place on 12 May 1942. It also suggests that Feldman was the only passenger that night.[62] However, the RAF 138 squadron flight log suggests that Feldman/Fallières may have flown alongside SOE F

60 Stephen Tyas, *SS Major Horst Kopkow: From the Gestapo to British Intelligence* (Oxford, 2017), p. 82.
61 The name of the mission also stands out as all missions up to that date, and several afterwards, were named after beverages (Sauterne, Rum, Whisky, Coffee etc).
62 Pierre Tillet, 'Tentative of History of In/Exfiltrations into/from France during WWII from 1940 to 1945 (Parachutes, Plane & Sea Landings), http://www.plan-sussex-1944.net/anglais/infiltrations_into_france.pdf.

agents destined to join SOE's ROACH and CHESTNUT circuits on the night of 12/13 May 1943, with the Halifax E 666 departing Tempsford at 22:35 and landing back at base at 03:50.[63] Given the lengths to which SOE had previously gone to keep NKVD agents away from the questioning gaze of SOE agents and officers this would have been an extraordinary break with the previous practice for PICKAXE missions if the ROACH and CHESTNUT packages were indeed agents and not simply supplies.[64] It is likely that the sheer number of SOE flights that left RAF Tempsford over the course of the two-week period between 10 and 24 May 1943 (the vast majority of which also carried multiple agents destined for several different circuits), dictated the use of aircraft for multiple networks. It would have been impossible to hide the details from the NKVD, as Chichaev took a close interest in the details of the agents' despatch, even so far as accompanying them to the airfield. A report by 24-year-old SOE officer, Mary Kennedy-Mundle, which covered an aborted attempt to send NKVD agents to Germany in January 1943, provides an interesting insight into Chichaev's modus operandi. After quizzing Kennedy-Mundle, taking note of her name, her father's profession, her nationality, and the name of the airfield to which they were heading (some of which received accurate answers, some not), 'the Ogpu', as Kennedy-Mundle referred to him, 'took a great interest in all the maps and operational dope' spread around the airport office. Trying to deflect his attention, Kennedy-Mundle 'spread-eagled' herself over the maps.[65] Kennedy-Mundle's account also sheds some light on the relationship between Chichaev and his agents. While regrettably skating over much

63 TNA AIR 27/956/1 Operations Record Book for 138 Squadron, Tempsford. Several ROACH agents were dropped into France over the course of May (see HS 6/406). CHESTNUT, run by Grand Prix racing driver William Grover Williams, was linked to Francis Suttill's PROSPER network. Grover-Williams was arrested by the Gestapo in August 1943 and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, before being executed in 1945. See TNA HS 9/1596/8 GROVER WILLIAMS.

64 Details for the ROACH and CHESTNUT supply missions were not uncovered as part of this research.

65 TNA HS 4/344 Report by Mary Kennedy-Mundle on the Tonic mission. For more on Kennedy Mundle, see TNA HS 9/1075/2 and Mary Vaudoyer *Whisper of Truth* (Cirencester, 2012)

potentially valuable information, she includes the following intriguing account of a despatch of two agents in her memoirs *Whisper of Truth*.

> 'During my time in the Operations room an unusual event was to take place, in which I was requisitioned to represent SOE: a Soviet parachute drop with Soviet conducting officers, equipment etc. To my amazement, none of the five men spoke English. We had quite a long way to drive to East Anglia and quite a long time to wait once we reached the airport, and the atmosphere was glacial. Not a word was spoken, not a single smile given. After hours of cramped boredom, the two parachutists were finally called and left us without a word. I had never seen people behave like this, particularly parachutists, who are usually tense and talkative before a flight. We drove back to London, to my home address. We got out of the car and as the remaining two men took my hands, they burst into floods of tears. The Soviet driver remained motionless in front. The tears continued to flow. What on earth was I supposed to do? I spoke no Russian. I had no idea what had caused their distress. I had been brought up to believe that men did not cry. These men did not speak, did not smile, did not communicate in any way with each other or with their agents, but they wept buckets. And there I stood, a 24-year-old female officer. In the end – I was not going to invite them into my home at 2 a.m. – I opened my front door, waved a hand and disappeared.'[66]

This account contrasts markedly with the somewhat more lighthearted report which she filed on 25 January 1943 about the procedures for the aborted TONIC mission. In this, Kennedy-Mundle detailed several conversations with Chichaev and noted that it was an SOE car – not an NKVD driver - that drove everyone home to London, first dropping the agents off at their safe house before settting Chichaev down at his address in Notting Hill Gate.[67] These significant discrepancies suggest that Kennedy-Mundle was either present at more than one despatch, or that the passage of time had dimmed some of the salient details. Unfortunately for this study, nothing like her forthright descriptions exist to shed light on the despatch of Feldman, Kennedy-Mundle having moved on from SOE operations

66 Mary Vaudoyer, *Whisper of Truth* (Cirencester, 2012), pp. 19 – 48.
67 TNA HS 4/344 Report of 25 January 1943.

room in the spring of 1943 to support former Section D officer (Colonel) Leslie Humphreys' DF (escape line) department.[68]

By the summer of 1943 the SOE-NKVD arrangement had become an uncomfortably open secret. In August, the Foreign Office was warned that a French agent who recently arrived in the UK alleged that 'many of the French people are surprised when they learn that the British are putting Russian agents into France. These agents appear to be acting as political agents, and not only for information.'[69] When questioned further the agent confirmed that 'the fact that the British were putting Russian agents into France was well-known in de Gaullist circles, and frequently spoken of in critical terms.'[70] This is not to say that the BCRA spread the information abroad. In July 1943, when the Deputy Head of SOE and the Head of SOE in North-West Europe formally approached M. Massigli, the CFLN *Commissaire aux Affaires étrangères* to let him know that the British had been approached by the Russians to drop agents into France M. Massigli reportedly 'nearly fell off his chair'. When told that the Soviets had secured permission from the Free French Chief of Staff, General Cochet, Massigli 'said that it was most frightfully important that we should take no action at all in the matter as he would deal with it himself.' The SOE officer 'gave him the necessary reassurance gladly!'[71] Either de Gaulle had kept him in the dark, or Massigli was an excellent actor. Despite Massigli's exortion that no further action should be taken by the

68 For more on the SAUTERNE mission see Chapter IV.
69 TNA HS 4/337 Unsigned note sent to Peter Loxley, Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Cadogan, 14 August 1943.
70 Ibid.
71 TNA HS 4/349 Letter from Colin Gubbins, Vice Chief of SOE (V/CD) to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 11 July 1943. A letter of 4 November 1943 from Christopher Warner of the Foreign Office to Harry Sporborg in SOE stated that '…it appears that Cochet in London is the man to whom [questions of NKVD infiltrations] should now be referred. As this question was taken up with him once before in July last when he was not representing the French Committee of Liberation and as he is apparently now to be your regular contact on such matters it would clearly be best for SOE to approach him again rather than for the Foreign Office to butt in' (TNA HS 4/337).

British, shortly after this meeting the NKVD received a gift from SIS of 12 W/T [wireless transmission] sets, as well as two special field sets from SOE, all 'for the use of Russian partisans operating in enemy-occupied territory.'[72] Within SOE, knowledge that the secret was out (among the French at least) gave the naysayers further reason to lobby for an end to the agreement. Charles Hambro and Colin Gubbins received one forthright briefing on 20 August stating 'From an SOE point of view, as opposed to a political one, there is absolutely nothing to be got out of putting in Russians [into France]. I doubt whether they are intended to further the war effort, but are intended for preparing the post-war ground. Their security is a danger, they take up our aircraft and, naturally, the ordinary Frenchman does not thank us for it. I hope it can be stopped.'[73] However a paper produced in November by Hugh Dalton, the Labour MP and former Minister for Economic Warfare suggested that wider cooperation with the Soviet Union should continue after the war, and that the formalisation of the Anglo-American-Russian alliance should become the 'solid nucleus of a world organisation.'[74]

Meanwhile, in the UK Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, a veteran anti-Communist who had led the charge to ban the *Daily Worker* in 1940 and had 'given instructions to the Security Services to continue to exercise ever closer vigilance over [CPGB] activities' argued strongly against CPGB affiliation to the Labour Party at the Labour Party Conference in June of that year.[75] The Home Secretary declared that whereas Stalin was 'a great man; one of the world's greatest men', there was a world of difference between Soviet statesmen who

72 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Notes on the Russian Section of SOE, p. 3 point 13.
73 TNA HS 4/337 Note from E.E. Mockler-Ferryman, Director of SOE 'London Group' (AD/E) to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), via Colin Gubbins (V/CD) of 20 August 1943.
74 John T. Grantham, 'Hugh Dalton and the International Post-War Settlement: Labour Party Foreign Policy Formulation, 1943 – 44', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14/4 (1979), pp. 713 – 729.
75 TNA CAB 66/40/9 Conviction of D. F. Springhall of espionage: memorandum by the Home Secretary, 3 August 1943; TNA CAB/66/23/22 Communist party: memorandum by the Home Secretary, 3 April 1942.

'happened to be Communists' and the scheming and dishonest British Communists who had shown 'a mental kink' in 1939.[76] This was exactly the sort of rhetoric which Stalin hoped to reverse when he announced the dissolution of the Comintern in May.[77] Stalin and Dimitrov actively promoted the dissolution of the Comintern as a concrete sign that Moscow was stepping back from directing international communist policy, allowing parties such as the PCF and the CPGB to organise their own, national-specific responses to the common fight against Hitlerism.[78] Such a move, Stalin hoped, would counter Nazi propaganda that Moscow intended to 'Bolshevise' other nations, whilst simultaneously undermining allegations of national labour movements that communists everywhere acted first and foremost in the interests of Moscow.[79] Anglo-American monitoring of secret communications between foreign communist parties, Soviet diplomats and Moscow, however, led many to conclude that behind the scenes the Comintern 'was and remained a vital and fairly intact carrier of Leninist strategic culture beyond its formal dissolution.'[80]

The day after the Labour Conference debate June, at which National Executive Committee (NEC) spokesman George Ridley stressed that the CPGB, if admitted as an affiliated member of the Labour PaRty, would be 'a snake in this Movement coiling itself with pretended affection around the body of its victim, sucking its life-blood and nourishing

76 Thorpe, 'Locking out the Communists', p. 237.
77 Files from the VENONA (US counter-intelligence project to examine encrypted Soviet diplomatic correspondence from February 1943) and ISCOT (British interception and decryption of radio messages between Moscow and Comintern outstations between 1943 and 1945) programmes were released from the 1990s and are now available on the US National Security Agency website and to view in person at the National Archives, Kew. See: Herbert Romerstein, 'Aspects of World War II History Revealed through ISCOT Radio Intercepts', *Journal of Intelligence History,* 5/1 (2005), pp. 15 – 28 and Christopher Baxter, 'A Closed Book? British Intelligence and East Asia, 1945 – 1950', *Diplomacy and Statecraft,* 22/1 (2011), pp. 4 – 27.
78 http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1943/05/28.htm *The Dissolution of the Communist International* Reply from Stalin to letter from Reuters correspondent Harold King, 28 May 1943.
79 Ivo Banac (ed), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933 – 1945* (New Haven, 2003), pp. 275-276. For previous discussions along these lines which took place in May 1941, see pp. 162 – 164.
80 Mette Skak, 'Female Comintern Insiders', conference paper presented at Årsmøde Dansk Selskab for Statskundskab in 2014, later published as part of a volume entitled *Frauen im Kommunismus*.

itself on it at the same time'[81] the communists' national organizer, Douglas Springhall, was arrested for espionage. The timing of the move by MI5 suggests it may well have been designed to support Labour's case for the political ostracism of the CPGB.[82] CPGB leader Harry Pollitt was reportedly furious at Springhall, whose activities had allowed the government to link the CPGB decisively - and publicly - with espionage, thereby giving MI5 an excuse to clamp down on communists working in government departments.[83] The CPGB moved quickly to contain the effects of Springhall's arrest by pressing on with the development of a reformist strategy, and arguing that only a Labour government could deliver on the types of post-war reforms such as those proposed in the 1942 Beveridge report.[84] But the negative press coverage damaged the CPGB's reputation, arguably irretrievably, and any chance of a Labour-CPGB pact was now dead in the water.

Both Churchill and Attlee remained concerned about the pervasiveness of pro-Soviet propaganda, but that did not stop the Foreign Office from considering making use of material put out by the newly established, Moscow-based Free German Committee (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*, NKFD), on the grounds that it should be accepted as 'a useful political warfare weapon forged for the purpose of demoralising the enemy.'[85] In stark contrast to the restrictions placed on pro-FTP tracts in the UK, Foreign Office official Dennis Allen advised that he could see 'no decisive political objection to our making use of some of this Soviet material, provided the Russians are willing to supply it and the BBC

81 Mette Skak, 'Female Comintern Insiders'.
82 TNA CAB 66/40/9 Conviction of D. F. Springhall of espionage: memorandum by the Home Secretary', 3 August 1943.
83 TNA KV 4/251 Policy on communists already employed in secret work in government departments.
84 Neil Redfern, 'Winning the Peace: British Communists, the Soviet Union and the General Election of 1945', *Contemporary British History*, 16/1 (2002), p. 33.
85 TNA FO 371/34416 Telegram from Ambassador Kerr in Moscow to Foreign Office, 15 November 1943

think they can use it.'[86] The project, however, appears to have been abandoned when concerns were raised that some of the statements of the Committee (such as the need to retain a strong German army) went directly against stated HMG policy with Foreign Office officials arguing that Britain should tread carefully 'to allay the American suspicions of Russian political and ideological expansion in Europe and the Russian suspicions of American schemes for the stablisation of European reactionary forces.'[87]

As far as France was concerned there was a particular urgency for Moscow to establish contact with members of the *Parti Communiste d'Espagne* (PCE), which in 1941 had called on its grass roots organisations to form the first groups of *guerilleros espagnols* in southern France. That such contact remained a concern of Moscow's is confirmed by requests to later agents to make urgent contact with the Spanish comrades in the Pyrenees.[88] Spanish refugees with experience of guerrilla warfare in Spain had helped organise a number of resistance groups in the forested areas of the Aude and Ariège where legally employed woodsmen provided them with physical and political cover. These camps had multiplied across the richly forested Midi and the Pyrenees since wood and charcoal became the only fuel the Germans allowed the French population to use for heating and running their cars.[89] It is quite possible that it was to these Spanish *maquis* that the next group of NKVD agents

86 TNA FO 371/34416 'Suggested use of material put out by Free German Committee in Moscow', notes from 20 November 1943 in relation to Foreign Office telegram 1381 to Moscow.
87 TNA FO 371/34416. Telegram from Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, 15 November 1943 on 'Suggested use of material put out by Free German Committee in Moscow'; Memorandum by John Wheeler Bennette on the Future of German Russian Relations, September 1943, pp. 5 – 6. See also previous references to Bill Donovan's use of IB volunteers and members of the PCI. The Americans, meanwhile, had been listening to former Weimar officials Gottfried Treviranus and Heinrich Brüning and were consequently becoming increasingly worried about Soviet influence – concerns which would have an impact on OSS recruitment of communist agents.
88 TNA KV 2/2827/2Analysis of services known to have operated or be operating to France on Group 12 Division 1.
89 AM Toulouse 85 Z 24 Brief history of the Groupement (Agrupacion) de Guerilleros Espagnols (Haute Garonne).

was sent in order to establish stronger links with Moscow, the PCE and the clandestine PCF. According to the flight log for RAF Squadron 161, on the night of 18/19 September 1943 an eight-man crew led by Squadron Leader Ratcliffe flew the three NKVD ORANGE agents alongside packages destined for unidentified missions TRAINER and JOHN 9.[90] The Halifax X plane took off from RAF Tempsford at 19:25 and landed back at 04:35 having managed to only successfully complete ORANGE,with contact made with ground reception at 00:05 hours and three agents, one package dropped.'[91] Pierre Tillet's record of infiltrations notes that this infiltration, which appears to have been the first NKVD drop involving a reception committee, occurred near Murs in the Vaucluse, roughly 50 km east of Avignon.

The men, all in their late twenties to early thirties, had arrived in the UK bearing the Russian names Mikhail Belov, Ivan Roussakov and Anton Marsov. SOE provided them with papers for a Michel Belfort, Antoine Martin and Jean Roussel, although 'Belov/Belfort' apparently already had a passport in the name of a Miguel Gonzalez.[92] Belov was further provided with a Certificat de Domicile listing his address as 18 rue Jean Carrière, in the 5ème arrondissment of Lyon. This was possibly supposed to be rue Jean Carries, a street which directly abuts the rue de Doyenné, noted in RUM agent Francine Fromond's SOE-crafted papers as her home address. Roussakov/Roussel was also provided with papers bearing a Lyon address which indicates both men may have intended to at least visit the city if not to base themselves there.[93] It is possible that these agents were part of the original four-man mission that Moscow had planned to drop into France in January 1943, which had finally

90 TNA AIR 27/1068/2. Flight log for RAF Squadron 161, 18/19 September 1943. SOE records suggest, however, that the mission was carried out on the night of 14/15 September 1943.
91 Ibid. It is possible that the Archives Départementales at the Palais des Papers, Avignon holds some evidence on the fate of Belfort, Martin and Roussel.
92 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Landing card for arrival in UK on 16.6.43 said Roussel's real name was Arturo Cabo-Martin born 09.08.09, Madrid. PF 604989.
93 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Certificat de Domicile issued 12.5.43 for 22 rue de la Grange, Lyon.

been approved as a three-man mission by the Director of SOE, Charles Hambro, in July.[94] Unfortunately, very little is known about these three men or the purpose of their mission. Donal O'Sullivan has suggested that all three were Spanish Republican exiles. Kim Philby later wrote that three of the NKVD agents 'were obviously Spaniards'.[95] It is possible that they were Spanish Republicans or former International Brigaders who had followed a course at the International Lenin School or at a special training centre at Ufa. As with native French speakers in Moscow, the pool of Spanish nationals in the Soviet Union was small. Glennys Young has shown that only 4,221 Spanish exiles made their way to the USSR before World War II, of whom 3,000 were children. Among the adults were leaders of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), and a number of pilots and sailors who had travelled to the Soviet Union for training and then become stuck due to the outbreak of war. Some Spanish exiles went on to fight with NKVD-sponsored partisan groups, and it may be that their experiences, recorded in archives held at the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica at Salamanca, hold clues as to the ORANGE agents' path to Moscow, and to the detail of this particular PICKAXE mission.[96]

The despatch of the ORANGE agents faced strong opposition from within SOE, with the head of operations for north-west Europe complaining that 'from an SOE point of view, as opposed to a political one, there is absolutely nothing to be got out of putting in Russians (sic) [into France]. I doubt whether they are intended to further the war effort, but are

94 TNA HS 4/336 An SOE chart from November 1942 notes an NKVD request for a four-person mission to occupied France had been accepted for January 1943.
95 TNA KV 2/2827/2 17 March 1946 H.A.R. Philby to Roger Hollis 'Recent analysis of services known to have operated or be operating to France'.
96 Glennys Young, 'To Russia with "Spain": Spanish Exiles in the USSR and the *Longue Durée* of Soviet History', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* 15/2 (2014), pp. 395 – 419. Young observes that there are a number of examples of Spaniards who enlisted in Soviet partisan groups, or who joined the NKVD in the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, Salamanca, Spain, Fondos incorporados (Enrique Zafra García), caja 19.

intended for preparing the post-war ground. Their security is a danger, they take up our aircraft and, naturally, the ordinary Frenchman does not thank us for it. I hope it can be stopped.'[97] In the autumn of 1943, however, dire problems with a PICKAXE mission destined for Austria necessitated urgent action to placate the NKVD. Over the summer three agents destined for Austria, who for various reasons had been in the UK since December 1941, begged their SOE handlers for help in arranging their desertion from the ship that was to return them to the Soviet Union via Canada. The officers, having got to know the 'COFFEE' mission agents over the course of their lengthy stay, and having considered and dismissed the idea that they were agents provocateurs, expressed themselves willing to help but were anxious that any SOE involvement in the scheme to desert should not torpedo the SOE-NKVD relationship.[98] It was all the more urgent, therefore, that SOE carry out successful infiltrations to keep the NKVD representative in London on side and buy the SAM mission favour in Moscow.

A note of 26 October from SAM to the Foreign Office warned that NKVD suspicions about SOE delays in dropping agents into France might drive the Soviets towards making a direct approach to the French with a request to drop agents from North Africa. If that happened, SAM warned, SOE would lose all control of operations. A flurry of communications ensued in which London noted that Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) would not tolerate any uncoordinated action. London prepared a draft response providing a vague assurance that the NKVD mission would be controlled by SOE London. Unsurprisingly, given the enormity of the falsehood, the draft was not passed, the fear being that 'should the Americans find

97 TNA HS 4/337 E.E. Mockler-Ferryman, Director of SOE 'London Group' (AD/E) to Charles Hambro, Head of SOE (CD), 20 August 1943.
98 TNA HS 4/347 PICKAXE: COFFEE. Various reports on the emotional condition and political affiliation of the agents.

out that our control of these agents extends to granting of transport facilities only, they would accuse us of double-crossing them.'[99]

Where SOE had once used the lack of a French provisional government as an excuse to avoid making commitments to the NKVD, now British officers urgently sought French approval to *ensure* future infiltrations. On 1 November 1943 the Foreign Office sent a message to the Resident Minister's Office in Algiers re-iterating a request made in early October that the socialist *Commissaire national à l'intérieur* of the CFLN, André Philip, be pressed to give his consent to PICKAXE operations. Philip, possibly due to pressure from the Americans, claimed that the matter was too delicate to decide without reference to Georges Boris, who was at the time Free French *directeur du Commissariat national à l'Intérieur*.[100] SOE was getting a taste of its own medicine: only a month before, at SOE's request, Chichaev had produced a letter signed by Georges Boris conveying André Philip's authorisation for infiltration of three agents into France but SOE had ruled that Boris' signature was insufficient. Chichaev did his best to secure the required signatures, insisting all the while that the Free French had no veto over the SOE-NKVD agreement. At the end of 1943, a formal arrangement was finally put in place under the terms of which SOE undertook to inform the Free French of any future planned drops into France. The whole situation made de Gaulle uncomfortable, but he may have been somewhat reassured by the small numbers involved as well as British reports which claimed the agents involved

99 HS 4/337 Cipher telegram from London to SAM in Moscow, 26 October 1943.
100 Edward Rice Maximin, 'The United States and the French Left, 1945 – 1949: The View from the State Department', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 19/4 (1984), pp. 729 -747.

were not 'the type likely to inspire confidence or increased activity among existing Communist groups.'[101]

Shortly after the despatch of ORANGE, however, concerns were raised at the highest level that these individuals were facilitating Moscow's control over the internal French resistance. By way of seeking reassurance on the matter, in November Churchill requested a report into Soviet support for resistance movements.[102] Both SOE F (British) and RF (Free French) agents provided input. Two of SOE's foremost experts on France and French colonial affairs, Robin Brook and David Keswick, reported that they were of the opinion that the leaders of the communist resistance in France (and Belgium and Holland) were 'not Moscow trained' and were not operating in any way 'different from that of any other indigenous Resistance Group'.[103] The SOE experts admitted that communist discipline and security were nearly always superior to other resistance groups, but confirmed previous intelligence that the type of communism SOE agents encountered had 'in a curious and paradoxical way become a nationalistic and even patriotic affair'. SOE's Director of Intelligence and Planning Archie Boyle was 'anxious to indicate to the Prime Minister that [SOE's] work had brought us into contact with the Communist organisations in a unique way and has given us a chance to know them and, in some cases, to gain their confidence.'[104] The hope was even expressed that these SOE agents might be 'in a position to influence some of the Communist groups at the time of the Armistice in a direction less unsatisfactory to HMG than that which they would be likely to pursue without our

101 TNA HS 4/356 Communism and Resistance to the Axis, report prepared for the Foreign Secretary by Harry Sporborg, November 1943, p. 5
102 TNA HS 4/356 H.N. Sporborg, Vice-Chief of SOE (V/CD) to the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden (SO), 10 November 1943.
103 TNA HS 4/356 Communism and Resistance to the Axis.
104 Ibid. Boyle was responsible for liaison between SOE and the British intelligence services.

intervention.'[105] Nonetheless, SOE circuit leader Francis Cammaerts reported to London that he did 'not wish to be too closely connected with them, as it might lead to conflicting directives.'[106] An officer from SOE's Free French (RF) liaison section worried that the FTP would constitute 'a relatively uncontrolled force on D-Day' but, stressing the importance of Gaullist oversight, suggested RF agents might bring the communist resistance 'into the fold without reserve.'[107]

Other reports suggested that significant Russian military successes were serving as a recruitment tool for the 'forces of the Left' and it would therefore be advisable for SIS and MI5 'to make a careful study of Communism on a world-wide scale' with a view to planning 'how SOE activities under the directives of HMG can be employed to the greatest advantage, not only for the quicker defeat of the enemy, but also for the ultimate return of normal conditions free from the disturbances associated with Communism.'[108] Free French Foreign Minister René Massigli, newly apprised of the SOE-NVKD arrangement, weighed in on the debate, arguing that 'particularly in the south west and in the Bordeaux district…[British agents] did not realise that in most cases active and energetic leaders of local opinion…were in fact communist agents who had been planted there' and that there

105 TNA HS 4/356 Memo from H. N. Sporborg, Vice Chief of SOE (V/CD) to the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden (SO), 10 November 1943.
106 TNA HS 9/258/5 Francis Cammaerts. Interrogation of ROGER, 13 November 1943, p.9.
107 TNA HS 6/319 Note from RF/G (possibly L.H. Dismore, Fighting French section of SOE) to Robin Brook, SOE Regional Controller for the Low Countries, France and the Fighting French (D/R) dated 1 October 1943. In this instance, Dismore referred specifically to MARIE CLAIRE, an alias of SOE RF agent Forest Yeo-Thomas (symbol RF/L) as well as the general name for his SOE liaison mission involving Pierre Brossolette.
108 TNA HS 4/356 See page 2 of Report on Communism and Resistance to the Axis prepared by Harry Sporborg, deputy Chief of SOE for Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, November 1943.

was a significant threat that 'all villages and towns would be seized by communist self-elected bodies immediately on liberation.'[109]

Responding to a paper on the potential political consequences of facilitating the strengthening the PCF's armed wing written by Robin Brook, SOE's regional controller for the Low Countries, France and the Fighting French, Desmond Morton argued that Britain's attitude must be determined by an accurate appreciation of what the PCF was, what it stood for and how it intended to operate.[110] Delving back into the nineteenth century, Morton perceived that there was 'a trend of political thought in France liable to call itself Communist whose Apostolic descent has nothing whatever to do with Russia or the Third International. Indeed, its tenets approach more closely to the type of regime in Russia today, which is no more Marxian Communist than I am, than to the ideas of the Comintern.'[111] Recalling a conversation with Vyacheslav Molotov, during which the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs had reportedly expressed 'horror' at the suggestion that France should turn Communist after the war, Morton urged SOE to consider that 'the vast majority of persons in France called, calling themselves, or working with Communists – and all these three categories are different – are not Communists at all, in any recognisable interpretation of that term.'[112]

1943 had been, then, a year of strengthening positions within and between Allied military and paramilitary forces. The PCF, with newly liberated or escaped representatives lobbying from their positions in the UK and North Africa, was becoming increasingly vocal but its

109 TNA HS 8/897/83 Cypher from Resident Minister's Office, Algiers to Foreign Office regarding communist agents in the French resistance movements, 3 November 1943.
110 Wilkinson & Bright-Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, p. 176.
111 TNA HS 6/319 Letter from Desmond Morton to Robin Brook, SOE Regional Controller for the Low Countries, France and the Fighting French 29 September 1943.
112 Ibid.

leaders were also anxious to maintain their access to senior Allied officials by emphasising their democratic credentials. Charles de Gaulle had consolidated his own control over a new provisional French government. Although he had achieved his position with critical support from the British, the Foreign Office had to accept that the Frenchman was anything but biddable, and that he was capable of making significant concessions to French communists in order to draw the Soviet Union into an agreement that would prevent Anglo-American interference in post-war French affairs. Concerned about a leftwards swing in British domestic opinion and well publicised support for the communist resistance in France, the UK government undertook regular political temperature checks and both the Conservatives and the Labour Party, assisted by the pragmatic Soviet ambassador, sought to suppress CPGB propaganda. Although at the highest level, politicians worked to ensure nothing upset the Anglo-Soviet alliance, only four NKVD agents were dropped into France over the course of 1943. It was clear that the SOE-NKVD arrangement had failed to live up to expectations. Despite mutual dissatisfaction with agreement, however, neither party was willing to initiate its demise. SOE was frustrated that it had been unable to persuade the NKVD to accede to any of its requests, and as eventual Allied success seemed increasingly assured, officials urgently began to consider ways in which they might exploit this avenue of cooperation in a post-war world.

PART THREE

Chapter VII:

The path to Liberation and a new political framework for France

As the war in Europe drew to a close, British commitment to Anglo-Soviet intelligence cooperation segued into a determination to shore up British defences against intelligence penetration as part of a more aggressive intelligence policy towards the USSR. Following a string of significant Red Army victories, and with a number of NKVD European intelligence networks once more operational, the Soviets were also becoming decreasingly invested in the SOE-NKVD arrangement. Testament to the increasing political tensions among the Allies, rumours persisted in France and Algiers that the British were deliberately restricting arms drops to communists in France for fear of facilitating a post-liberation communist uprising. In reality, the fact that SOE reception committees rarely involved the FTP was as much a consequence of communist reluctance to openly cooperate as the result of a British moratorium. Despite their not necessarily directly receiving consignments, significant numbers of British weapons were either deliberately passed to, or sequestered by the communist FTP and the MOI. As this chapter shows, however, at the same time as SOE was supplying weapons to the communist resistance in France, the Foreign Office increased political pressure on de Gaulle to restrict communist representation within the French provisional government, not least because it was feared a PCF-dominated French government would inspire and embolden anti-colonial movements in the French and British Empires.

In January 1944, with victory in France far from assured, Churchill promised Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigérie, André Philip's successor as CFLN *Commisssaire national à l'intérieur*, a significant increase in weapons and associated supplies for southern France in the hope that French *résistants* might replicate the recent successes by Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. This

additional support, Churchill hoped, would silence critics within the CFLN's *Assemblée consultative provisoire* in Algiers who were 'accusing the British and US authorities of keeping the French Resistance short of arms and supplies for political reasons.'[1] At that same January meeting in Marrakech, however, Churchill did reportedly seek assurance from d'Astier that 'you French will not use the weapons we provide to shoot each other?'[2] Having received the desire response, Churchill called upon senior RAF and SOE officers to coordinate British aid to the French Resistance, an order which 'began the process that would, in the end, deliver 13,000 tonnes of arms by air to France, sufficient to equip some 425,000 *Maquisards*.'[3] In February, arms sufficient to equip 8,000 resistance fighters were dropped into the Alps region.[4] Understandably, it took time for these drops to have a perceptible impact on the French resistance as a whole. Initially, the results of Churchill's Marrakech order were appreciated only by those groups with whom SOE had developed close connections. Hundreds of other resistance formations distanced from these networks resorted to 'requisitioning' stocks from local towns and villages. Observing the raids, some questioned the poor state of the *maquis*, wondering if the cause was a reluctance on the part of England and America 'to arm revolutionary bands.'[5]

Given the limited allocation and distribution systems in place, in many cases it was rival local French resistance groups, as opposed to the British, who were most forthright in their refusal to cooperate with communist units. One FTP representative recalled an exchange with a local

1 Wilkinson & Bright-Astley, *Gubbins & SOE*, pp. 177 – 178. The *Assemblée consultative provisore* was a representative group of resistance organisations and political parties that came under the direction of the CFLN, later (from June 1944) transferring to operate under the authority of the Provisional Government of the French Republic.
2 Emmanuel d'Astier, *Seven Times Seven Days* (London, 1958), pp. 154 -155.
3 Crémieux-Brilhac, *Une Stratégie militaire pour la Résistance*, p. 43.
4 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, 'Les Glières, Vingtième Siecle', *Revu d'Histoire*, 45/1 (1995), p. 58.
5 Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years*, p. 240. Diary entry of 18 February 1944.

Armée Secrète (AS) group in the Aveyron, which took place after the head of the AS for the department had decided to share the most recent cache of parachuted material between the AS and the FTP:

> AS: "Vous êtes des communistes. Vous donnez des armes? Vous méritez que l'on vous fusille, oui!"
>
> *FTP: "Vous avez un ordre de vos chefs."*
>
> AS: "Mes chefs? Je m'en fous."
>
> *FTP: "Vous vous en foutez? Et à qui obéissez-vous donc?"*
>
> AS: "A l'Intelligence Service."
>
> *FTP: "Ah! Félicitations! Vous êtes au service d'une puissance étrangère?"*[6]

The above exchange is instructive on a number of levels. Even accepting the possibility that it was massaged deliberately by the FTP representative to portray the AS as the footsoldiers of the British SIS, it underlines the way in which any association with British support – or lack thereof - was deliberately used by all parties to aggravate divisions between different resistance factions - even when SOE representatives were not present and had no control over the end-point distribution of material.

There is no denying that the communist resistance suffered from a lack of weapons and other supplies, but their situation was no different to that of many non-communist groups across occupied territory. What the communists did have - and this they played to their great advantage - was a powerful propaganda network supported by now well established and vocal representatives in London and Algiers. Setting their propaganda machine to work, the PCF vigorously promoted the argument that communists were behind the most effective and

6 Bouladou, *Résistance dans l'Hérault,* pp. 186 – 187. The *Armée Secrète* was a pro-gaullist entity formed with the guidance of de Gaulle's emissary in 1942 from the paramilitary oranisations Combat, Lbération-sud and the Francs-Tireurs (an entirely different entityto the communist FTP). In February 1944 the AS merged with the FTP to form the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI).

patriotic resistance forces in the country and as such deserved greater representation within the Provisional Government. Internal PCF memos from the same time reveal, however, that the Party was deeply concerned about the FTP's capacity for effective military action due to the arrival of thousands of often poorly-disciplined young volunteers fleeing the *Service de Travail Obligatoire* (STO), whom the communist-led *maquis* were unable to adequately clothe, feed, or train let alone arm. A document purporting to be from the PCF *Comité Central* to its cadres, and likely dating from early 1944, bemoaned the fact that most young FTP recruits only had the vaguest idea of what guerrilla warfare actually involved.[7] Substantial concerns were raised not only about inexpert handling of weapons and explosives, but also volunteers' lack of familiarity with the broader aspects of clandestine existence including effective liaison, reconnaissance, sanitation, and the securing and maintenance of food supplies. Rather than double down on training, however, the PCF decreed that the most effective safeguard against the plague of indiscipline was to keep the new recruits busy. Detailed police reports from the period attest to daily attacks on railways, many of which were strategically ineffective and caused minimal, if any, delays to traffic but which served the dual purpose of providing on-the-job training and maintaining the communists' local and national reputation as the resistance movement most willing to strike at the occupiers. With an eye to the future, however, militants were instructed to make every effort to adapt to their new life in training camps and to strive to become proficient in the handling of a variety of

7 TNA WO 204/12725 *Note confidentielle du Comité Central du Parti Communiste français aux principaux cadres du Parti*: *Pourquoi nous devons organiser et soutenir les groupes FTP.* There is no date for the original document, though it was transmitted to SOE on 8 June 1944.

weapons. Only by doing this, the *Comité Central* claimed, would the FTP be in a position to form the backbone of '*notre future armée rouge et de notre police de structure*.'[8]

Numerous intercepted '*mots d'ordre*' from the period claimed that '*Le Parti Communiste ne constitue pas une organisation de résistance mais un parti politique destiné à prendre le pouvoir plus tard*'.[9] While some seized upon these tracts as evidence that the PCF was planning for political revolution in the wake of Liberation, BCRA and SOE files show that many of these reports were dismissed in London and Algiers as Vichy, Nazi or even right-wing resistance propaganda designed to 'succour the Bolhsevik and Russian bogy'.[10] One tract entitled '*Préparation communiste de la guerre civile*', received by the head of the BCRA's counter-espionnage section, was accompanied by a covering note saying that it appeared to be '*dénué d'authenticité et vraisemblablement un soi-disant un [sic] tract clandestine répandu par les soins de la propagande allemande*.'[11] The existence of French intelligence reports and/or intercepts in British archives and vice versa point to a significant amount of information sharing on communist activity in France in 1944 between British, French and American intelligence agencies. Maiolo and Jackson have gone so far as to say that information sharing between the French and the British during the war inspired a new vision of post-war cooperation, based on mutual trust.[12]

8 TNA WO 204/12725 *Note confidentielle du Comité Central du Parti Communiste français* transmitted to SOE on 8 June 1944.
9 SHD GR 28 P2/105 *Mots d'ordre communiste* possibly 19 February 1944 (this may have been the date received by BCRA or Vichy intelligence, in which case the actual date of the *mot d'ordre* could be significantly earlier).
10 TNA WO 204/12725, Directives données le 20 Septembre 1943 par les responsables inter-régionaux de la région Parisienne de l'organisation communiste. Date de transmission 8 Juin 1944. A pencilled note states 'If this is not a plant, it is very interesting.'
11 SHD GR 28 P 2/105 Copy of tract entitled *Préparation communiste de la guerre civile* (no date).
12 Peter Jackson & Joseph Maiolo, 'Strategic intelligence, Counter-intelligence and Alliance Diplomacy in Anglo-French relations before the Second World War', *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 65/2 (2014), pp. 417 – 462.

The PCF was convinced that the British were using their close connections with the Free French to push de Gaulle into pursuing '*une politique d'unité nationale et anti-commnuniste en acceptant même une collaboration avec Vichy.'*[13] Reacting to indications of British attempts to interfere in the political composition of the French provisional government, PCF leaders recommended that communist propaganda fight back by stressing Britain's desire to reassert its economic hegemony in Western Europe and Africa, and its willingness to use dissident leaders to ensure the success of its post war political programme.[14] British diplomatic efforts to dissuade de Gaulle from making too many concessions to communists as he planned for the transition of the CFLN to a French provisional government markedly increased during the spring of 1944 and the inclusion of two communists in the CFLN in April led Churchill to instruct diplomats to exercise caution when imparting secret information to the *Comité*.[15] Appreciating the forces ranged against communist influence at ministerial level, the PCF leadership pushed for its members in France to gain an early upper hand within the *Comités départementaux de libération* (CDL), the establishment of which was ordered by the *Conseil National de la Résistance* in April 1944.[16]

Although the April ordonnance envisaged the disbanding of CDL once the more traditional civilian power structures had been re-established, the PCF saw the CDL as embryonic French Soviets that had the potential to ensure communist influence survived and thrived during the transition from active resistance to a post-liberation administration. One of those tasked with

13 TNA WO 204/12725 *L'activité du Parti Communiste vue par la Milice*. A collection of reports from the *Bureau d'etudes anti-communistes de la Milice destinés aux services intérieurs du Maintien de l'Ordre*. Source: ALON. Dates from 25 February 1944- 20 April 1944.
14 Ibid.
15 Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 5 Closing the Ring* (London, 1959), p. 537. Prime Minister to Minister of State and Sir Alexander Cadogan, 13 April 1944.
16 Article 19 of the CNR order of 21 April 1944. The CNR was responsible for coordinating all resistance movements from its inception in mid 1943. Its programme of action was adopted in March 1944.

ensuring local communist leaders exercised the maximum possible control over the CDL was Raymond Guyot, who remained in regular contact with Moscow on the subject of political developments in France. One of the first messages between Guyot and Moscow intercepted by the British was a long account of a congress of the CDL, which Guyot had attended in Avignon in October 1944 and at which it had been hoped that an agreement would be reached on the constitution of the CDL as power structures running in parallel to the provisional government, municipal councils, and the *conseils généraux*.[17] Only part of Guyot's message is available but he made sure to transmit that the Congress carried the resolution 'For Maurice' (Thorez was readying himself for a return to France), resolved to create Patriotic Assemblies, and confirmed the retention of the communist *milices patriotiques* - groups of civilians mobilised for a national insurrection.[18] The British government was initially unconcerned by the creation of the *Comités de Libération*. However, it soon became clear that communist-dominated CDL were in many localities attempting to dictate terms to other civilian structures.[19] De Gaulle fought back, directly appointing *Préfets* and *Commissaires de la République* to restrict the communists' room for manoeuvre.

If, as the PCF alleged, Britain was a key force behind de Gaulle's attempts to close down communist influence in French domestic politics, then SOE's actions of January to March 1944 were distinctly off-message. On 5 January 1944 three further 'Soviet' agents - M.S Simonov, A.A. Livanov and Ivan Rozov - arrived in the UK for onward infiltration into France. SOE reports

17 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Analysis of services known to have operated or to be operating in France on Group 12 Division 1, p. 5. Date circa March 1946.
18 Ibid. Guyot also informed Moscow that there were at that point 320,000 registered members of the Party, and that PCF members held leading positions in half the Unions, including the Miners' union. Meanwhile, Daniel Georges was passing messages from the political leadership in Lyon to new and emerging communist groups across the South of France. For more on this, see Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers de la Liberté: L'odyssée des 218 évadés par l'URSS* (Paris, 2004), p. 334.
19 Robert Gildea *Marianne in Chains* (London, 2003), pp. 333 – 334.

differ as to their age and origins. One describes them as 'politically minded French students of the lower classes', while another suggests they were all in their early thirties, with possibly some years' experience of serving with the Red Army.[20] From a conversation with Ivan Rozov, SOE officers concluded that he had been a motor mechanic before the war, was married with two children, and that he had served in the Russian forces between 1941 and 1944, attaining the rank of sergeant. His wife, it was understood, was a former law student who had gone on to become a Lieutenant in the Russian armed forces. There is no guarantee that any of the information provided by the agents was factual, but beyond these details there is nothing in accessible British files that offers any indication as to the men's true identities. Instead, one must turn to French and Soviet accounts in an attempt to piece together some plausible account of their activity before and after infiltration into France.[21] The available evidence points to at least two of the three men having been among the group of French POWs identified by Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac who offered to serve the Soviet Union after their release from internment in the USSR. The Soviets compiled dossiers on a total of thirty two French soldiers who elected to remain in the USSR following the German invasion. Eighteen of these men were recommended for further training and, of these, ten declared themselves ready for any undertaking chosen for them by the PCF.

Based on research in Soviet archives, Crémieux-Brilhac found that André Marty had recommended two of these former POWs, by the names of Jacquetant and Piza, for illegal work in France. An entry in the online *Maitron, Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social* notes that a Raymond Piza (pseudonym in France 'Maurice Roux'),

20 TNA HS 4/278, Report on Russian Agents for France, pp. 50 -51.
21 TNA HS 9/136/3 The only available file in the National Archives, Kew for an M Simonov refers to a Yugoslavian seaman.

who would have been in his mid thirties in 1943, had been a student of the École léniniste internationale (ELI). Piza's full entry in the *Maitron* reads: '*Chauffeur, Raymond Piza adhéra au Parti communiste en 1936. Fait prisonnier, il se retrouva en Russie où il fit connaître son engagement politique et fut envoyé à la 21er section de l'ELI*.'[22] There is no mention of the manner of his re-entry to France nor, unfortunately, of his alleged comrade Jacquetant. Both Jacquetant and Piza had been deemed ready to leave the Soviet Union as early as February 1943 but as of 26 September they were still awaiting notification of their departure date. It is possible that the delay in their departure was due to NKVD concerns about a third proposed member of the group. Paul Lambert, a boilermaker by trade and fellow student of the wartime version of the ELI, had joined the PCF in 1936 after having been a member of the *Jeunesses communistes*. Like Piza and Jacquetant, Lambert had also been selected '*pour une destination spéciale*' in February 1943 but André Marty warned Dimitrov that this particular recruit was fragile, timid and very emotional and that his colleagues Piza and Jacquetant had insisted he should not be given any information about their cover in France if for any reason he had to travel separately from them.[23] In a statement that says as much about the NKVD's lack of suitable recruits in 1943 as it does about Lambert's character, Marty suggested that Lambert only be used in France '*dans un poste où ses faiblesses ne risquent pas de faire prendre l'organisation à laquelle il appartiendra*.'[24] This selection process, combined with the later movements of Jacquetant, Piza and Lambert strongly suggest that they were the A.A. Livanov,

22 The Maitron entry for Raymond Piza (Maurice Roux) notes that he was born at Corsary in the Pyrénées Orientales on 1 June 1908. https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article89482

23 Lambert's entry in the Maitron reads as follows: *'Fils de Adolphe, manouvrier et de Alphonsine Fauvet, Paul Lambert adhéra aux Jeunesses communistes en 1933 et au Parti communiste en 1936 présent en Russie (on ignore la raison) il suivit l' "école politique de l'IC" en 1943, nouvelle version de guerre de l'ELI. Il mourut le 16 juin 1944 à Grandris (Rhône).'* There is no mention on the website of the circumstances surrounding his death. LAMBERT Paul, Julien, Auguste - Maitron.

24 Crémieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers*, p. 339.

S. Rozov and M.S. Simonov, who departed the Soviet Union for the UK sometime in December 1943.

The uncharacteristic absence of details in SOE files pertaining to this NKVD-sponsored mission to France, such as training reports, accommodation lists, or character portraits penned by SOE handling officers could be attributed to the somewhat uncoordinated and at times apparently arbitrary weeding of SOE documents which took place towards the end of the war. It is difficult to conceive of a situation, however, in which an organisation that was known for even filing notes bearing the message 'burn after reading' would discard precious information on Soviet intelligence agents. The evidence points instead to at least some of the files having been subsequently transferred to SIS. Whether or not Lambert was 'turned' has not been possible to determine. Before long, however, someone clearly decided that he had betrayed the Party or that he posed a danger to security: Lambert's body was discovered on 19 June 1944 in the valley of Azergues, to the north west of Lyon, not far from where Simonov and Livanov had been dropped by SOE four months earlier.[25] He had been executed with a bullet to the neck and his body stripped. The French Procureur concluded his death was in all probability one among many '*règlement de comptes*' between militia in which summary executions were carried out during the heat and mess of Liberation on the orders of hastily arranged kangaroo courts. Although the coroner was informed that Lambert had in all likelihood died on 16 June and the area in question had reportedly only been occupied by the FTP on 18 June, FTP maquis had been present in the Azergues since March 1943.[26] With no maquis or Milice reports from the area alluding to the episode, however, an investigation

25 Tillet, 'WWII Infiltrations', Entry for 5 February 1944.
26 Crémieux-Brilhac cites Mme Paule René-Bazi, Laurent Douzou and Virginie Sanisco as the sources for this information. For an audio account on the maquis of the Azergues, including oral testimony from former maquisards, see: http://histoire-et-genealogie.over-blog.com/2016/12/maquis-ftp-azergues-rhone.html

launched by Lambert's relatives in 1957 struggled to find answers about his death.[27] If the NKVD, PCF or the FTP had discovered any treachery and acted swiftly to address it the perpetrators have since been protected by a veil of silence.

Of all three agents the most is known about Ivan Rozov, who parachuted solo into France one month after his comrades, on 5 March 1944, into Clermont l'Hérault, landing approximately 40 km west of Montpellier - roughly the same area in which Guyot, Fromond and Georges had landed two years previously.[28] According to a note in SOE files, the original plan had been for Rozov to be dropped into the Paris region but plans had later changed. SOE speculated that this was because the PCF wanted in particular to get in contact with Spaniards in the South of France. Certain of Rozov's wireless communications with Moscow were captured by Britain's Radio Security Service (RSS), manned throughout the war predominantly by amateur radio enthusiasts, and it is from these records, together with other documents from the National Archives at Kew, the Archives Départementales de l'Hérault in Montpellier as well as accounts from FTP militants in the Hérault Department, that it has been possible to piece together at least some of his movements following his arrival in France. After landing, Rozov contacted Moscow to say that he was operating in the Hérault. On 27 July, RSS intercepted an order from Moscow to Rozov instructing him to 'make contact' with PCF structures in France by waiting 'as he had previously arranged, i.e. every Saturday and Sunday, at Tr[illegible] (Hérault).' The PCF liaison from whom Rozov was to obtain further details 'would be among the charcoal burners and known to them as Jean Paoli.'[29] A small, recently formed FTP maquis

27 Cremieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers*, p. 339. It is not known what, if any, conclusions it reached.
28 Donal O'Sullivan has shown that there had been five previous attempts to parachute Rozov into France, which suggests that the original plan had been for him to drop at roughly the same time as the other NKVD agents. See O'Sullivan, *Dealing with the Devil*, p. 84.
29 TNA KV 2/2827/2 See letter from H.A.R. Philby to Roger Hollis of MI5, dated 17 March 1946 and enclosing a 'copy of a recent analysis of services known to have operated or to be operating to France on Group 12

made up mostly of miners, and going by the name of *Vernazoubre* was at that time moving between camps in dense forest dotted around a tiny hamlet called Truscas.[30] Research by Gérard Bouladou has revealed that Truscas, which had a small factory and was frequented by charcoal burners, was the possible site of a training camp for PCF cadres.[31] That Rozov was operating in the vicinity of Truscas and potentially hidden by the *Vernazoubre* maquis is further supported by a message he sent to Moscow on 30 July 1944 reporting details of an FTP sabotage attack on the railway tunnel between la Tour sur l'Orb and Bédarieux in the Hérault, which is generally thought to have been carried out by the *Vernazoubre* maquis on 25 July.[32] Confusingly, however, a local police report from July 1944, which contains what appears to be a comprehensive list of sabotage attacks on various railway lines makes no mention of any sabotage that corresponds precisely to the July attack on the Tour sur l'Orb-Bédarieux tunnel, and certainly none that caused significant damage or warranted singling out by Rozov for Moscow's particular attention.[33] Whether Rozov's message regarding the 25 July sabotage attempt was a way of passing on information about local maquis action or simply a way to confirm that he was in the area, embedded with the *Vernazoubre* maquis, or ready to make contact/had already made contact with 'Jean Paoli', it is not possible to confirm.[34]

Division 1' dated 8 March 1946, p. 4.. Some of the accompanying typed report is illegible where the keys have not struck clearly enough.

30 ADH 91 J 1-37 *La résistance dans l'Hérault*, p. 500.

31 Ibid.

32 *Maitron bigraphique du mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social* entry for the FTP *maquisard* Antoine BOLOS. www.maitron.fr/spip.php?article179928. A map created by Gérard Bouladou of maquis groups operating in the Hérault in August 1944 also shows that the *Vernazoubre* maquis was camped near the point of the reported attack in July.

33 AD Hérault 18 W 150 *Compte rendu relative aux renseignements receuillis par la Gendarmerie ou à l'activité déployé par elle au cours du mois de Juillet 1944.*

34 Franck Liaigre, *Les FTP*, pp. 214 – 215 notes that reports were regularly sent to Moscow confirming sabotage attacks against German forces by way of promoting communist resistance.

While Rozov waited for instructions from his PCF liaison. Moscow asked that he dscover the details of documents a Frenchman would need in order to make a temporary stay in Spain and that he also pass '*les conditions de liaison*' to 'the Spanish comrades.'[35] A week later, on 15 July, Moscow pressed Rozov again to establish a liaison with Spanish communists beyond the Pyrenees by sending someone he could trust in order to obtain the names of those 'directing the work'.[36] Warning of the difficulty of such a mission, Rozov nonetheless agreed to try and make contact. Moscow's persistent instructions in relation to contacting the 'Spanish comrades', together with the profiles of, and orders issued to the previous three PICKAXE agents (Michel Belfort, Antoine Martin and Jean Roussel) indicate the importance the PCF (and likely the PCE) leadership in Moscow placed at this time on building strong links with the Spanish *guérilleros*. Reports from British agents working in south and south west France suggested that communists were trying to gather 20 – 30,000 Spaniards in southwestern France to renew the fight against Franco in Spain using weapons that the Fp had been storing in anticipation of an armed putsch in France.[37] The stockpiling of arms was not in and of itself a sign of the communists' preparation for a politically-inspired uprising: It was, after all, the Allies who had determined precisely that weapons should be hidden in preparation for use against German troops (albeit on Allied orders) following the opening of the Second Front.[38] But increased SOE nervousness as to PCF plans for France began to take

35 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Copy of a recent analysis of services known to have operated or to be operating to France on Group 12 Division 1, 8 March 1946, p. 4 reads: '…young Spanish communists over the Avignon area on 14.9.43. They had two W/T sets. These agents had failed to make contact with Moscow and possibly it was for that reason that the NKVD asked that Rozov should be dropped in the South of France instead of North of Paris as had originally been arranged.'

36 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Analysis of services known to have operated or to be operating to France on Group 12 Division 1, 8 March 1946, p. 3-4.

37 Jacques Fauvet *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français 1920 – 1976* (Paris, 1977), 337 claims that up until February 1944 Stalin had refused to let Thorez leave Moscow for France for fear of irritating the Allies.

38 As British intelligence noted, the *Organisation de resistance de l'armée* (ORA) and the *Corps francs de liberation* (CFL) were also believed to be storing arms. The ORA was formed of current and former soldiers in 1943, following the German invasion of the southern zone. The CFL was created in April 1944 at a meeting in

hold when George Starr, noted by Foot as one of the agents who had most successfully melded resistance groups of all political persuasions, briefed that there were signs that communists in France were operating under orders from Moscow and were 'deliberately making anti-British propaganda in the interests of Russia.'[39] Starr also advised SOE that five 'Ogpu' agents may have arrived in Toulouse from Spain at the end of August. Starr ordered two of his men to investigate the matter further, but both were murdered.[40]

British representative to the CFLN Duff Cooper, like his Whitehall colleague Desmond Morton, might have been convinced that independent observers were making 'much, possibly too much…of the Communist danger in Southern France'[41] But when the idea was floated (by whom it is not clear) that SOE might seek out liaison with 'Russian' agents in the Mediterranean, senior SOE officials put their foot down. On 15 February 1944, David Keswick, the SOE director for Mediterranean operations dismissed the proposal, declaring:

> 'In my opinion, there is nothing to be gained by an attempt on our part to contact any Russian agents – not that I think there would be the least chance of us being able to do so. The Russians are very experienced at this game and are going to handle their underground movement in Europe in their own interests. Nothing that we do will influence them in any way and any attempt at close collaboration with the NKVD would, in my humble opinion, mean disaster to us, as it would enable them to apply their usual technique and penetrate up to the hilt any clandestine organisations run by SOE.'[42]

Keswick nonetheless indicated his full agreement with the idea that '…a proposal should be made to the Russians to make full use of their Russian nationals in Europe and other agents to develop active sabotage and other subversive activities' although he fully imagined that

Paris of the various leaders of the Mouvement de Libération National (MLN) to ensure a greater degree of coordination between the resistance groups.

39 TNA FO 371/41907 Memorandum on the Liberation of the South of France.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 TNA HS 4/328 Note of 15 February 1944. From David Keswick, exact position unknown (AD/H) to AD G.F. Taylor, Director of HQ Staff Overseas and Missions (AD).

they would 'reply in their usual style that they have no organisation in Europe'. He concluded by saying:

> 'It is my personal opinion that the term collaboration when applied to Russians is meaningless and that the best policy is to let them run their clandestine organisations on their own lines and just hope that from time to time they may do something that coincides with the interests of the United Nations.'[43]

Even if they did not engage directly with each other, it is quite possible that both SOE, later joint Anglo-French-American miliary liaison missions (known as Jedburghs) and the Comintern/PCF/NKVD, were all in simultaneous contact with the same groups of communist partisans in the run up to, or immediately after the Allied landings in France. For example, it is likely that on orders from Moscow Rozov made contact with the 4ème Division of the XIV Corps of Spanish guerrilleros, the armed wing of the PCE in France[44] whose 3ème Brigade also received an Anglo-French Jedburgh mission parachuted into the region.[45] The 3ème Brigade went on to fight in close cooperation with the Jedburgh team and a letter received after the war attests to the high regard in which the Jedburghs held their Spanish comrades. British officer Major Bill Probert ('Crypte') and French Commandant Marcel Bigeard (Commandant 'Aube') wrote that '*Les membres de la mission sont fiers d'avoir combattu à côté des Espagnols, des parfaits guerriers qui luttent pour un idéal. Avec leur abnegation et leur courage ils ont libéré l'Ariège*.'[46]

43 TNA HS 4/328 Note of 15 February 1944.
44 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, pp. 225-226. Amilcar Calvetti, a former Secretary of the Jeunesses Communistes of l'Hérault was, from April 1944, Head of the FTP for the Tarn, Averyon, Pyrénées Orientales, Haute Garonne and Ariège. On 1 September 1944 he was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the FFI for Toulouse. Sanz considered the 3ème brigade to be the biggest and best organised resistance unit in the *Département*, estimating that, by the time of the Allied landings in Normandy, there were 3,400 3ème brigaders active across the nine departments of the Région 4 of the combined *Forces Française de l'Intérieure* (FFI), a figure which rose to 10,000 fighting across the whole of France by August 1944.
45 AM Toulouse 85 Z 24 Brief history of the 3ème Brigade de Guerilleros Espagnols, Ariège, p. 5. Sanz later wrote an account of his time fighting in France: *Luchando in tierras de Francia* (Madrid, 1981).
46 Ibid, p. 8.

Another militant communist who recognised at least the short-term value of working closely with the British in the run up to the Liberation was Georges Guingouin, the FTP leader who had apparently narrowly escaped execution for indiscipline in 1942. While Guingouin would later claim that he had secured weapons from the British as part of a '*ruse de guerre'* worth of the 14th century Breton knight and military commander Bertrand du Guesclin, SOE circuit leader Philippe Liewer quickly ascertained who he was dealing with and, after visiting his units, decided that Guingouin was *'un 'bon poulain' qu'il faut armer.'*[47] According to Grenard, Liewer's decision to arm Guingouin's fighters was instrumental in making the communist maquis leader the head of the FFI in the Haute-Vienne.[48] The cooperation between Guingouin and SOE, perhaps unsurprisingly, is rarely mentioned in communist histories. Philippe Robrieux's *Histoire intérieure du Parti Communiste*, for example, which refers to Guingouin's maquis as '*sans doute le plus remarquable, le plus solide et le plus efficace de tous le maquis dirigés par des communistes*'[49] does not to admit to the presence of Bob Maloubier, an SOE agent who was embedded in Guingouin's maquis group and who trained its members in tactics and the use of explosives for nearly three months between June and August 1944.[50]

Although M.R.D. Foot cites Richard Heslop of MARSKMAN and Tony Brooks of PIMENTO as examples of agents who tried to stay out of politics altogether, both Heslop and Brooks' circuits are also known to have supplied arms and actively engaged with FTP groups in their areas of operation. Earlier in Heslop's mission he reported having found the rank and file of the FTP to be generally 'very reliable' and singled out an FTP grouping in Coligny, in the

47 Grenard, *Légende du Maquis*, pp. 167 – 168, 506 – 509. Extracts from an interview by the author of former SOE agent Robert (Bob) Maloubier on 22 September 2011.
48 Ibid, pp. 167 – 168, 506 – 509.
49 Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire Intérieure du Parti Communiste, 1920 – 1945* (Paris, 1980), p. 551.
50 Grenard, *Légende du Maquis*, pp. 506 – 509.

department of Ain to the North East of Lyon as particularly useful.[51] Over the course of 1944, however, MARKSMAN experienced considerable trouble with FTP leaders, including an alleged plot to 'liquidate' Heslop and the head of the maquis in the Ain and the Haut Jura, Henri Romans-Petit. The plot was allegedly engineered by a communist going by the name of Dr Bertrand, whose attitude Heslop described as 'Down with the Germans and the British as well!'[52]

While Heslop, Starr, Poirier and others attempted to coordinate with communist groups in their areas of operation, other British officers stepped back in the face of growing political tension and rumours that Soviet agents were operating among the resistance groups. Starr's report of of NKVD agents operating around Toulouse was later supported by information provided by Jedburgh team CINNAMON led by Captain Harcourt, who indicated that there were several 'Russians' known to be operating in the south west of the country and that Toulouse was one of the potential 'nerve centres' selected by the PCF to enhance its control over the country in the wake of the Liberation. Harcourt's report was accompanied by a confidential annex dated 20 August 1942, which has since been destroyed/removed from the public record. Referencing the brusque and at times threatening attitude of the armed FTP/FFI patrols as well as the behaviour of the people in the streets Harcourt suggested that the hostility experienced by the Alllied team was a result of a misperception of the team's role and that, despite warnings from London not to become involved in politics, it had proven

51 Foot, *SOE in France*, p. 318. The Coligny FTP, led by the trade unionist and former orchestral director of the Folies Bergères, Paul Cribeillet, had previously received arms from Brooks' PIMENTO circuit.Heslop's primary contact with the Maquis, Henry Romans-Petit was incarcerated for several weeks in Fort Lamothe, Lyon. Members of the Coligny FTP included: Marcel Beisson, Robert Debiesse, René Chamberlin, René Cadoz et Gabriel Boulu (the latter a member of the PCF) as well as le commandant Thorembert, the regional head of the FTP.

52 TNA HS 9/701/1 Richard HESLOP. Notes on the FTP, pp. 110 – 130.

impossible to separate the miltary from the political.[53] Harcourt noted that the Toulouse 'political web' was further complicated 'by the ambitions and virility of the Spanish Republican movement there' whose politically educated members were 'popular with the people of the region.'[54] Despite having been threatened with liquidation by the local head of the FTP, Harcourt nonetheless concluded that the FTP would not seek to declare a 'red republic' while allied troops remained on French soil.[55]

Harcourt's findings that it was impossible to disassociate military affairs from the political was largely due to the FTP being 'more interested in their political aspirations than in their military operations', and the fact that most of the *Comités de Libération* in his area of operation were under socialist and communist control.[56] Between 25 February and 20 April 1944, a series of intercepted reports authored by Vichy intelligence claimed that the PCF viewed de Gaulle as a French Alexander Kerensky, the revolutionary leader of the 1917 Russian Provisional Government who was swiftly deposed by the Bolsheviks, and that the Party's secret desire was *'d'instaurer un nouveau régime en France, puis par la suite, avec l'appui des Russes, instaurer le bolchévisme.*'[57] There was also talk of communists infiltrating the Vichy-run *Chantiers de Jeunesse* and *Maisons de prisonniers*.[58] In June 1944, the BCRA received more credible indications that the leaders of certain communist resistance groups were arguing that armed insurrection could be supported by a general strike involving the working class

53 TNA HS 6/316 Report by Captain Harcourt of Jedburgh CINNAMON, 12 December 1944. A confidential annex to this report, dated 20 August 1942, was destroyed.
54 TNA HS 6/316, Letter from Buckmaster commending report by Captain Harcourt, 29 January 1945.
55 TNA HS 6/316, Report by Captain Harcourt of Jedburgh CINNAMON, 12 December 1944.
56 Ibid.
57 TNA WO 204/12725 *Note confidentielle du Comité Central du Parti Communiste français* transmitted to SOE on 8 June 1944.
58 Ibid.

more broadly, including the looting of food shops and the sabotage of communications.[59] For the time being, however, communist militants were ordered not to carry out actions or engage in anti-Allied political rhetoric that might provoke '*un renversement des alliances'* in which the USSR would find itself faced with *'une coalition germano-italo-franco-anglo-americaine à laquelle se joindraient leurs satellites de par le monde*.'[60]

Although kept abreast of PCF manoeuvres, in 1944 Churchill was less concerned about the electoral, or indeed revolutionary, power of the communists in France than he was about the prospect of a communist capture of Muslim states, reaching from the Middle East to north Africa and the potential ramifications of such radical political change for the British Empire. Churchill's virulent defence of colonial status for India in the 1930s that has presaged his years in the political wilderness had been based in great part on a fear of diminishing Britain's role on the world stage. Now he had to reckon with the prospect of communist successes in France emboldening nationalist movements across the French and British Empires.[61] Legalised on 1 July 1943 in Algeria, 13 July 1943 in Morocco and 10 November 1943 in Tunisia, the communist parties in North Africa had greatly increased their profile over the ensuing year. Immediately after being pronounced as a legal entity, the Algerian Communist party, for example, sprang into prominence as the most active political group in the country, with the Algiers-based Communist weekly, *Liberté* rapidly becoming the leading political paper with circulation reaching 80,000 at the end of April 1944. Communists in Tunisia had rapidly gained a reputation for effective and consistent anti-Nazi resistance and communist calls for

59 ADHG 16 J 186 Various copies of communist tracts show the PCF reaching out to wide sections of the population can be found in the multitude of tracts produced targeting different groups including communist papers produced for women, youth, peasants and shopkeepers.
60 TNA WO 204/12725 *Note confidentielle du Comité Central du Parti Communiste français* transmitted to SOE on 8 June 1944.
61 Jenkins, *Churchill*, pp. 455 – 456.

increased economic and social rights for local populations in Algeria, the creating of the Moroccan Communist Party in 1943 and the creation of separate Syrian and Lebanese Communist Parties in 1944 appeared to point to a hostile post-war political climate for imperialists. A report by Joseph Starr of US intelligence from May 1944 posited that 'if the Communists should succeed in producing some inspiring Arab leaders, their progress might be rapid…A bloc of Communist states, including the Soviet Union and perhaps France, and stretching through the Arab world, would arouse much apprehension among the British.'[62] Starr, perhaps reflecting a more general American antipathy towards de Gaulle's modus operandi, suggested that de Gaulle was at risk of being outplayed by the PCF. 'There are probably very few people who suspect that De Gaulle is a Communist', Starr wrote:

> '…but there are many who believe that he is ambitious, and that he is likely to get the worst of it if he tries to use the Communists for his own ends. It is alleged that the DE GAULLE government was friendly to the Communists all along, and is in large part responsible for their present influence.'[63]

Interestingly, Starr went on to assert that, far from inspiring independence movements, de Gaulle was in fact relying on the PCF to act as 'a make-weight to counteract Arab nationalism, especially in Morocco and Tunisia.'[64] This gamble to a certain extent paid off the following year when the Algerian Communist Party, heavily influenced by its pieds-noirs membership, actively *suppressed* calls for independence by its nationalist members.[65]

PCF *Députés* in Algiers portrayed Britain's political caste as reactionary would-be administrators who should not be trusted, complaining vociferously that the Allied and

62 TNA WO 204/12725 Report of Joseph Starr dated 24 May 1944 to Intelligence Section, Center-District, to AC of S, G-2, SOS NATOUSA, APO 750, US Army on 3 June 1944.
63 Ibid, p. 16.
64 Ibid.
65 Allison Drew, *We are No Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester, 2014), pp. 7, 98, 120 & *passim*.

provisional French authorities in Algeria were refusing the PCF permission to address constituents in France by radio while affording representatives of other parties the opportunity to broadcast messages.[66] Etienne Fajon and André Marty claimed that the Allied authorities in North Africa were also doing everything possible to stop the production of the communist monthly *France Nouvelle*.[67] Yet the messaging emanating from the PCF in Algiers was increasingly out of step with Stalin's vision for post-war division of spheres of influence. The Soviet leader prioritised the high-level relationship between the three major powers and the securitisation of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe above communist successes in France. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden penned some thoughts for the Cabinet on likely Soviet policy in the post war period. In relation to France, Eden noted that 'French post war opinion will probably gravitate to the Left' especially as 'General de Gaulle has made the cultivation of Russia a feature of his foreign policy.' However, Eden concluded, France would continue to recognise the importance of continued solidarity with Britain and, while irritation might prompt officials to talk occasionally about making common cause with Russia, any attempt to impose communism on the French 'would almost certainly be doomed to failure.'[68]

Eden's phlegmatic Cabinet offering was written just prior to the battle for the liberation of Paris, in which the communist resistance played a significant role. De Gaulle's fear of the communists gaining the upper hand in Paris, which might in turn prompt an administrative takeover by an Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT) led him to order General Leclerc to make haste to the capital city, where communist FFI leader Henri Tanguy

66 AD SSD 314 J 7. 'Séjour à Londres'. Letter from Etienne Fajon and André Marty in Alger to Waldeck Rochet in London, dated 18 July 1944.
67 The CNR manifesto of 14 July was published in the *Alger Républicain* under the title *L'heure est venue!*
68 TNA FO 371/43335 and 4336, Estimating Soviet policy in the post war period. Annex II: FRANCE, dated 9 August 1944.

(Colonel Rol) and his forces were holding out against the Germans. Leclerc's timely arrival in the capital ensured that it was not Tanguy alone who accepted and signed the act of surrender from the German General Dietrich von Choltitz. De Gaulle's own presence in Paris and his speech at the Hotel de Ville on 25 August 1944 were designed to ensure not only that his provisional French government took immediate charge instead of the dreaded proposed AMGOT, but also that control of the liberation narrative was wrested from the PCF.

Despite de Gaulle's rapid seizure of control in Paris, many communists in France fully expected that Maurice Thorez, when he eventually returned to the devastated country from Moscow, would seek to capitalise on the absence of elected structures, heavily promoting the sacrifice of the '75,000 communist martyrs' to lay the foundations for political success. While there were those who would have agreed with Jacques Duclos that de Gaulle was at that point invincible because '*Toute action contre lui aurait fourni des armes aux Alliés contre les communistes*' others, including André Marty, were convinced that the liberation of France from Nazi occupation offered an unrivalled opportunity to fight for a broader social revolution.[69] Thorez, however, was clear in his mind that to stave off rival bids for the leadership of the PCF, he needed to cleave to the Soviet line. If he had learnt anything from his three years in Russia it was that even leaders could be easily dismissed. In the following months, Thorez sent out strong signals that the Party was determined to follow the democratic process. One of the most significant directives was a decree issued at the end of October 1944 ordering the disbanding of the communist *milices patriotiques*. Robrieux has directly linked Thorez's order with the PCF leader's amnesty by the *Conseil des ministres* and his subsequent passage back to France.[70] As was to be expected, Moscow maintained regular

69 Jacques Fauvet, *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français, 1920 – 1979* (Paris, 1977), p. 340.
70 Robrieux, *Thorez*, pp. 270 – 271.

contact with the PCF throughout this period, requesting updates on the political situation and records from the local press.[71] Around the time of Thorez's entry into France in November RSS noted another secret communications link came on line between France and Moscow. SIS officers later speculated that this was being operated by either Ivanov or Simonov, the two NKVD agents who had been dropped into the Héyrieux region a month prior to Rozov's arrival.[72] When Thorez eventually arrived in Paris, he was met with a rapturous welcome from a packed audience at the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* who fully expected him to launch a renewed call to social revolution. When Thorez proposed unification with the *Section française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO) in order to create joint lists for the upcoming elections, therefore, the standing ovations and the hearty cheers fell away.[73] The crowd was left in no doubt – there would be no revolution.

How this situation differed from that envisaged at the outset of the SOE-NKVD arrangement is not known. Over drinks Colonel Chichaev told SOE's Major Manderstam that while the Soviets had indeed 'badly' needed SOE assistance at one point in time, the results had been 'very poor' with the effectiveness of the missions 'in most cases reduced to nil, due to the delays in [the agents'] despatch.'[74] Chichaev concluded by saying that the NKVD had no need for any further such assistance. The message was received with relief by many in SOE, even if any satisfaction was tempered by Chichaev's ominous warning that the NKVD was now doing

71 The British continued to intercept and decode these – often scrambled - messages, though most were considered to be of little interest.
72 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Analysis of services known to have operated or to be operating to France on Group 12 Division 1, 8 March 1946. The importance of these communications between France and Moscow was underlined when Thorez, on his return to France in November 1944, personally handed Rozov new books for coding. The new service carried on transmitting until June 1945, when Moscow ordered it to stop until further notice.
73 Robrieux, *Thorez,* pp. 279 – 285; Marc Lazar, *Maisons Rouges: Les partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours* (Paris, 1992), pp. 45 – 46.
74 TNA HS 4/350 Report by Major Manderstam (W20) to Major Seddon (D/P), 21 April 1944.

very well without British help. Only a week before Chichaev's signalling, Churchill had dictated a minute to the Foreign Office stating: 'You will remember that we are purging all our secret establishments of Communists because we know they owe no allegiance to us or to our cause and will always betray secrets to the Soviet, even while we are working together.'[75] SIS was instructed to renew its focus on international Communist activities, a task which had to a great extent been suspended during the war and which was complicated by the fact that, by the autumn of 1944, the greatest communist threat to British operations came not from external European resistance movements but from within SIS itself. Kim Philby, having successfully engineered the dismissal of Major Felix Cowgill, the head of newly reinstated Soviet Affairs section, Section IX, and his own appointment in his place, had just secured his position as the key gatekeeper of information on the subject of known and suspected NKVD agents.[76]

Within days however, events in Greece would prove that national communist movements nominally within the British sphere of influence were capable of ignoring Moscow's orders to cooperate with Allied powers. In December, the Greek communist party (KKE) and its armed wing (ELAS), which had also been instructed by Stalin not to jeopardise Allied unity or put Stalin's post-war objectives at risk, resisted disarmament as ordered by the British command and the head of the Greek government in exile. The outbreak of hostilities between the Greeks and the British pitted 17,800 communist fighters against a British force of between 80 – 90,000. But the communists were backed by large scale popular support. Reports soon came in that RAF units were surrendering equipment to ELAS fighters. At a huge rally called by the communist-dominated National Liberation Front (EAM), the nervous Greek police and

75 Churchill, *Second World War,* p. 537.
76 Cecil, 'C's war', p. 178.

gendarmerie opened fire killing twenty-eight protestors and wounding 148. The Dekemvriana – 'December Events' - in Greece precipitated a large-scale guerrilla war between the the communist KKE and the Greek government, supported by the British army, which would last until 1949.

Much as de Gaulle resented the presence of British and American troops on French soil, the leader of the Free French had to admit that they also acted as a serious deterrent to a revolutionary uprising. In his influential account of SOE's operations in France M.R.D. Foot concluded, however, that it was not the presence of Allied troops but the stalwart work of SOE, along with the RAF and the BCRA, that had prevented French communists from seizing power via the FTP.[77] Foot may have praised them for the part they played in suppressing revolutionary fervour and moulding disparate political groups into a more coherent fighting force but, as has been alluded to in a previous chapter, most SOE F agents resented the political aspect of their role.[78] And when high level discussions took place at the end of December about the future of SOE, the Minister for Economic Warfare, Lord Selborne, noted that Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee had 'resolutely set his face against the establishment of anything in the nature of a 'British Comintern'', although he accepted that the organisation might continue to operate in a 'defensive' form in the post-war period, being placed under either the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign Office, with a preference for the former.[79]

British interference in French domestic politics was instead orchestrated at a higher level, with simultaneous approaches made to de Gaulle to encourage him to limit communist

77 Foot, *SOE in France,* p. 445.
78 TNA HS 7/135, Evaluation of SOE Activities in France 1941 - 1944, p. 3 'Political Role'.
79 Wilkinson & Bright-Astley, *Gubbins & SOE,* p. 221.

representation in the French Provisional Government and to Stalin to discuss post-war spheres of influence. Given his awareness of British infiltrations of Soviet agents on to French soil, de Gaulle was well within his rights to baulk at British advice regarding the role of communists in the French Provisional Government. The Free French leader's secret knowledge of SOE involvement with the NKVD also doubtless coloured his brusque attitude towards SOE agents following the liberation of France. Despite valiant efforts on the part of some of its staff to find a rationale for its continued existence, there was a strong sense that SOE's capacity to generate political problems now outweighed its potential strategic or tactical value.[80]

80 For a detailed study of SOE's engagement with communist militia in Malaya, see Rebecca Kenneison, *The Special Operations Executive in Malaya: Impact and Repercussions, 1941 – 1948* (PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 2017).

Chapter VIII: Cooperation Unavowable to Operation Unthinkable

With Paris liberated, SOE F agents found themselves subject to the hostility of de Gaulle, who was eager to assert the primacy of FFI forces in the liberation narrative. While the Foreign Office and SIS had benefitted from the information gathered by SOE networks across the Channel, they were also determined to reoccupy the space in which SOE had operated by renewing or developing their own links with political and military contacts in the country. A key aspect of the post-liberation administrative reality was the reassertion of anti-Bolshevism, with officers urgently seeking out contact with arrested anti-Soviet Nazi officers who might be willing to act as agents or informants.

In January 1945, one of SOE's most active agents in France sent a report to London highlighting the prevalence of anti-British publicity in the wake of British attempts to neutralise communist forces in Greece the previous December. Francis Cammaerts warned of the importance of countering rumours that Britain and America were also working against the interests of communist insurgents in France, noting that Britain had 'many friends of the left wing' in France but sincere communists 'seriously mistrust us because they [think] that we were intriguing against their friendship with Russia.'[1] Emphasising the inevitability of considerable communist representation in a future French government, he urged that Britain 'cannot afford to allow them to go on mistrusting us as they do today, not only for this reason, but also because they have gained by foresight a very large control of the press.'[2]

1 TNA HS 9/258/5 Francis Cammaerts Report on the Political Situation in France, 22 January 1945.
2 Ibid.

By 1945, however, the mood within SOE had changed and certain of Cammaerts' colleagues within SOE were now allegedly supporting attempts to 'remove Communists' from unspecified resistance organisations. Several decades after the war Douglas Dodds Parker, who had once hosted NKVD chief Chichaev and reportedly maintained positive relations with several NKVD officers, recalled: 'The last 6 months of the war I spent in France, aiming to clear up the damage we had helped to make. Well informed by the Poles about USSR action in Eastern Europe, I supported French action to remove the Communists, widely entrenched. The Anglo Saxons, enthused by the euphoria about the Red Army and 'Uncle Joe', never fully realised the threat from Communism to the Continent in those post-War years.'[3]

Cammaerts might have been ignored (and passed over for the position of Foreign Office liaison to the Free French ostensibly because of his 'suspect' Belgian heritage)[4] but SOE agent, George Starr, whose Wheelwright circuit had cooperated with FTP and MOI groups in southwest France was labelled a 'mercenary' by de Gaulle and ordered to leave the country. On his return to the UK, Starr faced a court of enquiry for the alleged mistreatment of German prisoners and, although the court found that he had no case to answer, this sorry episode sullied his post-war legacy. It is perhaps for this reason, as well as question marks over the extent of his work with communist resistance groups that it was not until 2018 that any study was written dedicated to his wartime activity.[5]

3 MC P2/4/2C/94 Letter of May 25 2000 from DDP to Jacques Maillet.

4 Cammaerts' experience and skill in encouraging international cooperation were not lost entirely, however, as he later went on to work for the Inter-Allied Reparation Agency before becoming the first Director of the UNESCO Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges.

5 Charles Glass, *They Fought Alone: The True Story of the Starr Brothers, British Secret Agents in Nazi-Occupied France* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018). Plentiful material exists in the National Archives at Kew as well as in the Archives Municipales Toulouse and the Archives Départementales de la Haute Garonne covering the work his circuit carried out with the FTP and *guerilleros espagnols.* See, for example, AM Toulouse 85 Z 6; 85 Z 24; ADHG 16 J 160. This last fonds includes a wealth of information gathered by Daniel Latapie during his time

On leaving France, Harry Peulevé, another of Foot's 'star agents', was promoted to the rank of Major in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers before his eventual demobilisation in 1946. Like many other former SOE agents, he later led a peripatetic life, working for the oil company Shell in South America and Spain. Peulevé's close SOE associate Jacques Poirier also went on to work all over the world for the oil company before retiring to France where he wrote an account of his war years for his grandchildren. It is from this, originally private, memoir that we are able to catch a rare glimpse of the many ways in which one SOE agent and local French communists interacted without rancour. Poirier was remembered and celebrated by fellow *résistants* late in life, being elected in 2004 as President of the *Fédération Nationale Libre Résistance*, an association of former members of SOE (F).[6]

With many experienced SOE agents expelled from France, or going through the process of demobilisation, in the early weeks of 1945 the Foreign Office became heavily reliant on the new British embassy in Paris, headed by Ambassador Alfred Duff Cooper, for reports on the political situation in France. Due to pressures of work the Embassy's first report was not submitted until the end of February 1945. When it came through after repeated reminders from London, the commentary was relatively sanguine, observing that while politics in France had definitely shifted to the Left, there were no apparent rumblings of civil disturbances. The decisive factor, it was felt, was that communists were 'for the present at least on the side of law and order', citing as evidence Maurice Thorez's announcement the previous month that communist FFI fighters would be incorporated into the regular army.[7] Concerns remained that

as a correspondant of *the Comite D'HIstoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (CH2GM) and which was handed over to M. Didier Loubet for his memoire de maitrise, written under the supervision of Pierre Laborie in 1990.

6 The *Fédération Nationale Libre Résistance* is now run by descendants of SOE agents. For more, see: www.libreresistance.com.

7 TNA FO 371/49146 France, 1945 British embassy despatches noting Thorez's announcement of 21 January 1945 regarding the disbanding of the communist *milices patriotiques*.

communists were stockpiling weapons in case a call to revolution came at the last moment, but the municipal elections of April and May 1945, the first in which women in France had the vote, were remarkably untroubled by violence.[8] Duff Cooper's team in Paris correctly predicted that the PCF's dominance would be muted by the socialist SFIO, whose candidates gained the mayorships of major cities including Marseille, Lille, Bordeaux and even Toulouse.[9] The two main surprises of the elections were the extraordinary gains made by a new party, the centrist Christian Democrat *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), which benefitted greatly from the fact that many potential right-wing candidates had been refused permission to stand due to their history of collaboration with the Vichy or German authorities, combined with the disastrous results for candidates promoted by the *Comités de Libération,* whose role and influence Raymond Guyot had promoted so assiduously.[10] While many CDL continued to act as advisory committees to town councils, and communists enjoyed a majority on many of these committees, the British Embassy in Paris reported that they had lost much of their authority, and that the power and influence of the *Conseil national de la résistance* (CNR) in general was declining.[11]

Somewhat out of step with the political currents in Whitehall, a small core within SOE began to discuss options for future collaboration with the Soviets in Western Europe. For two years

8 That elections were held at all was an extraordinary political and logistical feat given Germany did not capitulate to the Allies until 8 May. Elections did not take place in the Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, the Moselle or Belfort as recent fighting prevented the timely creation of electoral lists. The creation of accurate electoral lists was further complicated by the absence of up to two and half million prisoners of war and reservists of the STO.

9 TNA FO 371/49146 France, 1945 British embassy assessment of the French political landscape, 28 February 1945.

10 The MRP, led by Parisian journalist Maurice Schumann and politician and former chair of the *Conseil National de la Résistance* (CNR) Georges Bidault mopped up the votes of many right-wing candidates who had been declared '*indigne*' due to wartime collaboration with the occupying or Vichy authorities and as a result had been stripped of their right to vote and to stand for election. For details of the declaration of '*l'indignité nationale*' see René Floriot *La repression des faits de Collaboration* (Paris, 1945).

11 TNA FO 371/49146 Report from British Embassy (Duff Cooper) Paris 22 July 1945 on Congress of Departmental Committees of Liberation, Paris 10 – 13 July 1945.

the SAM Mission in Moscow, supported by Ambassador Clark Kerr, had lobbied for a stay of execution on the grounds that it might form 'the nucleus of what may, one day, become the cornerstone of post-war cooperation between Russia and the outside world.'[12] A memorandum from Hill in Moscow to SOE on 27 January 1945 did prompt secret bilateral discussions around possible future mutual assistance but by the end of March an agreement seemed as distant as ever, with the NKVD now complaining about SOE obstruction of Anglo-Soviet intelligence collaboration in Germany and the Far East.[13] As had been the way with the SOE-NKVD relationship since the beginning, however, the following month the NKVD changed tack once more, inviting SOE to send a special representative to the Soviet Union.

It is possible that this was a calculated manoeuvre to ensure SOE offered its logistical support to further NKVD agents as in May 1945, around the time of the Prague uprising, SOE dropped a final two NKVD agents into the Czech capital.[14] The NKVD, clearly seeing that it could still extract some benefit from the SOE-NKVD agreement, continued to signal interest in intelligence cooperation, but SOE was by now well aware it would receive nothing of substance in return. When NKVD officer Colonel Graur asked if the British might let the NKVD have, 'on an exchange basis', results of the interrogations of senior Nazi officials pertaining to the continuing underground Nazi movement in Germany, the British did not respond.[15] This continued, but diminishing to and fro between SOE and the NKVD took place against a backdrop of deteriorating high-level relations between Britain and the Soviet Union. Even as an SOE plane dropped NKVD agents into Czechoslovakia, Churchill was ordering his military

12 TNA HS 4/328 Clark Kerr to Foreign Office 17 March 1943.
13 TNA HS 4/335 SOE-NKVD co-operation of 4 March 1945 and Further collaboration with NKVD and the proposed agenda for discussions 29 March 1945from D/P106 to AD4 (names and positions unknown).
14 Martin Kitchen, 'SOE's Man in Moscow', *Intelligence and National Security,* 12/3 (1997), p. 106.
15 TNA HS 4/335 Notes on first meeting with Col. Graur of 4 June 1945 & H.N. Sporborg, SOE Liaison Officer to the Secret Services and Deputy to General Gubbins to C.F.A. Warner, Head of the Northern Department at the Foreign Office, 27 August 1945.

chiefs to draw up a plan of attack against the Soviet Union. The ensuing report, entitled 'Russia: A Menace to World Civilization' was nicknamed Operation Unthinkable.[16] The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Alan Brook concluded, however, that the scale of attack and the size of force needed to make Unthinkable a success were not just imponderable, they were 'quite impossible'.[17]

A a pall descended on Anglo-Soviet relations, SOE nominally dropped all suggestions of its Moscow mission becoming the cornerstone of future intelligence cooperation, proposing instead the inclusion of a 'specially chosen representative' on the British Embassy's staff list, whose task would be to move beyond traditional observations of government and officialdom by studying 'every sort of movement and minority which may exist in the vast territory' in the hopes of identifying alternative governments or opposition movements which might be 'potentially useful to this country either in furtherance of its foreign policy of peace or in the prosecution of war'.[18] In the margins of the Potsdam conference of July-August 1945, however, SOE could not resist making one final attempt to offer unspecified services to the NKVD. Unsurprisingly, the SOE representative (probably Hill) reported back that 'although I tried, nothing came of it.'[19] Hill admitted that he 'had nothing concrete to offer…but had the NKVD wished for closer working it gave them a golden opportunity to ask for it…even if it was all 'give' from our side.'[20] The disinterest shown by Soviet representatives showed that they clearly felt they had extracted the maximum benefit from the wartime arrangement and by

16 TNA CAB 120/691 Report from the British Mlitary Leaders to Prime Minister Churchill on the chances of Opearation Unthinkable - a surprise attack on the USSR, 22 May 1945.
17 Dallek, *The Lost Peace*, p. 109.
18 TNA HS 4/335 Archie Boyle, SOE Director of Security, Intelligence and Personnel (A/CD) to Colin Gubbins, Head of SOE (CD), 23 August 1945.
19 TNA HS 4/335 From D/P 100 (name and position unknown, though possibly George Hill) to Colin Gubbins (CD), 3 September 1945.
20 Ibid.

August 1945 the relationship had unquestionably reached its permanent wilting point. SOE decided to wrap things up before they were formally asked to leave and on 15 November 1945, after months of fruitless scoping for a post-war intelligence relationship, Brigadier Hill and his small staff were finally instructed to close down the SAM mission.[21]

Colonel Gubbins, the operational head of SOE, was adamant that Britain had obtained nothing of value from its agreement with the NKVD and that, due to leaks that he laid at the door of the American and the French intelligence, SOE had become an 'overt' organisation.[22] Interestingly, the head of the NKVD, Lt General Fitin, offered a more positive appraisal of the SOE-NKVD agreement. In a subtle but powerful message, the NKVD lead told George Hill:

> '…it would seem that not a bad job has been done. True, it might have been better, but results which seemed to us at the time as insignificant have now proved their value. On the whole our co-operation has not produced bad results. It is true that there have been mistakes, but I am inclined to blame these on a clash of personalities concerned (he named himself, Chichaeve [sic], Major Seddon). It is true that when people are more interested in small side issues, they lose sight of the main objective. In our case the main objective [DP/100: I am not clear whether he meant winning the war or co-operation] was never lost sight of. We have achieved a great thing in opening a new path in co-operation between our two nations, and it is a path down which we shall have to walk during the next 20 years.'[23]

Coming from the man who had overseen Soviet penetration of the US nuclear programme, British intelligence and the Foreign Office it is difficult to see this as anything other than a

21 TNA HS 4/335 SOE-NKVD Cooperation in Moscow January 1944 – December 1945.
22 TNA HS 4/328 Colin Gubbins, Head of SOE (CD) to unknown recipient (RW), 26 October 1945. The *Direction générale des études et recherches* was a branch of the BCRA created towards the end of 1944. Gubbins was ignorant of the extent of Soviet penetration of Section D and SOE, but equally he refused to recognise the weaknesses in SOE's own correspondence methods. It is likely that discrete enquiries were made at the end of October 1945 to ascertain just how much the NKVD knew about SOE's organisational structure as a note issued around the time offered reassurance that 'SOE was never mentioned in correspondence between SOE Russian section and NKVD in Moscow. Only on one occasion at a dinner at which GRAUR and Col. HUDSON were present, H.E. [Ambassador Clark Kerr] mentioned the word.' See: TNA HS 4/328 Major Seddon (DP) to unknown recipient (RWR), 25 October 1945.
23 TNA HS 4/335 Letter from D/P 100 (possibly George Hill) to Colin Gubbins, Head of SOE (CD), 28 September 1945.

mischievous parting shot designed to sow confusion as opposed to a genuine diplomatic effort to thank the British for their assistance in facilitating communications between Moscow and Soviet intelligence networks across Europe.

The apparent lack of a final assessment of the SOE-NKVD relationship, combined with inconsistent record keeping and Philby's tight grip on information about wartime liaison with the NKVD meant that when MI5 set about diligently following up on the identity and whereabouts of PICKAXE agents in the post war period, the domestic security service received little useful information. In response to enquiries led by Ms Bagot of MI5 in February 1946, Philby forwarded two photographs of Raymond Guyot, with attached notes suggesting that one was possibly of a Russian agent called Rodionov, who had passed through the UK in 1942, while the other was of a French politician going by the name of Guyot. Studiously avoiding giving his own opinion, Philby invited Bagot to compare the two to see if she thought they might be one and the same person. The photos themselves have not survived in the MI5 file, but it can be deduced from subsequent correspondence that it was impossible to conclude one way or the other as the image of Guyot was only a side profile while the other was of a man facing the camera. It would not have been difficult for SIS to source other images of Raymond Guyot, who had been made a full member of the PCF politburo at the 10th PCF Congress in July 1945, and whose photograph would have been widely available from French newspapers and PCF publications. Philby did, however, reveal to MI5 that SIS suspected a radio service they knew to be operating between France and Moscow, Service 168, was run by Raymond Guyot who, in *L'Humanité* of 30 June 1945, had been identified as the man who had 'personally directed the insurrection in Lyons in 1944' (an accolade that Alban Vistel, head of Region 1 of the *Forces Françaises de l'intérieur* (FFI), which included Lyon, would doubtless

have taken issue with).[24] In all probability fishing for information about the status of MI5 investigations, Philby pressed Ms Bagot to reveal whether or not she believed Rodionov was indeed Guyot, giving the rather implausible reason that this would assist SIS investigations into another radio service, which SIS was not able to read, but which was operating in 1946 and was thought to have moved from Lyon to Paris.[25]

Philby continued to drip feed Bagot and her successor Miss Small insignificant details of the NKVD agents' arrival in the UK, stressing that not much information had been extracted from the agents bound for France as SOE had been prohibited from asking questions under the terms of the agreement between SOE and NKVD.[26] MI5 might have found itself at a dead end in 1946, but investigations were reopened in February 1950 when, acting on reports that a Soviet spy ring operating in France may have had its roots in the NKVD arrangement, an officer from the French approached MI5 for more information about the individuals dropped by SOE into Western Europe. Following up on this request, MI5 suggested SIS provide their French counterparts with a copy of a document they had already passed to the American CIA only *if* it was thought advisable the French should have it.[27] Three months later Miss Small renewed her quest for information from SIS. Although her contact returned an 'extremely interesting

24 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Letter dated 27 February 1946 from H.A.R. Philby of SIS to Miss Bagot of MI5 enclosing two photographs, in which Philby refers to a report in *L'Humanité* of 30 June 1945. The extract in question, on page 2 of the paper, reads: '*Raymond GUYOT…A partir de 1940, l'un des organisateurs en zone sud des grandes manifestations et grèves contre l'envahisseur et ses complices, ainsi que de la lutte armée jusqu'à l'insurrection lyonnaise qu'il dirigea personellement*.' Alban Vistel, in *La Nuit Sans Ombre* (Paris, 1970), pp. 539 – 571 makes no reference to Guyot in his chapter on the Liberation of that city. Vistel does, however, mention the importance of a general strike in the city. Stéphane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la Guerre*, pp. 451 – 452 notes that Guyot and Léon Mauvais were ordered to assume direction of the FTP in Lyon in July 1944 after the arrest of most of the FTP leadership in the city. SOE agent Richard Heslop referred to FTP attacks on the Germans at Lyon in August 1944. TNA HS 9/701 Richard HESLOP. Report, page 110 onwards.
25 Service 12/21 of ISCOT. ISCOT was the name given by the British to intercepted communications coming from Scientific Institute 205, a branch of the reformed Comintern. See: Herbert Romerstein *Aspects of World War II History Revealed through 'ISCOT' Radio Intercepts* Journal of Intelligence History 5:1 (2005), 15 - 28
26 TNA KV 2/2827/2 Letter dated 27 February 1946 from Philby to Miss Bagot enclosing two photographs.
27 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Letter from K. Morton Evans of MI5 to unnamed contact in SIS, dated 1 March 1950.

letter…regarding an alleged independent network of the [Russian Intelligence Service] in France' they were unable to provide any information as to whether its activities were confined to France or might possibly be used to target British interests. Neither the letter, nor the document purportedly sent to the CIA are available in the publicly available MI5 or SOE files. In 1956 the *French Sûreté* together with MI5 officers were still trying to piece together information about the agents who had been infiltrated into France.[28]

It is now known that Szyfra Lypszyc, who as the very first NKVD infiltrated into Europe under the SOE-NKVD agreement ensured the resumption of communications between Paris and Moscow, prior to her captured and probable execution in 1942. Francine Fromond, perhaps the best known of all the eleven agents SOE infiltrated into France, operated successfully for over a year on behalf of the PCF/Comintern before she also was captured in July 1943. The fearless 26-year-old who worked closely with senior Comintern cadres including Eugen Fried, Giulio Ceretti and Danielle Casanova and was murdered just before the liberation of France is today widely celebrated in the pantheon of the communist resistance. The wartime activity of the remaining nine individuals who were successfully infiltrated into France has been largely erased from the historiography of the resistance. This is as true for Raymond Guyot, the most senior PCF representative sent to France under this arrangement and who became a member of the post-war PCF politburo, as it is for the working-class students, *chauffeurs* and *chaudronniers* whose names have yet to be confirmed.

In the post-war period Daniel Georges also cemented his position in the Party, being appointed Mayor of Lilas by the local *Comité de libération* in the department of Seine Saint Denis, to the northeast of Paris in 1945 before taking a seat in *l'Assemblée de l'Union française*

28 TNA KV 2/2827/1 Letter from Miss Small to undisclosed recipient dated 30 May 1956.

in 1949. Yet, apart from the brief mention in SOE files describing him as 'small, insignificant' and 'not intelligent', Daniel Georges' contribution to the communist resistance in France has been overshadowed by the more overt resistance activity of his brother Pierre, alias Colonel Fabien. Crémieux-Brilhac's revelations about the French experience in Soviet prisoner of war camps meant that it was impossible for Georges to deny his passage through the Soviet Union or his active role in energising support for the Party among his fellow soldiers, although a rare interview Georges gave in the 1980s – a truncated version of which exists in the PCF archives at Seine Saint Denis - attempted to minimise the importance of his passage through Britain, to which he referred only very briefly.[29]

The three agents Mikhail Belov, Anton Marsov and Ivan Roussakov, identified by SOE as being of Spanish origin (although one must be wary of taking SOE observations as read), may have been former members of communist battalions in the Spanish Civil War who had studied in Comintern training schools under the watchful eye of André Marty. Their SOE-prepared identity cards suggest they were intended for operations across the south of France in the autumn of 1943. Their true background and ultimate fate, as with Igor Feldman who was infiltrated into the Nantes area in 1943, remains obscure. SOE officers felt that Feldman would not last long, but it is quite possible that they underestimated him as they did so many of the agents destined for France. Ivan Rozov, who from RSS intercepts of his communications with Moscow appears to have survived the Second World War, has yet to be unmasked although it has been posited here that he was in fact French communist Raymond Piza (FTP alias 'Maurice Roux') and that his fellow agents Simonov and Livanov were the former French communist prisoners of war Jacquetant and Lambert who, on their release from a Soviet POW

29 Crémieux-Brilhac, *Prisonniers de la Liberté*, pp. 163, 169, 289, 361, 383 & *passim*; AD 283 J 69 GEORGES Daniel: Mémoirs de Guerre.

camp, had offered their services to the Soviet Union alongside fellow POW Daniel Georges. If Livanov was indeed Lambert, then his fate is known to have been execution, possibly at the hands of his travelling companion.

The overriding narrative of French communist antagonism towards British forces and vice versa has also obscured examples of positive relations between myriad local communists and SOE. The communist André Bonnetot, for example, participated in reception committees, provided hearty meals, and offered much-needed transport to SOE officers, their agents, and couriers despite threats that he would pay 'heavily' for such contact. On the surface, at least, despite comments from fellow resister Roger Ranoux suggesting that Bonnetot did suffer for his liaison with SOE, Jean-Jacques Gillot and Michel Maureau make no mention of this in their entry in the *Maitron*, noting instead that eventually went on to become the departmental President of the *Association National des Anciens Combattants et Ami(e)s de la Résistance* (ANACR).[30] Robert Brouillet aka 'Charles the Bolshevik', however, was not singled out by his compatriots for celebration. Close friend and SOE agent Jacques Poirier was left particularly baffled by the local community's decision not to name a street after him or erect a monument to his honour.[31] There are likely many more such stories of cooperation that have been obscured, hidden by Cold War narratives that funnelled resistance fighters into separate silos: British, Gaullist, Communist.

But it was not just communists' engagement in collective, or at least collaborative, anti-fascist action that has been deliberately or inadvertently overlooked. Colonel Grand, who pioneered

30 Interview with Roger Ranoux, 19 October 2009; www.maitron.fr/spip.php?article24395; Jean-Jacques Gillot, Michel Maureau, *Résistants du Périgord, 1500 notices inédites et illustrées*, (Bordeaux, 2011); Jacques Lagrange, *Dictionnaire de la Résistance, Dordogne* (Edition Pilote 24, 2007).
31 Poirier, *Giraffe*, p. 101 – 102.

cooperation in the field of sabotage and subversion was for decades referred to only in the prefaces of books on SOE, and usually pejoratively as a 'maverick'. His legacy is now starting to be acknowledged as interest grows in SOE's origins, although the communist element of his work continues to be largely ignored.[32] A number of individuals recruited by Grand went on to have a profound impact, for better or worse, on British government relations with communists, from Trotskyists to NKVD agents. Many of them, including Leslie Humphreys and Clara Holmes, warrant their own biographical studies. Even before Churchill warned of an 'iron curtain' descending across Europe, certain individuals who had worked closely with the NKVD fell under SIS suspicion, with officers questioning, for example, George Hill's true allegiances.

In the post-war environment, previous involvement in encouraging links with Soviet intelligence in Moscow, securing the release of former KPD members from French prisons, or infiltrating agents into France and elsewhere in Europe on behalf of the NKVD was conveniently forgotten. Yet the general consensus to the very end of 1944 and even into early 1945 had been: 'Needs must'. This attitude perhaps explains why Section D and then SOE routinely vouched for Karl Groehl, despite question marks over the quality of the intelligence he procured, the lack of tangible results from his dissemination of propaganda and sabotage materials and even when MI5 produced evidence of his contact with potential Soviet agents in London. Where Karl Groehl's political allegiances truly lay, however, remains a matter for debate. Was he a dedicated Trotskyist anti-Nazi activist, or a Stalinist posing as a Trotskyist as certain French intelligence officers claimed? Or did his politics shift during his nearly six years

32 After being moved out from a young SOE following his unsuccessful attempt to reach out to the Soviet Union during the period of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Grand went on to serve in the East, being decorated for his service in Burma. His family, likely wary of further unflattering portraits, are protective of his image and did not grant access to his private papers for this study.

living and working in England? Did he continue to be employed by SOE after his links to Stanislas Szymonzyc, André Labarthe and Alta Maria Lecoutre had been established because his colleagues genuinely believed he had 'journalistic' reasons for contacting them, because he had in fact been sent to contact them, or because SOE felt it safer to have such a man on the inside? Groehl's dismissal in 1942 might have been, as was alleged, the result of some unspecified indiscretion regarding agents in Switzerland, or he may have been an early casualty of Churchill's general directive to purge communists from SOE or SIS.

After his employment with SOE was discontinued, Groehl founded the 'League of German Revolutionary Socialists' in Britain with little interference from the authorities. This was in keeping with HMG's decision to allow foreign political groups relative freedom in the UK: MI5 monitored meetings through informants but rarely took action to close them down. In November 1942 MI5 reported that Groehl's political programme showed him to be 'a positive supporter of the Bolshevist revolution [who] is undoubtedly a revolutionary socialist whose aim is a classless society' and that he had given speeches suggesting that, as Britain had no interest in a German revolution, militant socialism must be promoted by Germans outside of Germany.[33] In 1946, at the age of 50, Groehl left the UK for Saarland, by that point a French protectorate of West Germany, where he wrote a pamphlet on German Communists under then pen name of Spartakus, in which he advocated the creation of a socialist federation of German states.[34] He was never readmitted to the KPD, and eventually settled in Frankfurt, West Germany, where he found work at a publishing house run by a close friend, the Social Democrat Karl Gerold. Groehl died in 1979, a relatively obscure and undocumented figure. Given SIS practice of openly cutting ties with officers it wished to employ in more secretive

33 TNA KV 2/2172/1 Note from E5L (CLAUDE W. SYKES) dated 24 November 1942.
34 Ibid, Letter from the American embassy in London dated 4 February 1947.

work, and Groehl's background of working for multiple intelligence agencies, it is possible that he arranged to be diverted into longer-term work infiltrating and reporting on German émigré groups, or even working for SIS in West Germany, but on this SIS records are – as they always have been and possibly always will be – silent.

There never was an official investigation into Section D or SOE's use of communist agents that mirrored investigations in the US in 1945 in which OSS head Bill Donovan was 'hauled before the US Congress…to meet accusations that his agents were communists.'[35] The key difference being that, in Britain, the directive to engage with communists had come from the top. Any investigation would have provoked awkward questions around policy and the role of SIS in wartime. This concern was particularly acute following revelations of high-level penetration of the intelligence services in the 1950s, which had been largely facilitated by Section D and SOE.

Instead of examining the benefits and disadvantages of working with known communists, there was plenty of soul searching in the post war period about the use of insurgents and state-sponsored acts of sabotage in general. Many, including the military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, expressed distaste for training in sabotage on the grounds that it would have disastrous consequences for the morality of British youth. Others saw in the policy serious potential political consequences. Immediately after the war, the Foreign Office carried out a series of lectures or lessons on the role of insurgents in warfare, in which officials were at pains to point out that it had been British military intelligence which had pushed for cooperation across political lines in the face of opposition from the Foreign Office, which had warned of

35 Zdenko Maršálek & Diego Gaspar Celaya, 'From Regular Armies to Irregular Resistance', in Gildea & Tames, *Fighters Across Frontiers*, p. 85.

creating problems down the line. In one such lecture, given to an unidentified group of soldiers in France in the summer of 1946, the lecture notes read:

> '…I would remind you that even in the last war, all SOE activities were undertaken in the light of the political and military direction given at the highest level at the time. The point is that military and political considerations will often conflict. The Services say 'Help anyone who will fight the enemy'. The [Foreign Office] has to look further, and to weigh up the post-war results. In the last war, the Services generally had their way, and we are now faced with some of the consequences….'[36]

While such an assessment was inevitable from a Foreign Office keen to reassert the predominance of diplomacy over the military, it could be argued that proactive engagement with communists in the realm of sabotage and subversion during the Second World War had created a unique space for bilateral discussions between the Soviet Union and Britain at a time of crisis. The Soviet predisposition towards working with the devil it knew, as noted by Ambassador Cripps when he urged transparency with regards to George Hill's anti-Bolshevik espionage background meant that, if anything, Churchill's aggressive anti-communist pronouncements impressed Stalin. Ironically, had Burgess made it to Russia as part of a scoping mission on behalf of Section D in the spring of 1941, it may well have put a stop to an arrangement between the two agencies before it even got going: Not because of the Englishman's insobriety and general lack of discretion but because his prior links to Soviet intelligence would have aroused suspicions in Moscow that he was a double agent.

It is true that SOE failed to secure Soviet logistical support for British missions and SOE conducting officers were unable to ascertain much about the NKVD agents who passed through Britain on their way to France and other countries in Europe, but there is no denying that the arrangement brought about unprecedented exchanges between NKVD

36 TNA HS 7/1 Brief History of SOE 1938 – 1945. Set of notes for a VCSS lecture of July 1946, Part VI, p. 27.

representatives in the UK and Moscow, at times challenging and at times confirming preconceptions.[37]

Interaction with British officicals and communists from and within France also stimulated much internal debate as to the nature of communism, and how it might meld with nationalist traditions. Desmond Morton, for example, was left much discombobulated by his discussions of the PCF political programme with Fernand Grenier, and SOE agent Francis Cammaerts recorded with interest commentary by French communist farmers about the application of collective farming policy in the French context. Comments by SOE conducting officers about the perceived 'democratic' nature of the NVKD agents they ushered around and supported through Britain reveal a mixture of genuine interest in the communist manifesto and a disbelief that 'true communists' might be emotionally 'soft', or appreciate good food and wine. The SOE commentary is also coloured by a prevailing attitude of British superiority – an attitude Ambassador Cripps had warned SOE against adopting when dealing with Soviet counterparts. Reports of wartime audiences with the Soviet Ambassador to the UK, Ivan Maisky, are instructive insofar as they reveal senior British politicians musing openly about the political future of Britain, and their fate as landowners. According to Peter Hennessy, these carefully curated relations between British officials and the Soviet Embassy later facilitated British government requests for Soviet support in muting the CPGB, which HMG wished at all odds to prevent from capitalising on the shift leftwards in British politics that occurred between 1940 and 1943.[38] In the end, even though a number of new Labour MPs who came into parliament in 1945 could possibly be described as 'crypto-communists', and

37 For details of British appreciation of the support, or lack thereof, from NKVD towards SOE missions under the SOE-NKVD arrangement, see TNA HS 7/278 SOE War Diary, Russia August 1942 to June 1944, pp. 98- 100.
38 Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945–1951* (London, 2006), p. 66.

the communists chalked up an average 12.5% share of the polls in 1945, the first past the post system ensured only two CPGB candidates were returned and twelve deposits lost in what has frequently been depicted as 'a disaster for the Communist Party'.[39] Yet the CPGB continued to make headway in local elections and, despite being in such financial straits that it had to make cuts to staff, local council elections in 1946 saw the number of Communist councillors increase from 81 to 215,[40] prompting Labour to search once more for 'evidence of the problems being caused by Communists in the country at large' in the run up to the Annual Labour Party Conference of 1946.[41]

If in the UK the CPGB was effectively locked out of British politics, in France the increasing power of the PCF following their election successes in 1944 and 1945 caused deepening political tension with the Gaullists.[42] In January 1946, de Gaulle resigned as President, citing conflict with 'ungovernable' elements within the administration, by which he meant his PCF partners. Immediately afterwards Jacques Duclos, the former political leader of the FTP, confirmed that the PCF would seek to lead the next government, although the Party refrained from putting forward its own candidate for President. The French communists pushed hard to force a change in the constitution to abolish two-chamber rule and provide for a unicameral government, but the proposal was narrowly defeated in a referendum on 5 May 1946.[43] Although the majority of the population opted for a continuation of the checks and

39 The two communist MPs were Phil Piratin for Stepney and Willie Gallacher in West Fife. For more on the election and the results for the CPGB see: Pelling, *British Communist Party*, p. 131; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt,* p. 145; Neil Redfern, 'Winning the Peace: British Communists, the Soviet Union and the General Election of 1945', *Contemporary British History*, 16/1 (2002), p. 47.
40 Communist Party of Greaet Britain: History: https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/history.htm
41 Thorpe, 'Locking out the Communists', p. 244.
42 According to Douglas Hyde, the PCF guided the British party 'with the mixture of arrogance, intolerance, and condescension one expects of people newly possessed of wealth or power. See: Hyde, *I Believed*, 222
43 The proposal was defeated by a margin of 5.6% (52.8% against, 47.2% for).

balances enshrined in two chamber rule, the PCF's local power base, as evidenced by communist control over the seven largest CGT federations, continued to give France's allies pause for thought.[44]

Despite moves to convince the electorate and its fellow parties in government of its democratic agenda, the PCF had to fight against the imposition of political conditions on economic aid and specific orders to US emissaries to undermine communist strongholds.[45] Although Truman's administration proceeded with caution with regards to relations with France in the early months of 1946, the PCF's strong showing at the elections of June led to a hardening in US anti-communist diplomacy.[46] Even though the PCF actually dropped six seats, and failed to secure its place as the lead in a tripartite coalition with the MRP and the SFIO, the Americans in particular feared that France, a key player in the political reorientation of Europe, was on the cusp of becoming a satellite state of the Soviet Union.[47] While avoiding 'giving any impression of intervening directly in internal French affairs', significant US pressure was brought to bear on de Gaulle's successors, Presidents Georges Bidault and Léon Blum, leading in May 1947 to the eviction of all communist ministers from the tripartite government.[48]

44 Tiersky, *French Communism*, pp. 132 – 141.
45 Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 8-9; Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France 1945 – 1954* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 42 – 45.
46 The PCF actually dropped 6 seats in the June elections, going from 159 to 153, whereas Bidault's MRP gained 16 (from 150 to 166). PCF representatives sought to reassure US officials that the Communists were actually preventing labour unrest.
47Smaller revolutionary parties such as the Trotskyist *Parti Communiste Internationale* (PCI) argued that there was a strong pro-revolutionary current of opinion in the south of the country. ADHG 5020 W 10: Note from 6 December 1946 includes a copy of a poster from Toulouse that claimed 60,000 workers had voted for 16 lists presented by the PCI.
48 Edward Rice-Maximin, 'The United States and the French Left, 1945 – 49: The View from the State Department', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19/4 (1984), pp. 729 – 747; Tuong-Vi Tran, 'The Failure of the French Tripartite Experiment in May 1947', *European History Quarterly*, 42/2 (2012), pp. 261 - 285; Alessandro Brogi, 'Ending Grand Alliance Politics in Western Europe: US Anti-communism in western Europe 1944 -7', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53/1 (2018), pp. 134-157.

While the US was exercised by the power of communist politicians in France, the British government was primarily concerned with the potential impact of the PCF's support for enhanced political representation for the French colonies on independence movements within the British Empire. Intelligence relating to communist agitation in India strongly suggested that this would be the case and British officials monitored the situation closely as the most powerful players manoeuvred towards and within a new global power structure. While de Gaulle had made promises for wider citizenship and constitutional reforms in return for the support of pro-independence movements across the French Empire, nationalist activists could reasonably have expected to gain full-throated PCF backing for a programme of decolonisation after the war. Despite pushing through several progressive laws in relation to colonial government, however, the PCF almost universally shied away from promoting nationalist movements. In fact, in Algeria, neither the PCF, nor the *Parti Communiste d'Alger* (PCA) supported Algerian independence, largely because of the overwhelming influence of European-born members among the PCA membership. Allison Drew has argued that the PCA's prioritisation of anti-fascism over independence ultimately led Algerian nationalists to view the communist party with suspicion.[49]

Instead of advocating full independence, the PCF pushed for a reformist agenda for the French colonies. Mindful of significant popular public support for continuing French rule in Indo China, for example, the Party called for negotiations with Ho Chi Minh, but fell short of endorsing independence.[50] In Martinique, the PCF supported the election of anti-colonialist poet and intellectual Aimé Césaire as a *Député*, but Césaire's introduction of a bill to make the colonies of Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion Island into French

49 Drew, *No Longer in France*, pp. 7, 98, 120 & *passim*.
50 Rod Kedward, *La Vie en blue: France and the French since 1900* (London, 2005), p. 321.

departments, was a reforming, democratising move rather than a revolutionary one.[51] Ironically, when de Gaulle was pressed by the Americans to set in motion a process of decolonisation, the French leader made the extraordinary claim that dogged US promotion of self-determination would provoke the French public, threatening that 'nobody knows to what that will lead. We do not want to become Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit, but I hope that you do not push us into it.'[52]

51 Nick Nesbitt, 'Departmentalisation and the Logic of Decolonisation', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 47/1 (2007), pp. 32 – 43.
52 Robert Dallek, *The Lost Peace* (New York, 2010), p. 140.

Conclusion

The decision to engage with communists in France and the UK, as well as elsewhere in Europe, was driven first by individuals within SIS, and only latterly and intermittently supported by the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry for Economic Warfare. At various points it gained the support of individual émigré communists, the Soviet NKVD, and members of the international communist resistance in France, each of whom played an active role in determining the nature of their engagement. Prime Minister Chamberlain agreed to the original idea, albeit reluctantly and only on condition that any cooperation could be denied in the event that any action threatened negotiations with Germany. Chamberlain's acquiescence, however unwilling, was key to the establishment of early ventures in anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion and therefore warrants recording, if for no other reason than it offers a more nuanced picture of the single political figure most famously associated with appeasement. The more pragmatic and avowedly anti-Bolshevik Winston Churchill was initially more supportive of such unavowable alliances, but as the tide of the war turned in favour of the Allies under his premiership, even he began to worry about the post-war consequences of such close liaison. With this in mind, while actively promoting SOE support to NKVD agents (even meeting two of them) and directing his sabotage agency to drop weapons to the communist resistance in France, he simultaneously gave clear instructions to his staff to monitor and control domestic pro-Soviet propaganda, ordered the BBC to keep the Internationale off the airwaves and, in an extraordinary admission of the openness of wartime liaison, to effect a purge of communists from within the British secret services.

If engagement with communist agents received high-level political sign off at an early stage in the UK, in France there appears to have been limited discussion on the subject. When Section D officers broached the subject of early engagement with anti-Nazi saboteurs with their French counterparts in February 1939, the *Deuxième Bureau* found much in the project that they disagreed with and, while they engaged enthusiastically in weapons development exchanges, they sat heavily on the 'political' aspects. Had the French willingly engaged with the British in developing weapons caches, training officers in the art of irregular warfare, and developing links into Germany using communist agents, might this have encouraged a more organised, early anti-Nazi resistance to German occupation in France? It is possible – and indeed reports written immediately after the war called for significant preparation of resistance networks in anticipation of possible occucpation - though a more aggressive, time-sensitive and well-resourced approach towards research and development of sabotage devices and training of personnel would have been required to ensure adequate supplies of the necessary materials and the efficient use of the same. As it was, ambivalence and infighting within SIS combined with French intransigence resulted in Major Grand's advances never amounting to anything more than half-hearted or 'amateurish' attempts at subverting the German military and industrial complex. This early disagreement over sabotage in general, and the use of communist agents in particular, combined with a subsequent lack of enthusiasm for de Gaulle's leadership and serious concerns about the security of the BCRA, informed the SOE decision to keep the French in the dark about its PICKAXE Operations until late 1942/1943.[1]

1 There is no indication that, when de Gaulle and René Masigli were formally apprised of the PICKAXE oeprtions, they were offered any further detail as to the content of the NKVD-SOE arrangement.

If differing attitudes towards sabotage and the use of civilian (including communist) agents, combined with a conviction that its defences were impenetrable prevented France from developing a secret underground army prior to May 1940, the lesson was not entirely lost on Britain when faced with the threat of invasion. While the Security Service's attitude towards home grown communism was uncompromising and communists were denied commissions in the British army, former CPGB member Tom Wintringham was instrumental in designing the content of the first SOE pamphlets on guerrilla warfare. Not only that, but he successfully lobbied for the creation of an appropriately trained Home Guard and developed an irregular warfare training school that introduced topics such as street fighting, road blocks and sabotage – all of which were adopted by later SOE training programmes. There are two main reasons why Wintringham and his comrades have for so long been overlooked in histories of SOE and Section D, both of which were largely dictated by Cold War diplomatic imperatives. The first is that the British government desired to suppress information about British communists' influence on British military strategy. The second is that communists themselves were either encouraged, or themselves felt it important to obscure evidence of pro-active involvement with the British state.

If communist advisors, informants and propagandists who engaged proactively with British representatives often found themselves side-lined or forgotten after the war, much the same can be said of the British officials most deeply involved in regular liaison. One of the most influential characters in the history of this engagement was the CSS himself, Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, until his death in November 1939. In the face of substantial opposition from anti-communist officers, Sinclair took the bold step of potentially exposing the Service to infiltration and exploitation by Soviet agents in the hope of maximising opportunities to strike

at Nazi Germany. Sinclair's act was not naïve, however: it had at least one precedent from the First World War when the communist Willi Münzenberg had been approached by SIS officers in the hope of encouraging him to provoke a workers' revolution in Germany. Furthermore, should any communist agents be discovered, the staunchly anti-Bolshevik Chamberlain could plausibly deny any links to them and abandon them to their fate. But Sinclair's decision was not borne purely out of a regard for precedent. It was a considered response to the growing realisation that the leaders of the conservative German opposition in whom the British Foreign Office had placed such great hope were by 1937 openly advocating a foreign policy that in many ways mirrored Hitler's aggressive expansionism. Sinclair's recommendation that SIS look to engage with émigré communists as alternative sources of information as well as potential agents who might sow doubt and confusion in Germany almost certainly also took into account the fact that the recent Moscow Show Trials, and the rifts within the communist movement that had been brutally exposed during the Spanish Civil War had created a pool of international communists who, while they remained resolutely anti-fascist, were nonetheless turning their backs on the Comintern and refusing to take orders from Moscow. The creation of Section D was therefore a timely, considered, but daring response to the evolving continental intelligence picture, which was largely enabled by increased funding flowing from the Treasury to SIS after the Austrian Anschluss.

Sinclair's strength of character and conviction in the validity of the process is further evidenced by his loyalty to Laurence Grand even as the Section D leader faced allegations of operational incompetence and financial irresponsibility. It was only after Sinclair's death that an internal review of relations between the British intelligence services subjected Grand and his projects to scrutiny. Grand's downfall, while facilitated by the absence of a staunch

protector, was ultimately determined by the perfect storm of events that occurred in May 1940, including: the scattering of his networks following the fall of France, newly installed Prime Minister Churchill's frustration at the lack of tangible results, and Section D's poorly thought through attempt to reach out to the Soviet Union using the unlikely and eminently unsuitable (though Grand could not have known just how unsuitable) emissary Guy Burgess. If Sinclair showed such faith in Grand, the smartly dressed 'cad' who inspired devoted loyalty and odium in equal measure, is it fair to conclude, as many observers have done, that Grand merely oversaw a string of failed projects and the recruitment of an assortment of amateurish agents? Despite the invective thrown his way, Grand developed from relatively basic existing documents a comprehensive plan for sabotage against a wide variety of key targets, and his staff developed prototypes of devices that went on to be used throughout the world by SOE operatives as well as Britain's allies. The practical and personal relationships Grand's officers developed with their counterparts in the *Deuxième Bureau* between February 1939, when SIS formally acknowledged their early work on sabotage and subversion, and the fall of France in June 1940 greatly facilitated later lines of communication between SOE and Vichy. Grand's choice of Groehl as one of his premier agents, although as much the result of concerted lobbying on the part of the Primrose League as his own diligent preparation of a 'card index' of suitable candidates, combined with his dogged determination to support Groehl's propaganda and sabotage efforts was a significant and perhaps unprecedented example of considered cooperation between a British intelligence officer and a communist agent in the war against fascism. Grand was also responsible for the early appointment of a number of women to positions of responsibility, personally recruiting Clara Holmes to manage Section D's German section and supporting Leslie Humphreys' recommendation of Vera Atkins, who went on to play a pivotal role in the life of SOE agents.

It is a well-established irony that, while objections were raised within SIS and MI5 to proposals to engage émigré communists, two of Section D's British recruits, Guy Burgess and Kim Philby, were Soviet agents. Equally incongruous is the fact that Burgess' involvement appears to have effectively stymied early attempts to reach out to the Soviet Union with a view to discussing anti-Nazi sabotage and subversion.

Although it is not known exactly how much information was passed to Moscow in relation to Section D and later SOE activities, West and Tsarev have claimed that when, just before the end of the war in Europe, Pavel Fitin was ordered to recommend individual agents for particular recognition for their service during the war Philby, Blunt, Burgess, Cairncross and Macelan were offered significant annual pensions.[2] Cairncross, as secretary to Lord Hankey, was in a particularly good position to report on the activities of the Security Services, including Section D, while Philby's superior acquaintance with SOE afforded him access to information about numerous key individuals and evolving policy.[3] The alacrity with which the Soviets responded to SOE's eventual attempts to open discussions about mutual assistance for sabotage and subversion operations in April 1942 points to the Soviets having been tipped off in advance. Over the course of the preceding years, however, while the Nazi-Soviet Pact held, the Soviets appear to have done little to play this advantage – possibly as internal suspicions about the veracity of the intelligence coming from their agents in the UK meant much vital information was ignored or, worse, was considered part of a deliberate attempt to spread misinformation. Philby's subsequent position within SIS also enabled him to stall and

2 West & Tsarev, *Crown Jewels*, p. 171.
3 Ibid, p. 213.

obfuscate when faced with post-war enquiries from MI5 and French Intelligence about the individuals involved in the NKVD PICKAXE missions.

What Philby thought of the SOE-NKVD agreement is not known. What is clear, however, is that, despite grumblings from both sides, the operations that took place between 1942 and 1944 marked a highwater point in Anglo-Soviet intelligence relations. The agreement is generally thought to have benefitted the Soviets far more than the British, but it is important not to underestimate the opportunities it afforded British officers to observe, converse with and potentially subvert a number of communist agents, some of whom had been, or would go on to be successful politicians in their home countries. In an interesting aside on the relations between SIS and SOE, Douglas Dodds Parker noted that he had 'kept in touch with [Chichaev's] successors ever since.'[4] SOE accounts of contacts with NKVD officers, agents, and senior PCF representatives, also reveal, however, the confusion experienced by senior British officials who, having developed a clear idea of the ideal Soviet citizen from private reading of Marxist-Leninist literature, suddenly found themselves confronted with individuals who, on the surface at least, put such a differing personal and nationalist spin on communist ideology that their British interlocutors were left feeling they no longer knew what was Left and what was Right.

If exposure to NKVD agents and PCF emissaries left the British somewhat disoriented, the Soviets clearly found the experience operationally useful, and quite possibly also politically enlightening. Those most intimately involved with its design and execution on the Soviet side retained their positions or were moved to equally important roles after the war. In a service defined by mutual suspicion and regular purges, this is significant. Pavel Fitin, the head of

4 MC P2/2/2MS/24, Undated notes on SIS and SOE.

external intelligence for the NKVD, who oversaw the entire SOE-NKVD relationship, continued in post until Stalin's death in 1953. While his position was doubtless secured by other successes, not least of which his involvement running spies for the Manhattan nuclear development project, had the SOE-NKVD relationship proven an unmitigated disaster and caused irreparable damage to Anglo-Soviet relations, it could quite easily have secured Fitin's political - and actual - demise. One might safely assume the same for Colonel Chichaev who, despite his regular complaints to SOE about the lack of results, apparently impressed his superiors with his handling of affairs in London sufficiently to warrant appointment as Soviet envoy to Prague in April 1945 – immediately prior to the Red Army advance on the city and the Prague uprising.

The experience of the senior NKVD cadres involved in the SOE-NKVD relationship contrasts markedly with that of many SOE officers who came into close contact with émigré communists, NKVD agents, or even FTP representatives in France. If Sinclair gave the clear direction to Grand in the spring of 1938 that nothing at all was banned, the ambiguity of the political directives given to SOE F agents during their pre-departure briefings caused no small amount of confusion and irritation. A headline conclusion from a post-war evaluation into SOE activities in France stated that the British government should have sought to completely disassociate itself 'from any political implications of the Resistance Movement' by focussing solely on clandestine tasks, leaving all paramilitary activity to the French-led RF section.[5] Many recruits bemoaned the limitations of political briefings. SOE's insistence that officers rely on their own reading of local politics and adopt locally appropriate responses to the varying political affiliations, geographical fluidity and military preparedness of the *maquis* was

5 TNA HS 7/135 Evaluation of SOE activities in France 1941 - 1944, pp. 3 & 7.

intended to afford individual agents the option of supplying or withdrawing support according to need but this also allowed for a very mixed application of directives, thereby providing fuel to the fire of anti-British propaganda. As M.R.D. Foot would later acknowledge, some of SOE F section's most successful agents maximised the profit from the leeway offered, in some cases creating powerful hybrid resistance movements that incorporated MOI and FTP units, and in others fostering powerful personal bonds, such as that forged between Jacques Poirier and 'Charles the Bolshevik'. Interestingly, Poirier, who was 100% French, passed himself off as an Englishman precisely because he felt it helped him avoid becoming embroiled in political disputes among the resistance.

Other agents, however, struggled to weld ideologically disparate resistance forces in their area. This was often as much due to FTP orders to avoid contact with outside forces as it was because of the personality or political inexperience of the SOE agents. Without being able to ascertain the communists' level of preparedness, SOE agents were often unwilling to allocate resources which could otherwise be shared with groups with whom they enjoyed a closer connection and whose capacity for action they could more easily verify. While there certainly were those within SOE and the British government more broadly who baulked at the idea of arming communists in France, the majority of the intelligence reaching Britain on the state of French politics from 1943 onwards pointed to the PCF (on instructions from Moscow) supporting unity of action and involvement in post-war democratic elections. A possible exception to this is the work of Guyot who on instructions from Moscow lobbied hard for a post-war role for the *Comités de Libération*, many of which were dominated by communists and which for many held the promise of forming a new soviet-style structure of local government. Had the CDL succeeded in dominating the local political landscape, it could have

been argued that Britain, through its infiltration of Guyot and other agents into France between 1942 and 1944, played a significant role as facilitator.

That the CDL were almost immediately eclipsed by de Gaulle's system of *Préfets* and commissaires can be seen as a failure of PCF domestic policy and Soviet foreign policy, but Moscow was not unduly perturbed. In fact, as far as the resistance was concerned, far more than inadequate British support to the resistance, it was Soviet foreign policy that prevented a post-war insurgency in France, with Thorez ordered to approve the affiliation of the FTP with the Free French forces and stand down the communist *milices patriotiques* despite popular communist support for a national insurrection. Meanwhile, recognising the British public's desire for social and economic change, the Home Office oversaw a radical shift in the language of government, with official publications and even Conservative MPs co-opting terms such as 'revolution' when describing, for example, their support for proposed changes to the welfare state.

One of the British government's greatest fears regarding providing support for communists in Britain and France related to communist influence on independence movements across the British Empire. Colonial officers, whose experience of, and musings on, irregular warfare had provoked SIS interest in sabotage and subversion in the mid-1930s, scorned the tendency in the immediate post-war period to see communists behind every nationalist insurgency, but many ministers and senior government officials were convinced that even where they hadn't inspired insurrection, communists would nonetheless seek to take advantage of it.[6] The anti-British guerrilla war for liberation in Malaya, for example, was described by the Manchester Guardian in 1950 as 'part of an attempt to impose a totalitarian Communism on the world'

6 David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945 – 1967* (Oxford, 2011), p. 42.

while in Kenya, British officials feared 'communist inspired agitators' were planning on cultivating the Kikuyu to resist British rule.[7] In one of the many counter-intuitive examples arising from the SOE-NKVD relationship, one of SOE's key 'wins', as they saw it, had in fact been an agreement from the NKVD to allow their Indian agent Bhagat Ram to intrigue against the Indian National Congress. On this point, some of the most useful information provided inadvertently by Groehl through MI5 monitoring of his prolific correspondence came not in the form of his communist contacts in Germany, but from his knowledge of former communists who were deeply involved in attempts to end British rule in India.

As this thesis has shown, the history of British government engagement with communists in the UK and France between 1938 and 1945 involves multiple interlocking strands reaching across the globe. Just as neutrinos, which while individually exhibiting a weak force and a small range, allow for the microscopic transfer of energy to the matter through which they pass undetected, certain communists whose passage through British intelligence and SOE has gone generally unremarked were in fact able to exert influence on British and French intelligence by sourcing intelligence on Nazi war preparations, promising access to a reported network of hundreds of underground communists in Germany, infiltrating anti-Nazi propaganda and sabotage materials into Nazi-occupied territory, and bolstering Anglo-Soviet relations during Britain's darkest hours. Perhaps the most important legacy of these passages, however, was that the willingness to cooperate gave each party a measure of hope in times of despair, a sense of the possible when impossibilities loomed large.

Was British government engagement with communists in France and the UK between 1938 and 1945 a critical innovation in intelligence cooperation, a pragmatic response to an

7 French, *Counter-Insurgency,* p.42; Manchester Guardian, 9 June 1950.

unprecedented threat, or an abject failure of British foreign policy that facilitated high-level penetration of the government by Soviet agents? The answer is all three, with the emphasis shifting depending on the angle or time period from which one chooses to view the relationship. The experiment with contacting pro and anti-Stalinist communists of various nationalities provided Britain with valuable expertise and networks, an option for attacking fascism from a different angle, and an opportunity to observe Soviet intelligence operatives from close quarters. But, beyond Dodds Parker's unverifiable claims to continued links to Soviet intelligence officers, the ties were never strong enough to survive the reassertion of Anglo-Saxon anti-communism. The impetus behind initial contact – the application of irregular warfare methods as seen in colonial and anti-colonial conflicts to the fight against Nazi Germany – led to an intensive period of research and development, for which the Second World War acted as the laboratory. Adolescent ideas were then let loose in a series of colonial conflicts in which Britain tried to reassert her Imperial power. A mere decade after the Red Flag flew at the Albert Hall, after Section D had actively sought out émigré communists to support their attempts to subvert Nazi Germany, and after tens of NKVD agents had been infiltrated into Europe by SOE, communism was being referred to in British troop manuals as 'an evil philosophy' which 'spells the end of all the powers for goodness in the world'.[8]

8 TNA WO 291/2480 Anti-guerrilla operations in South East Asia. Part 1. Tactics (First edn. April 1962).

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