The state's secret servants
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Security is vital to the interests of states. This paper describes the history of the evolution of so-called secret intelligence services in Europe, with particular emphasis on the UK. It examines their record on combatting the declared 'public enemies' in the 20th century, namely communism and fascism, illustrating how contradictory and perverse some spies' intentions were in this period. Whilst security agents embraced 'anti-communism' as their priority, the leadership of powerful Communist parties in France and Italy sought to distance themselves from the revolutionary goals of Marxism and become trustworthy allies to their governments as will be discussed in the Italian case from the 1970s.

Introduction

States require agents dedicated to advancing their interests who can act in secrecy obscuring their motives. This has frequently led to covert crimes against democracy in the name of national security and protecting states from alleged public enemies. A primary state institution of social control with inbuilt subversive tendencies is its secret intelligence services: According to one history, it has been part of state formation processes from the beginning: «In Europe national espionage developed slowly by the employment of ambassadors and envoys as spies. Diplomacy and theft were almost synonymous» (Deacon 1969, 3). The strengthening of the national state machinery under Henry VIII in the first half of the 16th century emerged from the 1529 reformation and engendered conflict with the power of the international Catholic church, dividing populations and their leaders across the continent. Whilst the growth of the merchant class created the force to capture wealth and resources, and states feuded over their colonies and empires, the conflict often took on religious forms. This process saw the "origins of capitalism" (Dimmock 2015) in England and the Netherlands, whose leaders warred with powerful feudal and absolutist states such as Spain and France. A look back to the Tudor origins of the English secret service illustrates how the concept of national security concentrates on combatting domestic enemies. For Queen Elizabeth I's secretary Francis Walsingham,

«No sooner had he unmasked one plot than another was discovered; the multiplication of plots forced him to spend more money and, like other espionage chiefs after him, he was sometimes compelled to exaggerate, or even invent threats, in an attempt to conjure more funds from the royal coffers» (Deacon 1969, 16).

Europe's rulers were divided both against one another, but also within their own state territories, as distinct interest groups developed their own perspectives. The reason for secrecy is not just to prevent discovery by your enemy, but also to allow state servants to break the rules, commit crimes and manipulate for their own advantage. Hence one of Walsingham's maxims was 'if there were no knaves, honest men should hardly come by the truth of any enterprise against them.' (Deacon 1969, 20) Secret services

are crucial weapons in the state's armoury. They allow one power to gather information on the intentions of others and use it for their advantage. In August 1765 the British East India Company defeated the young Mughal emperor and forced him to establish in his richest provinces a new administration run by English merchants who collected taxes through means of a ruthless private army – what we would now call an act of involuntary privatisation. The East India Company's founding charter authorised it to 'wage war' and it always used violence to gain its ends. But the creation of this new government marked the moment that the East India Company ceased to be a conventional international trading corporation dealing in silks and spices and became something much more unusual: an aggressive colonial power in the guise of a multinational business. Britain had vanquished the Indian's Mughal Empire in order to build its own. Bribery corruption, violence and espionage were crucial weapons in their success. (Dalrymple 2019) Britain's long imperial history explains why it has been able to take a lead in this area of statecraft. By the late 19th century, when imperial power was at its zenith, there was political sabotage and dirty tricks in its oldest colony – Ireland. As Deacon recounts:

«Too much reliance was placed on the political judgement of the secret agents…they were apt to regard any Irishmen who wanted independence as a traitor or a revolutionary. [One spy] Le Caron…provided ammunition for the politically blinkered who wished to see… Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish party in the House of Commons…destroyed» (Deacon 1969, 117).

1. *Into the 20th Century*

The weapon employed was "fake news". In 1887, *The Times* published a series of articles under the heading of "Parnellism and Crime", reproducing a letter in Parnell's handwriting that associated him with a campaign of assassination of those loyal to Britain, for which they paid the extraordinary figure of £2500. The lies hit home and Parnell resigned, blighting any prospects of home rule in Ireland. In 1888 a Special Commission of Inquiry proved "the whole case against Parnell was a fraud and an invention", but the damage was done. Even Winston Churchill, who was later to become a prominent user of secret services to blacken the name of his enemies, wrote that Parnell "was the reverse of a demagogue and agitator". One notorious early example of Churchill's skulduggery was the 1911 siege of Sydney Street, London. One thousand police officers alongside a company of the Scots Guards, were ordered out by Home Secretary Churchill to surround a house after a policeman had been shot dead by unknown "anarchists". It turned out that the leader of the gang "Peter the Painter" was in fact a Russian government agent who had posed as a comrade of the anti-Tsarist conspirators holed up in the property. There was a five-hour stand-off, personally supervised by Churchill during which two more officers were killed before the house was burnt down. In the aftermath, the killers escaped «with the knowledge of the police». Churchill «knew all about the ramifications of counter-espionage which the siege involved» (Deacon 1969, 119, 117, 173).

Spies had up until the early 20th century been truly secret – their existence denied by state authorities. But imperial rivalries between Britain, France and the rising power of Germany who now also wanted 'their share' of colonies were making the case for

official recognition of spying. In 1909, the year that Erskine Childers published the best-seller *Riddle of the Sands,* where two heroic Brits exposed the Kaiser's secret plans for an invasion of Britain, eminent Civil Service mandarin, Maurice Hankey had written a report for the Committee of Imperial Defence that proposed setting up a Secret Service Bureau. This was established and by 1914 had demonstrated its value:

«Popular enthusiasm for war, combined with paranoia about spies, forced the Asquith government to look tough. Eleven German spies were shot at the Tower of London…More people were executed there during World War One than under the Tudors» (Aldrich *et al*. 2017, 28).

In his history of GCHQ, subtitled "the uncensored story of Britain's most secret intelligence agency", Richard Aldrich uncovers a steady stream of spying. Over a century ago, Royal Navy code-breakers broke the "Zimmerman Telegram" – sent to Mexico by the German Foreign Minister:

«As an inducement, Mexico was to be offered the return of her lost territories in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. These revelations, made public in March 1917, were central in bringing the US into the First World War on the side of Britain and France» (Aldrich 2011, 15).

For the US, this was a switch in policy from isolationism. Indeed «President Woodrow Wilson had won his recent election campaign on the slogan "He kept us out of the war"» (Aldrich *et al.* 2017, 36). Now he was leading the US into war in Europe from 1917 onwards, and played a crucial role in erecting the architecture of the post-war world at Versailles the following year. It also showed how far the nascent British secret service, in this instance the Naval Intelligence Department, were prepared to go to achieve their goals. One history describes how they tracked down the British parents of a cypher clerk in the German navy, telling them "The Navy needs the German cipher and it is your son's duty to steal it for us. You must write a letter telling him this… If you refuse, then we shall have no alternative but to have you locked up in an internment camp". Despite complying, the half-Austrian cypher clerk, Alexander Szek, was found dead in Brussels – according to a British agent; «run down by a car in a side street not far from his lodgings. "Accidental death" they called it. I am sure he was deliberately killed by another British agent and his body somehow smuggled back into Belgium» (Deacon 1969, 212, 216).

The First World War did not end with a conventional victory and defeat. The bloody stalemate could have lasted longer still if it were not halted by the undermining force of a revolution from below. The German navy mutinied, soldiers refused to fight, and workers struck to bring down the Imperial regime and the Kaiser. Coming in the wake of the Russian Bolshevik revolution of the year before, a new world of transformed societies appeared possible, either exhilarating of horrifying depending upon your class position and sympathies. Everything seemed uncertain and pregnant with the threat and the promise of future instability. The policies of the victorious allies were enough to earn this rebuke and warning from one of the senior statesmen overseeing the drafting of the Versailles Treaty, John Maynard Keynes:

«In the first place, this treaty ignores the economic solidarity of Europe, and by aiming at the destruction of the economic life of Germany it threatens the health and prosperity of the Allies themselves. In the second place, by making demands the execution of which is in the literal sense impossible, it stultifies itself and leaves Europe more unsettled than it found it. The treaty, by overstepping the limits of the possible, has in practice settled nothing. The true settlement still remains to be made out of the ashes of the present and the disillusionment of the future, when the imposture of Paris is recognized for what it is» (John Maynard Keynes: The Economic Consequences of the Peace 1920, in Rayner 1992, 8).

In hindsight, the demands for war reparations fundamentally undermined the chance of a stable Germany emerging in the 1920s. Moreover, unlike the second world war, where Nazi aggression and invasion was clearly the cause, all the major European states, Britain, France and Germany, share the blame for the build-up of tensions and imperial rivalries that bred the 1914-1918 war. Unfortunately, the Allied leaders did not agree: «There must be justice for those millions whose homes and land, ships and property German savagery has spoliated and destroyed» exclaimed Étienne Mantoux, «Germany must undertake to make her reparation to the very uttermost of her power» (Rayner 1992, 9). Hitler agreed wholeheartedly with the "usefulness" of this approach to his cause, claiming:

«[E]ach one of the points of that Treaty could be branded into the minds and hearts of the German people until sixty million men and women find their souls aflame with a feeling of rage and shame; and a torrent of fire bursts forth as from a furnace, and a will of steel is forged from it, with the common cry: 'Wir wollen wieder Waffen! – We will have arms again!'» (Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf [1926], in Rayner 1992, 10).

Postwar, the British state also led the charge to maintain its influence and thus its empire: In 1919, Britain's Secret Service Committee set up the "Government Code and Cypher School" (GC&CS) in the Strand, next to the Savoy Hotel, in order to exploit their dominant position in handling diplomatic information. «Many of the world's messages travelled over British cables at some point… Although government cable censorship had officially ended in 1918, a private arrangement meant that all the commercial cable companies secretly handed over their traffic to GC&CS for copying» (Aldrich 2011, 16-17) Surveillance of other states' secrets was thought to be in the interests of the British state during war and peace, but even then, the attitudes and prejudices of those carrying out the espionage affected the outcome.
Britain's prime minister from 1916 -22 was the Liberal Lloyd-George. Taking power in the midst of a war now acknowledged to have been led disastrously, he also faced the growing radicalisation across Europe in the wake of the Russian and German revolutions. One historian has characterised him as «a master of political manoeuvre, giving ground where necessary and striking when the time was most opportune, dividing his opponents so that he could defeat them in detail… A Conservative government would almost certainly have precipitated a revolutionary outbreak by confronting the growing unrest head-on» (Newsinger 2015, 68). In this light Lloyd-George sought to disengage Britain from the conflict with the Bolsheviks, viewing Britain's support for the White Russians as an unhappy extension of the First World War. However, he constantly vacillated to keep on side with his coalition colleagues when he feared becoming isolated, and the Cabinet Secretary in 1922, Tom Jones,

reported how Lloyd-George 'capitulated to Churchill' on the issue (Jones 1969, 195), whilst providing a flavour of the latter's attitude.

«Churchill in passionate tones full of conviction deplored our dealings with the Bolsheviks...The account received from our Moscow representatives showed that these leaders had the brains of tortuous conspirators…they would use every effort to make breaches between the Western Powers and would be absolutely cynical in an all their dealings with us…He was bitterly sorry that at a time of strong Conservative majorities and deep devotion to the monarchy we were to step out to accord this supreme favour and patronage to these people» (Jones 1969, 196).

It was the viewpoint of Churchill and those like him in the British establishment that was to set the template for relations with continental Europe. «They were now forced to respond to a world where landed wealth was no longer the sole, or even the main, road to power, and where democratic politics demanded major adjustment to the patrician expectations of deference» (Kershaw 2004, 7). As a result, some sought "someone to blame":

«[T]he Bolshevik triumph had sent shockwaves reverberating through Europe…an upsurge of anti-Semitism, as Jews were portrayed in many countries as the carriers of revolution and social upheaval… that Jews were somehow an alien body… the imagined threat of Communism helped to sustain prejudices much more latent than outward, towards Jews within the British upper class» (Kershaw 2004, 8).

In the 1920s, to counter the "Bolshevik threat" Vernon Kell, the head of the British secret service recruited Maxwell Knight, Director of Intelligence from the British *Fascisti,* to head MI5's B division-counter-espionage. This is one version of the story. In another – Knight's autobiography, he began his spying career being asked to infiltrate the British *Fascisti* organisation, whilst he reported on their activities to his superiors, he rapidly rose up the ranks of this group and took part in anti-communist burglaries with other fascists where they would steal documents and trash properties. In the course of these events, he befriended William Joyce, the leading fascist, who Knight later helped to escape arrest by fleeing to Germany in 1939, where he became the notorious Nazi propagandist Lord Haw Haw who broadcast their message back across the channel (Hemming 2017). In somewhat of an understatement, Knight's biographer notes, «[a]s his colleagues got to know him better, some of them must have wondered whether his time among so many right-wing extremists had changed the way he saw the world, perhaps more than he realised» (Hemming 2017, 130). Knight has since become a British legend, the inspiration for James Bond's boss "M," according to a new bestselling biography.
For the public-school educated institutions running the various branches of the state in early 20th century Britain, and many of their European equivalents, communism appeared a much more potent and real threat – a harsh clash of values with their own life-experience of class privilege and empire – than the far right, whose methods and aims often seemed more in tune with their own. Thus, General Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote about his Prime Minister in his diary in 1920, «I

keep wondering if L.G. is a traitor and a Bolshevist, and I will watch him very carefully» (Aldrich *et al.* 2017, 37).

In times of tension, it appears that splits can occur in the opinions of the ruling institutions as to whether to appease or suppress opposition, or indeed who they should consider their real enemies. Creating the secret services demonstrated that there would be times when extra-parliamentary action was needed to counter such threats. If General Wilson feared even a Liberal like Lloyd George could usher in Bolshevism, how much more dangerous would he consider a Labour government? At the end of 1923, Baldwin's Conservative government lost the election and the Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald «found himself in a precarious position in 1924, perched delicately atop an unstable minority government» (Aldrich *et al.* 2017, 48) The secret services then conspired to unseat their prime minister through the fabrication and publication of the infamous *Zinoviev letter'* which "proved" the Labour Party to be a tool acting on the orders of the Russian Bolshevik government. It was published in the *Daily Mail* on 25th October 1924, just four days before a general election.

To make sure the message got across, the headline was in bold capitals right across the page:

CIVIL WAR PLOT BY SOCIALISTS' MASTERS – with sub headings below

MOSCOW ORDERS TO OUR REDS.

GREAT PLOT DISCLOSED YESTERDAY. "PARALYSE THE ARMY AND NAVY." AND MR MACDONALD WOULD LEND RUSSIA OUR MONEY!

DOCUMENT ISSUED BY FOREIGN OFFICE. AFTER "DAILY MAIL" HAS SPREAD THE NEWS.

The content was certainly sensational. Here are some of the highlights:

Very secret

Executive Committee, Third Communist International.

To the Central Committee, British Communist Party.

Presidium, September 15, 1924. Moscow.

Dear Comrades,
The time is approaching for the Parliament of England to consider the Treaty concluded between the Governments of Great Britain and the S.S.S.R. for the purpose of ratification… The proletariat of Great Britain, which pronounced its weighty word when danger threatened of a break-off of the past negotiations, and compelled the Government of MacDonald to conclude the treaty, must show the greatest possible energy in the further struggle for ratification and against the endeavours of British capitalists to compel Parliament to annul it… Armed warfare

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> must be preceded by a struggle against the inclinations to compromise which are embedded among the majority of British workmen, against the ideas of evolution and peaceful extermination of capitalism. Only then will it be possible to count upon complete success of an armed insurrection… In the event of danger of war, with the aid of the latter and in contact with the transport workers, it is possible to paralyse all the military preparations of the bourgeoisie, and make a start in turning an imperialist war into a class war.

Intelligence historians have since concluded that the letter «was almost certainly a fake…White Russians, the exiled supporters of the tsar, were the most likely culprits» MI6 agents in Riga sent it on to the Foreign Office in London, claiming «the authenticity of the document is undoubted» (Aldrich *et al*. 2017, 49-50). The government asked for proof. This was verified by Desmond Morton, head of MI6, citing information received from an agent who had infiltrated the Communist Party of Great Britain and stated the communists had held a meeting in early October to consider a letter received from Zinoviev, although, as Aldrich notes «the agent's original written report made no mention of any letter from Moscow at all. Morton claimed that the extra information had been gained after he met the agent on 10 October for further discussion» (Aldrich *et al.* 2017, 50).

The plot is now clearly established as a fraud perpetuated by British Intelligence Agent Sidney Reilly whose motive was his deep-rooted anti-communism. As this anticommunism was shared by the political establishment, the military and the barons who ran the press in the 1920s, it shaped the "threat perception" of the new secret services. In the wake of the collapse of the first Labour government, trade unionists looked more to their traditional weapon of industrial action. The General strike of 1926 only confirmed establishment prejudices, and «MI5 and Special Branch intercepted the mail of leftist leaders». Their paranoia about how far these dangerous ideas were spreading led to extreme measures: Agents also «sampled public opinion directly by eavesdropping under railway platforms» (Aldrich *et al* 2017, 54).

At the same time, the political movement known as Fascism came to prominence with Mussolini's seizure of power in Italy. Rising inequality and poverty under the existing system became a reality at the end of the 1920s, thus giving more extreme ideologies of the far left and right greater traction. This raises the spectre of the rise of German fascism in the 1930s.

2. *The rise of the Right*

«More than anything else, the Nazis were a nationalist protest against globalization» (Hett 2019, 106) They were, of course, not the first nation led by a modern dictator, that honour fell to Italy. Mussolini's Ambassador to London used populist language that could have come from the lips of any of today's far right leaders as he explained the "attraction" of fascism to *The Times* journalist A.L. Kennedy in December 1933:

«We must get out of our heads all our old ideas about dictators… The new dictator is the representative of the people. He is not against the people. He is against the oligarchy that had got the machinery of government into its hands» (Kennedy 2000, 115).

The Times was certainly the voice of the British establishment in the 1920s and 30s, and the new security services appeared similarly unconcerned about any threat fascism posed to Britain: «GC&CS paid limited attention to military matters of the rise of the Axis until the mid-1930s. Germany, Italy and Japan were a remarkably low priority» (Aldrich 2011, 19). By the 1930s, Churchill's cousin, Lord Londonderry, became a notorious advocate for British appeasement of the Nazis, which Kershaw defines as «offering concessions from a position of weakness» (Kershaw 2004, 50). Londonderry wrote to Hitler's Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop that «I have no great affection for the Jews. It is possible to trace their participation in most of the international disturbances which have created so much havoc in different countries» (Kershaw 2004, 146). Meanwhile, his wife, Lady Londonderry, told Göring that the British press was «controlled to a great extent by Jews… an alien presence, outsiders in a Christian society… Jews in the East End of London are a really dangerous element in the country» (Kershaw 2004, 147, 230). In fact, at this time there were significant sections of the establishment actively lobbying for a less democratic and more dictatorial approach to government. Right wing columnist Collin Brooks and his patron, newspaper tycoon and *Daily Mail* owner Lord Rothemere, wrote a diary claiming «Never in the history of the nation has parliament and Cabinet sunk so low in the public mind. Strong and competent men are excluded from Office and strong critics like Nuffield are bribed into acquiescence» (Brooks 1998, 176). Besides championing "strong men" in the form of Oswald Mosley the leader of the British Fascists, who the *Daily Mail* regularly promoted, the two hoped that the new king would stand up for Hitler-like measures such as conscription for the growing numbers of the unemployed. Brooks's diary reports:

«Edward VIII received a tumultuous reception from the Empire ex-servicemen at the Albert Hall… the visit of the King to distressed areas of South Wales and his outspoken demand that 'Works brought these men here – something ought to be done to find them work' occupies attention everywhere… There are many signs that the nation approves this vigorous conduct by the Monarch… he could, if he wished, make himself the Dictator of the Empire. Some minds see in the South Wales activities and brusqueness a sign that he may yet dominate the politicians» (Brooks 1998, 179-180).

Historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, recruited to the Secret Intelligence Services (SIS) during the second world war, was «shocked to find that none of his colleagues had bothered to read the 'sacred texts' of those they were fighting, such as Hitler's *Mein Kampf*» (Walton 2013, 35). Very prominent members of the establishment favoured appeasement and indeed took a positive view of Hitler and «Germany's traditional anti-communist policy» (Rust 1949, 148). These were the words of Lord Kemsley, the owner of *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Graphic* and *Daily Sketch* newspapers – the latter later merged with *The Daily Mail* – who «visited Hitler in the summer of 1939 and offered to give space to the Nazi point of view in his newspapers… He was

strangely impressed by the character of Reichsminister Goebbels, whom he thought a clever and broadly educated man» (Rust 1949, 98).

Hitler must have been delighted that all these advocates of appeasement populated the newspapers, the armed forces and – above all – the governments of Europe. As his troops invaded more and more countries in the course of the 1930s, with Mussolini's Italy doing the same in a more limited capacity. They were confronting an establishment whose "social character" – the pattern of associations and values with which they identified – made them see the Fascist leaders as men with similar values to themselves, many of whose characteristics; such as militarism, authoritarianism they admired. With them, they shared a belief that if democracy went too far it risked degenerating into socialism and communism. Thus, the disgraced British PM, Neville Chamberlain failed so spectacularly because he always wanted to believe he could do a deal with the likes of Hitler and Mussolini. A sense of his attitude is supplied by his reaction to Italy's invasion of Albania in April 1939:

«Musso has behaved to me like a sneak and a cad», he moaned. «He has carried through his smash and grab raid with complete cynicism» (Aldrich *et al.* 2017, 83).

Aldrich and Cormac comment, «Chamberlain and his senior colleagues did not believe because they did not fit with their preconceived stereotypes and assumptions». (Aldrich *et al*. 2017, 84). Strong leaders are better than democracy runs the right populist argument. Thence rulers' domination or "hegemony" becomes less contested. Contemporary signs of this tendency include a US survey reporting that 81% of 16–25-year-olds and 57% of the general population "believe a military takeover would be necessary if governmental democracy was failing" (BBC 2019). So, ironically, rising fears about the state of democracy can popularise demands for its suspension. This is not unusual. The economic and political crisis in Italy led to the appointment of a technocratic leader in 2012: In fact, the existence of a "crisis" – real or make-believe – has been the midwife of virtually every military coup in history. It may not quell the obdurate opposition from a principled minority, but has a proven history of limiting the horizons of broader groupings through the creation of a "climate of fear". Michael Welch spelt this out:

«As a social psychological defense mechanism against confronting the real source of frustration, scapegoating provides emotional relief for people racked with fear and anxiety. That solace is inevitably short term, prompting scapegoaters to step on the treadmill of endless bigotry and victimization» (Welch 2006, 4).

Thus, one step of "othering" can lead to another: Especially as the far-right's political rivals 'shift the window' of acceptable prescriptions and solutions towards ever-more radical hate speech and actions in order to demonstrate their political virility. Examples from the 1930s demonstrate a more extreme version of the process of manufacturing folk devils (Cohen 2011) and a rationale that justifies the persecution of the dreaded

outsider group. Kennedy's diary recounts conversations with Nazi Foreign Minister Ribbentrop on a visit to Berlin in 1936:

«In regard to Jews, von Ribbentrop's main contention was that the Jews must not be allowed to dominate. I think that what the Germans want is to be unmistakeably top dogs in their own house. They are afraid of Jews getting into key positions. Once they have got them under, they may leave them in peace» (Kennedy 2000, 194).

The last statement reflects the hopeless wishful thinking of those who wished to appease, rather than oppose, the dictators. It was as if they believed there was no alternative: «I am afraid that the drive against the Jews is so strongly backed that nobody can stop it for the present» (Kennedy 2000, 199). History tells us how this group paid the ultimate price – leading, of course, to many other groups also being persecuted and invaded. There were many voices of opposition that sought to expose and explain the rise of anti-semitism. For example, the German Jewish sociologist Norbert Elias wrote in 1929: «The Christian German middle class faces a struggle... In the form of anti-semitism it is fighting against those of its competitors & bourgeois opponents of its own interests who seem easiest to strike against & render harmless» (Elias 2006, 82-83). Elias could clearly see the need to fight this poisonous nationalistic anti-semitism, whilst the establishment view, reflected in Kennedy's diaries, was a mixture of mild concern combined with positive approval towards the "sense of purpose" he saw in the Nazi regime:

«I understand now that the Germans regard Teutonism as something sacred and something that is vitiated by the inmixture of Jewish blood or Jewish influence. This Teutonism is quite terrific. I am more impressed by it the more I look into German life» (Kennedy 2000, 199).

3. *War against the Nazis*

During World War Two, the two largest states to be occupied by the Nazis, France and Italy (after Mussolini's fall in 1943), certainly bred powerful – and necessarily secret – armies of resistance, both of which won a depth of popular support that undoubtedly vindicated their formation. The embattled British leader, Winston Churchill, in 1940 expressed similar sentiments when he 'ordered the creation of a secret army under the label the "Special Operations Executive" (SOE) to "set Europe ablaze by assisting resistance movements and carrying out subversive activities in enemy held territory" (Ganser 2005, 40). Its' commander was to be Labour minister Hugh Dalton, whose statement expressed the determination and the philosophical dilemmas associated with taking this path:

«We have to organise movements in enemy-occupied territory comparable to the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland, to the Chinese Guerillas now operating against Japan…to the organisations in which the Nazis themselves have developed remarkably in almost every country in the world» (Ganser 2005, 40).

Dalton's mention of Sinn Fein – the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) – created a certain degree of legitimacy for the tactics of anti-British resistance movements fighting for national liberation from occupation and colonisation, a legitimacy which the British state had been determined to deny in Ireland for centuries

until the eventual Good Friday agreement in the 1990s brought an end to their war with Irish nationalism – although Northern Ireland, of course, remains under British control. The British state had also disapproved of Chinese liberation movements whilst they controlled Hong Kong and had access to key Chinese ports until the fall of Shanghai in 1940. The last example cited by Dalton, of Nazi mass movements, may have referred to the recent Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. General Franco's victory in Spain pointed to the dangers from the far right and fascists seizing upon this tactic – violently overthrowing the government as their way of fighting against the "communist threat". Indeed, the term that was employed by the right, in a positive fashion, to describe hidden forces opposed to the republican government – a "fifth column" – was first used in 1936 by Mola, one of Franco's generals, as he threatened the people of Madrid that besides the four brigades, he was bringing to besiege their city, a fifth column of Franco supporters were already amongst them. Thus, the threat of violence was amplified through creating a climate of fear amongst the people – of an "enemy within". There is some evidence that the republican forces fighting Franco became obsessed with countering the internal threat of secret forces planning their destruction, which is, of course, exactly what General Mola was hoping for.

The fear of betrayal from within during World War Two was heightened by the rapid fall of France to the Nazi invaders in 1940, which some blamed on internal weakness and a pro-German "fifth column". There began "a frantic effort to discover the cause of Western weakness and the secret of German success" (New York Times, 1940). A series of photos in the June 1940 issue of Life magazine were captioned of "Signs of Nazi Fifth Column Everywhere". In a speech to the House of Commons that same month, Winston Churchill reassured the members that "Parliament has given us the powers to put down Fifth Column activities with a strong hand" (Churchill 1940). Just as fear of communism had driven many states to acts of violent repression against the left in the 1930s, whilst underplaying the threat of fascism; in the 1940s, the realities of wartime occupation bred resistance from below to the fascists' military rule and suppression of democracy and human rights. In the 1950s, as we shall see, the old communist folk devil returned to the top of the agenda. The term "fifth column" – one that was initially hailed as a saviour by the right – now described a threat coming from the left – to be feared by the right, and with luck all those they governed.

Wartime propaganda in Britain had encouraged the public to report their suspicions of others to the government and generally be aware of the threat of a Nazi takeover. Another way in which the war led to the creation of practices that would dominate in future decades was the growth of the secret agencies carving greater roles for themselves within society. For example:

«In 1940 when the German invasion of England seemed imminent, plans were laid to establish a network of cells which would remain behind enemy lines and conduct guerrilla activities… MI6 (SIS) whose section D was responsible for subversion and sabotage behind enemy lines…set about gathering up a store of arms and recruiting agents all over Britain, without informing anyone else. MI5 became quite alarmed when it started receiving reports of Section D's activities and several of their agents were arrested as spies before the truth was discovered» (Bunyan 1977, 264-5).

It appeared one section of the secret services, MI6, felt obliged to treat Britain as if it had already been invaded and tried to recruit a resistance army to combat the invaders, whilst the other section, MI5 – responsible for internal security, saw these actions as evidence of enemy activity! Similar clashes between policing institutions were to occur often during the cold war in Europe, and indeed in the US between the police, FBI and CIA (Weiner 2007, Corera 2012). Recent research based upon excavating the official records of Britain's internal security service, MI5, has unearthed a plethora of plans being hatched to aid the threatened Nazi invasion – the height of which was the summer of 1940. The spies realised they had to take decisive action to track the culprits, many of whom were highly placed at the top of the establishment.

In *Hitler's British Traitors*, Tim Tate reveals the extent to which accommodation and appeasement of Nazism was integral to so many institutions in the 1930s. Senior figures in the military, the monarchy, the church and parliament sincerely believed in the benefits of an authoritarian from of government – especially in its ability to suppress unwanted and dangerous ideas such as communism; and to repel and protect "the national interest" against its pollution by dangerous races such as the Jewish people. When MI5 proved the existence of a military coup plot headed up by the Tory MP for Peebles and South Midlothian, Archibald Maule Ramsay, who formed the notorious "Right Club" in 1939, the Home Office refused to charge him with treason, although they as much as admitted his complicity by accepting the need for his being detained in Brixton Prison alongside another Nazi plotter, Admiral Barry Domville. The MI5 records in the National Archives noted «the proposed defendants take the view that they are safe from trial and punishment because neither of the Governments concerned dare to have these matters discussed». The "matters" concerned being «plans to replace – violently and with German assistance – the British government with a cabal of pro-Nazi fascists and fellow-travellers» (Tate 2019a, 183, 186).

Clearly, the government was divided. On the one hand there were the appeasers, who saw the Nazis as the "lesser evil" such as the PM Neville Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, the latter even approved secret missions of pro-Nazi "diplomats" to Hitler with peace proposals after war was declared (Tate 2019b, 29) One such was led by fellow Lord, Tavistock, soon to become Duke of Bedford. If we see the like of the "Right Club" as measures of the strength of British wartime pro-Nazi anti-semitic sentiment, Tate suggests:

«of the 242 Right Club members listed, 13 were titled aristocrats (of both sexes) and 12 were sitting MPs; there were also three members of European Royal Families and at least five senior officers, serving in the British army» (Tate 2019b, 18).

On the other hand, some of the establishment, notably Churchill himself, took a different view. One treason trial judge outlined the stakes as he saw it in sentencing:

«Your crime is a political crime, and it is sometimes suggested that political crimes ought to be treated with greater leniency than other crime. I entirely dissent from that view. It seems that, of all forms of crime, that which affects the state at whose heart it is directed can be least tolerated» (Tate 2019a, 249).

Looking back, it appears obvious that appeasement failed and Nazism had to be fought and defeated. Unfortunately, this has led many British historians and commentators to give the impression of a country united against Hitler, describing an imagined community of stalwart citizens "keeping calm and carrying on", when the reality was one of divided views and a spirit of institutionalised compromise with the forces of reaction running deeply through parts of the establishment. Moreover, those members of the establishment most likely to be determined to defend the state against "the enemy within", whom they believed to be found amongst the trade unions, the Labour Party and the communists, were also those most likely to be undermining it in any conflict with fascism. These conflicts escalated within the security services as their importance grew.

The course of the war saw the massive expansion of state-directed operations in all countries. In Britain, the surveillance operation developed to detect enemy plans and operations generated the 'ultra' decryption of the German "Enigma" coding machines. Obviously, the allied ability to read the Nazi's messages had to remain secret to be effective, although we now know that details were being passed on to the Soviet Union who had an informant, John Cairncross, working on the code-breaking team led by Alan Turing at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire (Smith 2019). MI6 went on to recruit Cairncross to their ranks in 1944 which either suggests that senior figures in the espionage world knew he was briefing the Soviets and were happy for it to happen as it aided a war ally, or that their security vetting was very ineffective. Regardless, once the war was over the 'ultra' secret remained so, as the allies were keen to listen in to the Enigma machines used by many diplomatic services in the new world of the cold war and the decline of the British empire (Walton 2013). The result of all this necessary duplicity and double-crossing was that a vital wartime ally, the Soviet Union – despite it being a brutal dictatorship, now became the principal enemy of the West. Whereas during the war British spies may have been prepared to conspire to send the Soviets secret information, now they became their prime target for subversion and subterfuge. Moreover, because the Cold War was borderless – truly international – then the state's agencies of social control must also target the communist "enemy within". As we have seen, they had been doing this already from at least 1917, and for many of operatives of western intelligence agencies this persecution of the "left" felt more natural and justified than that of the right-wing regimes of their wartime enemies. In fact, as social democratic ideas and parties became more popular and mainstream in the post-war years, it became increasingly easy for them to see these politicians as dangerous "fellow travellers" they should guard against.

This is an example of a pattern of behaviour at the heart of the concerns and motivations for writing this article. The "common sense" idea of conspiracy theories as fantastical inventions should give way to a fuller recognition of how often history provides examples of the determined refusal of elements of the state machinery to admit the possibility that such reactionary schemes to destroy democracy exist. Indeed, the necessity of state crimes – consisting of acts of violence aimed at overthrowing and undermining governments – exists within the mindsets of some key sections of the

state apparatus; in particular, those associated with maintaining social control. For them, there are circumstances, by definition, when even elected governments – If dangerously radicalised – can require subversion. A divided and appeasing British government in the tension of the last months before World War Two is one example. There would be other examples in the cold war period, especially in the 1970s, where these strategies of tension were being manufactured by the state's "rogue agents": «between 1974 and 1976 a paranoid feeling of apocalypse, of imminent Armageddon spread through the private clubs, the lobby rooms and the secret services throughout Europe» (Teacher, 2013 kindle ref. 1919).

Another wartime activity that set precedents for 21st century counterinsurgency was the practise of British Intelligence secretly detaining, interrogating and transporting enemy agents. As Calder Walton notes 'a form of state-sponsored kidnapping – closely resembling the process of "extraordinary rendition" (Walton 2013, 58-59). Britain's wartime "Guantanomo Bay" was Camp 020 - a former lunatic asylum in a South London suburb run by the monocled Lieutenant Colonel Robert "Tin Eye" Stephens. However, his approach was far more enlightened than that of Bush and Donald Rumsfeld during the Iraq War, entailing 'every method short of physical coercion'. He explained:

«Violence is taboo for not only does it produce an answer to please, but it lowers the standard of information… A prisoner will lie to avoid further punishment and everything he says thereafter will be based on a false premise. Through stupidity… an investigation becomes valueless» (Walton 2013, 65).

This is, of course, the opposite method of the "extraordinary rendition" policies carried out in the early 2000s by the US and UK military «deliberately sending suspects to third-party countries with poor track records on human rights, where they have allegedly been tortured to gain intelligence» (Walton 2013, 67).

However, all the globe's machineries of state were challenged and transformed through the experience of 1939-45. Old empires were shown to be redundant and decolonisation was to become a major post-war tendency. The principle of "letting the market decide" or *laissez faire* economics withered as both the axis and the allied powers assumed more state control and grew their bureaucracies in order to "plan" their societies for war. Having purged his enemies and assumed dictatorial power, Stalin the "state capitalist" dictator was a much more amenable figure to the likes of Churchill than Lenin and Trotsky, the revolutionaries who were both killed in the interwar years, the latter on Stalin's orders (Patenaude 2009). Both state leaders aspired to the role of "strong man" and recognised their shared interest in controlling – respectively – the "free west" and the "Eastern Bloc". A.J.P. Taylor notes «Churchill and Stalin shared out the political control of eastern Europe with odd statistical precision» (Taylor 1977, 712).

For those who mourned for the imminent decline and fall of the British Empire, the success of Labour in the 1945 elections seemed to confirm their despair and resentment at the direction of 'progress' and the modern world. The establishment had continued

to believe in the fake news of their own invention that had branded Labour as dangerous "crypto-Communists". This tendency of all the power blocs' mechanisms of power to blur into similar patterns was, of course, what George Orwell described in 1948's "1984". One of his influences during the war was the fact that his wife worked in the new giant tower block Senate House, built in the 1930s as part of the University of London, it still looms over Bloomsbury and the British Museum even today. It became the wartime location for the government's propaganda department, The Ministry of Information:

«In his Blitz spy novel, The Ministry of Fear (1943), Graham Greene rechristens the department. Orwell… renamed it as the Ministry of Truth, or Minitrue. In Nineteen Eighty-Four, a huge pyramid-like building of white concrete towers over the city… disseminating an invented language called Newspeak… designed to facilitate 'doublethink' in the population» (Ingleby 2017, 147).

After 1945, Britain's rulers had another reason for keeping their knowledge of enemy codes secret: Many states continued to use *Enigma*-type machines to encrypt their communications, so post-war Britain and their American allies had a real incentive to keep their success "top-secret" – thus allowing them to continue listening in to the new independent rulers of the post-colonial powers. The situation was therefore in many ways different in 1945 compared with 1918. Britain and America had co-operated so closely in the allied war effort that they were now interdependent. Britain was broken, her empire on the wane, and needed US resources to survive. The US valued the expert knowledge and practice of the British military they had learnt about in joint operations, with the US Marines adopting the Green Berets of the UK paratroopers in tribute to their role in propping up the empire around the world, a task that now fell to the Americans. (Ganser 2005, 43) In intelligence terms, the links were so close that the acronym "UKUSA" was frequently used to describe their actions.

4. A Suitable Enemy: The folk devil of communism

The fluidity of the situation in Western Europe was particularly acute in two countries that started the conflict on opposite sides, France and Italy: Both finished the war under Nazi occupation and the years 1943-45 saw powerful secret armies of resistance built up largely led by fighters with allegiance to their respective communist parties. Their guerrilla war against the occupiers made them at least in part the authors of their own liberation from Nazi rule, alongside the invasion of the allied troops. This was the fundamental source for the period of tension that became known as the 'cold war' of 1945-89. In the west the cold warriors were convinced their old Soviet ally, and its affiliated parties were a far greater threat than what remained of Fascism. The "liberators" were to be guarded against in the new postwar political arrangements. Right-wing crusader Brian Crozier described the reasons for this 'unseen war':

«Because Communism was now the greatest threat to freedom, anti-Communism was an axiomatic requirement… The Communist threat was more subtle, more insidious, more long-term. It invaded daily life, affected social mores, poisoned minds and institutions» (Crozier 1993, 10).

This was clearly not the "popular" view in France and Italy, where millions believed that the communists had been the key to their liberation. There was also widespread concern about the degree of rehabilitation and influence accorded to many collaborators and enthusiasts for Fascism by the "new rulers of Europe". The public concern that the anti-communist obsession would mean soft-pedalling on cleaning up the old fascist order was well founded. Indeed, the Nazi's authoritarian methods were often commended: In 1949, senior US spy George Kennan remarked «it often seemed to me, during the war living over there, that what was wrong with Hitler's new order was that it was Hitler's» (Judt 2007, 154).

As Hermann and Chomsky outlined, «Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the spectre haunting property owners, as it threatened the root of their class position and superior status» (Herman, Chomsky 1988, 29) This means that priorities are always governed by a pro-capitalist and therefore anti-communist, or anti-socialist, agenda. As long as those that control the state, government ministers, Army and Police chiefs, top Civil Servants and the leaders of the judiciary – and the corporate global interests with whom they ally – adhere to this view, they create their own contradictory consequences. As German sociologist Norbert Elias described it, in the Cold War period of 1945-1989, both systems of states – the "free West" and the "communist East" – were trapped in a double-bind:

«Explanations in the usual terms, according to which this drift is either the fault of the capitalists or the communists… obscures the double-bind character of the figuration and also makes the struggle more intractable. On each side, it gives the hegemonic struggle between the two superpowers the character of a crusade… In both cases, the social practice which they have created is so far removed from an ideal state that it is impossible… to see how, from that sad reality, an ideal social condition can emerge. Yet that is what each of the two antagonistic states claims for its own side; that is what fires the emotions» (Elias 2007 157).

The other question raised by the actions of covert organisations, what Daniele Ganser calls "secret armies", is whether such acts of violence and subversion of the established territorial power can ever be justified. Can it ever be "in the national interest", and if so, on whose authority? Of course, some commentators will scoff at such notions, calling them the product of a "conspiracy theory" mindset that manufactures mythical enemies of the people from the benign force of state authority; but a careful analysis of the behaviour of western governments over the last century produces many examples of just such a phenomenon. This paper builds upon Clement and Scalia's previous analysis of the UK and US involvement in the Italian history of secret armies in particular, whilst noting parallel developments in other parts of Europe (Clement, Scalia 2021). Sometimes the armies are not even that secret, such as the notorious *Organisation armée secrète* or OAS (meaning Secret Army Organisation), which fought to bring down French leader General De Gaulle and attempted to assassinate him in the early 1960s. The US role, ably assisted by their British junior party, was to assess the political consequences of the General's assassination and recommend the best choice for his successor.

The 1962 CIA paper *Consequences of the Death or Assassination of De Gaulle* stated that in the event «we believe the succession would take place normally, as if the 71 year-old president had died of natural causes» (CIA 1962 2), concluding «Under such comparatively tranquil circumstances the probable choice of the conservative-dominated electoral college would be a "notable" of Fourth Republic vintage, such as Antoine Pinay… any probable successor would almost certainly display a more forthcoming attitude towards the US and towards NATO» (CIA 1962 3,4). Pinay had collaborated with the Nazi occupation of France in 1940, joining the Vichy regime's national council the next year, inviting in the quisling leader Petain before standing down and distancing himself midway through the war. The CIA would have been well aware that Pinay had founded a secret "Pinay Circle" to lobby for anti-communism a decade earlier and acted as a champion for US and NATO interests (Teacher 2013).

The US and UK were the leading NATO powers, and doubtless the statesmen at the helm of the new American Empire were learning from the example of the antics of the secret services of their predecessors. The wartime collaboration between the "Office of Strategic Services" in the US and the British "Special Operations Executive" – later to become the Special Air Service (SAS) – also featured in the creation of NATO. The NATO symbol is the compass rose commonly seen below the steering mechanism on a ship and represents how NATO leaders saw their role as to steer the ship of the state on the right course, and to correct those nations whose governments threatened to take them in other directions. In case this point sounds too conspiratorial, the compass rose also features as the central graphic on the logo of the CIA. The "strategy of tension" may have been initiated and funded by the US, but it matured in soil also cultivated by the UK in the postwar years. Shared ideals and methods in counterinsurgency were developed in British and American joint military operations to back their favoured groupings against "communist" opposition in places such as Albania and Greece in 1945 (Newsinger 2015, 2016). Unfortunately, the victory of the Labour Party in 1945, although anathema to the right, did not signal a move away from traditional UK foreign policy. Labour committed itself to the atomic arms race and (secret) co-operation with the US. It also proved itself to be just as determined to maintain "anti-communism" as its Churchillian predecessor. This was a situation all the leading Labour politicians had become used to during the war as they served under him in the wartime coalition government. Shared ideals and methods in counterinsurgency were grown in joint missions in places like Greece in 1945. Labour's foreign secretary, ex-Trade Union leader Ernest Bevin, "deeply feared a communist takeover of Greece".

As the "soft underbelly" of Europe… and losing it, Bevin feared, would have a devastating effect on commerce, trade and the spread of democracy. Despite opposition from sections of his own party, Bevin continued Winston Churchill's policy of supporting any Greek regime as long as it was not communist (Cormac 2018, 39).

Even in the very year that the allies' main enemy had been organised fascism, their leading state figures had switched their fire toward a new "main enemy" – or rather reverted to the "traditional" ideological foe of the capitalist powers. Just as the pre-war powers had largely appeased, not confronted, fascism and militaristic national

aggression, now it abandoned fighting these forces once more to concentrate on the "danger" of Soviet expansion and the presence of their proxies, communist parties and even more moderate reforming organisations such as social democratic parties or Trade Unions when they were more actively campaigning.

In the years after 1945, it is often assumed that Western and Eastern Europe were immediately divided by an iron curtain, but Greece was not the only area where people were contesting the arrangements made by allied leaders for allocating countries to their respective "spheres of influence" i.e. the "free West" and the "Eastern Bloc". For example, Czechoslovakia remained out of Moscow's control until 1948, and Austria was under the joint control of various powers until 1949 when it became part of the Western camp. herefore, the task set one British MI6 spy, Anthony Cavendish, was:

To prepare for the war itself by building a so-called stay-behind network. This consisted of recruiting sleeper agents and burying weapons and communications systems which could be activated in the event of Austria being overrun by the Red Army (Corera 2012, 26).

Corera compares this to «acting like pirates on Treasure Island, by finding a quiet spot in the park or the countryside and then counting paces from a tree or other landmark, burying a box three feet deep… Across Europe and the Middle East, gold ingots were dropped into lakes, guns hidden in caves and radio sets buried» (Corera 2012, 27). Thus state spies and so-called terrorists can often end up performing the same actions – preparing and commissioning acts of violence for political ends. The former is an act of social control, the latter aims for their version of "social justice". This is certainly one area where the "special relationship" between the governments US and the UK has endured and, in the spirit of Philip Agee (the former CIA case officer who later became a vocal opponent of its practices), the authors aim to publicise some of the methods and locations used by Britain to maintain the "strategy of tension" through the period of the Cold War and beyond. Infiltration and undercover activities are an important part of any government's prevention strategy or counterinsurgency (Agee, Wolf 1978; Newsinger 2015), evolving into a "strategy of tension" as enacted in many European countries such as West Germany and France – but above all in the country where the US led the invasion that drove back the Nazis – Italy.

Even when they were not making such positive associations with Nazism and authoritarian rule the first instinct of Europe and America's new political rulers was to see communism as a dangerous threat and combatting it became their top priority. In France, those police with communist sympathies were removed after the war, but many of the officers who had been active supporters of the collaborationist Vichy regime of Marshall Petain remained in post with disastrous consequences such as the Paris Massacre of Algerians in 1961 (Einaudi 1991). The US was now the dominant state, with imperial interests and policing concerns spanning the globe.

«Behind the rapid international growth of multinational giants like Chase Manhattan, Coca-Cola, Standard Oil, and General Motors lay a global network of US military bases, spy stations, and alliances with despotic regimes. The twin exigencies of the Cold War and the US empire gave the national security establishment unprecedented free rein to operate… to subvert democratic governments that

were deemed insufficiently pro-American and to terminate these governments elected leaders» (Talbot 2015, 550).

What was their position. How did they envisage the future Europe? According to CIA spymaster Milton Bearden, the opportunities to expand US influence needed to be taken. They lay in "undecided space" – countries under threat from growing communist influence. It was «more about making that country ours instead of theirs. It denied them that piece of the chessboard… It was about 'country management' so that I don't get any surprises out of that country» (Grey 2016, 54).

Of course, such grandiose ideas of controlling the global chessboard were dealt a massive blow by the US defeat in Vietnam, beginning with the Tet Offensive by the Vietnamese Liberation Army in early 1968. Just as in France, the events of 1968 and 1969 in Italy has proved to be an opening for the "new left" as many of those radicalised by the strikes and street protests had turned to new parties outside the communists. There were Maoist, Trotskyist and anarchist groupings being formed, and an increasing appetite for taking forms of direct action against price rises, low wages and lack of social housing – which saw a rise in squats, "free shopping" in supermarkets and other guerrilla actions designed to help poorer people cope with the crisis. Over the next few years, rather than these events pushing the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to the left, they appeared to drive the party's leadership to argue for a retreat, a compromise, needed to prevent further repression from the right and the state. It is worth looking in some detail at the words used by the PCI leader, Enrico Berlinguer, to justify the "historic compromise". The key was fear of the power of the US state, in particular its determination to intervene with military repression in order to prevent the Italian left in government undermining economic orthodoxy. On 11th September 1973, Chilean president Salvador Allende was shot dead by troops from his own army as a US-backed coup put general Pinochet in power and over 30 000 government supporters were massacred in the capital's football stadium. For Berlinguer, «the events in Chile make it clearer, against all illusions, that the character of imperialism and especially of North American imperialism is still economic and political suffocation, the spirit of aggression and conquest» (Russo 1979 78). Doubtless, all those Vietnamese fighting for their national liberation from the American war in their country would agree, as would their millions of supporters across the globe. However, in 1973, the Vietnamese were on the verge of driving the Americans out – with the US withdrawal from Saigon finally occurring in 1975; but for the PCI and Berlinguer their conclusion was not to resist this state-sanctioned violence but to find an alternative path: «we have always given due weight to the fundamental fact that Italy belongs to the politico-military bloc dominated by the USA and the inevitable implications of this fact» (Russo 1979 79). Their whole mission since 1945 had been to achieve the *sorpasso* i.e enough votes to form a government, but now the self-limiting logic of compromise was pushing them away from this goal, claiming the events in Chile 'proved' how divisive it would be. He continued:

«It's not by obtaining 51 per cent of the vote that the left-wing parties can be sure of governing… a vertical split down the whole of our country… would ruin the experiment of renewing our society. This is what happened in Chile» (Russo 1979, 79).

His message was that in order to avoid being crushed by reaction, the PCI must argue for a grand coalition with the party who, since its formation, had been determined to vanquish the communists; «a new great historic compromise was needed between the forces representing the vast majority of the people, namely communists, socialists and Christian Democrats» (Russo 1979, 80).

These statements were all made by Berlinguer in 1973; in 1974, the PCI extended the idea of the historic compromise into the economic sphere, accepting the need for private enterprise and profit making to be the government priorities. This was becoming a matter of grave concern for the US state. Their own stability and global pre-eminence were under threat after President Nixon's forced resignation in the Watergate scandal and now establishment voices were questioning US tactics of violent counterinsurgency against governments, they deemed hostile, particularly in Chile in 1973. Leading DC politician Aldo Moro had a close relationship with Berlinguer – so much so that the Americans saw him as the co-architect of the compromise. On a visit to the states US secretary Henry Kissinger "attempted to dissuade Moro with threats to his life". His wife Eleonora repeated her husband's recollection to the commission investigating the motives for his killing in 1978, stating he was told «You must abandon your policy of bringing all the political forces in your country into direct collaboration. Either you will give this up or you could pay dearly for it» (Willan 1991 kindle loc. 4280). The trend continued however – even when the 1975 regional elections gave them an improved mandate, the PCI leaders avoided the "trap" of a left government and "strove for broad alliances" (*large intese*) *including* the DC. They also drove a further wedge between themselves and the rest of the left by endorsing the *Legge Reale* laws which allowed mass arrests of those the state judged terror suspects and other abuses of civil liberties.

This then was the main message from the PCI in the 1976 elections. Whilst they hoped for unity it was in many ways very divisive. For the far left, it proved the PCI was moribund and out of touch with the desperate state of crisis which threatened both political repression and an economic recession to be paid for by the working class. Many loyal PCI supporters would agree, after all they had spent thirty years arguing the DC could not be trusted. Now their leaders wanted to collaborate with them, without even a promise of communist involvement in any future government. Nevertheless, their vote rose: In June 1976, the PCI polled 34,4%, less than 5% below the DC government. The DC was split on their best option – between those who favoured a compromise with the PCI, the 'Mediterranean' tendency of Moro, Fanfani and Andreotti – and the "American Party in Italy" who did not, including the likes of secret service chief General de Lorenzo, who had the backing of the US state and both country's secret services. Other Western European governments had immediately agreed with the Americans to stand firm and threaten «to isolate Italy in case of participation in the government by the communists» (Van der Pijl 2006, 143).

The stakes were very high at this point. Hundreds of thousands of workers and students were losing faith with the politics of compromise and were increasingly convinced that they had to raise the struggle further in order to prevent state repression. They were drawing the opposite conclusions from the PCI leaders. In an important international initiative, leading French leftists and intellectuals, Jean Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault all signed a manifesto "Against repression in Italy" which condemned not only state repression but the communist collusion with the process. In September 1977, a conference organised by the far-left grouping *Lotta Continua* against repression was attended by between 40 000 and 80 000 young people. The politics of compromise was roundly rejected: A minority – the autonomists – argued for «the so-called 'armed party'… open violence against the state» (Russo 1979, 96). The majority disagreed with this (literally) suicidal option, but tragically the way ahead was unclear.

The US state machinery was in a profound crisis by the time all these events were occurring. The defeat in Vietnam in 1975 had created a "syndrome" where the US military's old confidence in their undaunted supremacy as the globally dominant power was shaken, even though America remained more powerful economically and militarily than any of its rivals. As one commentator writing at the end of the 1970s described the dilemma:

«China is lost. So is South-East Asia, Latin America may be slipping away. The US position in Europe guarantees America status as a world power. The United States has paid dear in blood and treasure to fulfil that commitment, which over the years has come to be identified with a commitment to save democracy in Europe from communism. If it should turn out that the workings of democracy should result in the arrival of the communists in power, then a theoretical dilemma would already be present. Which is the higher duty; to defend democracy in Europe, even if it means installing some version of communism there? Or to defend Europe from communism, even if that means limiting the freedom of European democracy?» (Hodgson 1979 304).

In my view, to ask this question is to answer it. If the PCI had won the election in 1976 or 1978 and actually formed a government – and their opponents then appealed to the US to prevent the horrors of communist rule – would the President, his generals and secret services tell their Italian equivalents they had no choice but to accept the people's verdict? Events tell their own story at the peak of the strategy of tension in 1978.

The wave of strikes, occupations, violence and protests that filled 1977 ended with 100 000 engineers marching through Rome protesting at government austerity. These cutbacks on spending were the policy of the "National Solidarity government". The fact that this coalition was in office was «the first stage of historical compromise… which the communists first backed from the outside, then as an organic part of the parliamentary majority» (Clement, Scalia 2016, 47). Things were at an impasse and the pressure was building on the DC government to bring the left into a new coalition to win public consent for the austerity measures they believed were vital to stave off a crisis. The US was clear in its opposition to including the communists: «US

ambassador Gardner, followed by the State Department itself acting on orders from [President] Carter, pronounced a clear and peremptory veto» (Russo 1979, 104). But it appeared this would not be enough to prevent it. Trade Union leader Luciano Lama «declared that the unions were prepared to accept the necessary sacrifices to solve the country's social and political problems» and following Christian Democrat President Aldo Moro's famous speech to the parliamentary party, «he obtained its consent to the inclusion of the PCI in the governing majority» (Russo 1979, 105). Italian democracy had crossed the rubicon. What would be the result? Giovanni Russo, a specialist in communist affairs for Italy's leading establishment newspaper *Corriere della Sera* takes up the story.

«On the very day when the government appeared before the Chamber to ask for a vote of confidence, 16 March 1978, Aldo Moro was kidnapped. His five bodyguards were brutally murdered by a 'commando' acting with exceptional speed and efficiency. Responsibility was later claimed by the Red Brigades. Moro was not only the architect of the PCI's entrance into the majority, he was also certain to be the next President of the Republic. He was the 'manager' of the historic compromise» (Russo 1979, 105-106).

The Italian people were being sent a very clear message by whoever was behind this kidnapping: Whether the action was truly the work of an ultra-left terror group as claimed, or the work of the "secret armies" – a virulently ultra-right covert action bringing together elements in the military and the secret state, its purpose was to suggest that any radical change would be accompanied by a violent reaction. The US State Department summarised the PCI position:

«Discussing the Moro kidnapping, (PCI leader) Napolitano conceded that it presented many unknowns for the national political situation… particularly in the event that Moro would not return to resume a role in political life… the disappearance of Moro from the scene could impact negatively on this unity and could even induce the party to move in another political direction» (Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 3rd April 1978, released Wikileaks 20 Mar 2014[1]).

This evidence was, in fact, proof that the secret services were listening in to PCI meetings, and actively fomenting a climate of fear through the tactics of counterinsurgency. The "Gladio" revelations demonstrated how they were behind the bombings and murders that had shaken Italy from 1969, promoting a climate of fear that justified the mass incarceration and suspension of civil liberties of the left in 1979 (Scalia 2022; 2023).

Conclusion

Fifty years on from the 1970s, we are seeing new "strategies of tension" emerging from various state machineries as they operate in an increasingly crisis-ridden environment. Public faith in democracy seems fragile in the face of governments' failure to tackle these problems and many leaders will find themselves turning to their spies and special agencies to take action. Unfortunately, the political

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[1] Cfr. "Moro Aldo" https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1978ROME07581_d.html.

viewpoint of these groups has been to value "security" above "democracy", identifying with the far right and prepared to suppress those forces it has labelled "public enemies". Accounts like this are designed to illuminate some of the pitfalls and pressures faced by contemporary societies, and to warn against the perils of state counterinsurgency achieved through conspiracies orchestrated by secret services.

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