

M y S i l e n t

W a r

b y K i m P h i l b y

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To the comrades who showed
me the way to service

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A few of the characters in this volume appear under

P r e f a c e

This short book is an introductory sketch of my experiences in the field of intelligence. More will follow in due course. But already at this early stage I must draw attention to a problem by which I am confronted.

The public naming of serving officers whose work is supposed to be secret cannot fail to cause personal embarrassment. I have no desire to cause such embarrassment to former colleagues in the British, American and sundry other services, for some of whom I feel both affection and respect.

I have tried therefore to confine the naming of names to officers whom I know to be dead or retired. On occasion, however, it has proved impossible to write a lucid story without naming officers who are still in service.

To these latter I apologise for any embarrassment caused. I, too, have suffered personal inconvenience through my connection with secret service.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

This short book has been written at intervals since my arrival in Moscow nearly five years ago. From time to time in the course of writing it, I took counsel with friends whose advice I valued. I accepted some of the suggestions made and rejected others. One suggestion which I rejected was that I should make the book more exciting by heavier emphasis on the hazards of the long journey from Cambridge to Moscow. I prefer to rest on a round, unvarnished tale.

When the book was brought to a provisional conclusion last summer (1967), I gave long consideration to the desirability of publishing it, again consulting a few friends whose views might be helpful. The general consensus of opinion, with which I agreed at the time, was that the question of publication should be shelved indefinitely. The main reason for this was that publication seemed likely to cause a rumpus, with international complications the nature of which was

difficult to foresee. It seemed unwise to take action that might have consequences beyond the range of reasonable prediction. So I decided to sit on my typescript.

The situation has been completely changed by articles which appeared in *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* in October. Those articles, in spite of a number of factual inaccuracies and errors of interpretation (and, I fear, gratifying exaggeration of my own talents), present a substantially true picture of my career. It was immediately suggested, of course, by rival newspapers that *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* had fallen victim to a gigantic plant. The absurdity of this suggestion has already been exposed in *The Sunday Times*. For my part, I can only add that I was offered an opportunity to vet the typescript of *The Sunday Times* articles before publication and, after reflection, deliberately declined. I felt that the Editor should be prepared to stand by the conclusions reached by his own staff, and that the objectivity of the articles would be open to attack if I, so interested a party, intervened.

As I say, these articles completely changed the situation. The consequences of the truth being disclosed are on us irrevocably, for better or worse. I can therefore offer my book to the public without incurring the charge of wanting to muddy waters. My purpose is simply to correct certain inaccuracies and errors of interpretation, and to present a more fully rounded picture.

The first serious crisis of my career was long drawn out, lasting roughly from the middle of 1951 to the

end of 1955. Throughout it, I was sustained by the thought that nobody could pin on me any link with Communist organisations, for the simple reason that I had never been a member of any. The first thirty years of my work for the cause in which I believed were, from the beginning, spent underground. This long phase started in Central Europe in June, 1933; it ended in Lebanon in January, 1963. Only then was I able to emerge in my true colours, the colours of a Soviet intelligence officer.

Until quite recently, when *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* let some large and fairly authentic cats out of the bag, writers who touched my case in newspaper articles and books thrashed around wildly in the dark. They cannot be blamed for their ignorance since throughout my career I was careful not to advertise the truth. But some blame perhaps attaches to them for rushing into print in that blissful state, and for their insistence on looking for complex explanations where simple ones would have served better. The simple truth, of course, was painful to a crumbling Establishment and its Transatlantic friends. But the attempt to wash it away in words, whether ingenious or just nonsensical, was futile and foredoomed to failure.

After nearly a year of illegal activity in Central Europe, I returned to England. It was time for me to start earning my own living. Then something evidently happened. Within a few weeks I had dropped 'll my political friends and had begun to frequent functions at the German Embassy. I joined the Anglo-German Fellowship, and did much of the legwork

involved in an abortive attempt to start, with Nazi funds, a trade journal designed to foster good relations between Britain and Germany. In spite of my best efforts, this strange venture failed, because another group got in ahead of us. But while the negotiations were in progress, I paid several visits to Berlin for talks with the Propaganda Ministry and the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*. No one has so far suggested that I had switched from Communism to Nazism. The simpler, and true, explanation is that overt and covert links between Britain and Germany at that time were of serious concern to the Soviet Government.

The Spanish war broke out during one of my visits to Berlin. The Nazis were cock-a-hoop, and it was not until I returned to England that I learnt that General Franco had not taken over the whole country, but that a long civil war was in prospect. My next assignment was to Fascist-occupied territory in Spain with the aim of bedding down there, as close to the centre of things as possible, on a long-term basis. That mission was successful, for within a few weeks I became the accredited correspondent of *The Times* with Franco's forces, and served as such throughout the whole heart-breaking war. Again, no one has suggested that this made me a Falangista. The simpler explanation still holds the field; I was there on Soviet service.

In August, 1939, when the war clouds were piling up fast over Danzig, *The Times* told me to forget Spain and hold myself in readiness for attachment to any British force that might be sent to the Western

Front. It was as good as I could have expected in the circumstances. Any war correspondent with an enquiring mind could amass a huge amount of information which censorship would not allow him to publish; and my experience in Spain had taught me the right sort of question to ask. As it turned out, British headquarters were established in Arras, within easy reach of Paris. I spent most of my weekends in the heaving anonymity of the capital, not only for the obvious purpose of philandering. But, good as it was, the Arras post was not good enough. I had been told in pressing terms by my Soviet friends that my first priority must be the British secret service. (Those were pre-Muggeridge days, when the service still enjoyed a reputation.) Before the press corps left for France in early October, I dropped a few hints here and there. All that I could then do was sit back and wait. This book describes in some, though not complete, detail how this new venture was crowned with success.

In case doubt should still lurk in devious minds, a plain statement of the facts is perhaps called for. In early manhood, I became an accredited member of the Soviet intelligence service. I can therefore claim to have been a Soviet intelligence officer for some thirty-odd years, and will no doubt remain one until death or senile decay forces my retirement. But most of my work has lain in fields normally covered, in British and American practice, by agents. I will therefore describe myself henceforth as an agent.

"Agent," of course, is a term susceptible of widely

different interpretations. It can mean a simple courier carrying messages between two points; it can mean the writer of such messages; it can imply advisory or even executive functions. I passed through the first stage rapidly, and was soon writing, or otherwise providing, information on an increasingly voluminous scale. As I gained in knowledge and experience, consultative and executive functions were gradually added to the mere acquisition and transmission of intelligence. This process ran parallel to my rising seniority in the British service, in which, from about 1944 onwards, I was consulted on a wide range of policy problems.

Some writers have recently spoken of me as a double agent, or even as a triple agent. If this is taken to mean that I was working with equal zeal for two or more sides at once, it is seriously misleading. All through my career, I have been a straight penetration agent working in the Soviet interest. The fact that I joined the British Secret Intelligence Service is neither here nor there; I regarded my SIS¹ appointments purely in the light of cover-jobs, to be carried out sufficiently well to ensure my attaining positions in which my service to the Soviet Union would be most effective. My connection with SIS must be seen against my prior total commitment to the Soviet Union which I regarded then, as I do now, the inner fortress of the world movement.

¹ Secret Intelligence Service, formerly MI (Military Intelligence) 6, the British secret service department in charge of all secret intelligence work, both espionage and counter-espionage, on non-British soil.—*Eds.*

In the first year or two, I penetrated very little, though I did beat Gordon Lonsdale to the London School of Oriental Studies by ten years. During that period, I was a sort of intelligence probationer. I still look back with wonder at the infinite patience shown by my seniors in the service, a patience matched only by their intelligent understanding. Week after week, we would meet in one or other of the remoter open spaces in London; week after week, I would reach the rendez-vous empty-handed and leave with a load of painstaking advice, admonition and encouragement. I was often despondent at my failure to achieve anything worthwhile, but the lessons went on and sank deep. When the time came for serious work, I found myself endowed with much of the required mental equipment.

It was just as well, for my first challenges came in Germany and in Fascist Spain, both countries with a short way of despatching enemy intelligence agents. My reward came during the Spanish war, when I learnt that my probationary period was considered at an end; I emerged from the conflict as a fully-fledged officer of the Soviet service.

How did it all begin? My decision to play an active part in the struggle against reaction was not the result of sudden conversion. My earliest thoughts on politics turned me towards the labour movement; and one of my first acts on going up to Cambridge in 1929 was to join the Cambridge University Socialist Society [CUSS]. For the first two years, I attended its meetings with regularity, but otherwise took little part in its proceedings. Through general reading, I

became gradually aware that the Labour Party in Britain stood well apart from the mainstream of the Left as a world-wide force. But the real turning-point in my thinking came with the demoralisation and rout of the Labour Party in 1931. It seemed incredible that the party should be so helpless against the reserve strength which reaction could mobilise in time of crisis, fore important still, the fact that a supposedly sophisticated electorate had been stampeded by the cynical propaganda of the day threw serious doubt on the validity of the assumptions underlying parliamentary democracy as a whole.

This book is not a history or a treatise or a polemic. It is a personal record, and I intend to stray as little as possible from my main theme. It is therefore enough to say at this point that it was the Labour disaster of 1931 which first set me seriously to thinking about possible alternatives to the Labour Party. I began to take a more active part in the proceedings of the CUSS, and was its Treasurer in 1932/33. This brought me into contact with streams of Left-wing opinion critical of the Labour Party, notable with the Communists. Extensive reading and growing appreciation of the classics of European Socialism alternated with vigorous and sometimes heated discussions within the Society. It was a slow and brain-racking process; my transition from a Socialist viewpoint to a Communist one took two years. It was not until my last term at Cambridge, in the summer of 1933, that I threw off my last doubts. I left the university with a degree and with the conviction that my life must be devoted to Communism.

I have long since lost my degree (indeed, I think it is the possession of MI5).² But I have retained the conviction. It is here, perhaps, that a doubt may assail the reader. It cannot be so very surprising that I adopted a Communist viewpoint in the thirties; so many of my contemporaries made the same choice. But many of those who made that choice in those days changed sides when some of the worst features of Stalinism became apparent. I stayed the course. It is reasonable to ask why.

It is extremely difficult for the ordinary human being, lacking the gift of total recall, to describe exactly how he reached such-and-such a decision more than thirty years ago. In my own case, an attempt to do so would make appallingly tedious reading. But as the question will be asked, it must be answered, even if the answer takes the form of gross oversimplification.

It seemed to me, when it became clear that much was going badly wrong in the Soviet Union, that I had three possible courses of action. First, I could give up politics altogether. This I knew to be quite impossible. It is true that I have tastes and enthusiasms outside politics; but it is politics alone that give them meaning and coherence. Second, I could continue political activity on a totally different basis. But where was I to go? The politics of the Baldwin-Chamberlain era struck me then, as they strike me now, as much more than the politics of folly. The

² Secret service department responsible for counterespionage and security in Britain and in all British territory overseas.—*Eds.*

folly was evil. I saw the road leading me into the political position of the querulous outcast, of the Koestler-Crankshaw-Muggeridge variety, railing at the movement that had let *me* down, at the God that had failed *me*. This seemed a ghastly fate, however lucrative it might have been.

The third course of action open to me was to stick it out, in the confident faith that the principles of the Revolution would outlive the aberration of individuals, however enormous. It was the course I chose, guided partly by reason, partly by instinct. Graham Greene, in a book appropriately called *The Confidential Agent*, imagines a scene in which the heroine asks the hero if his leaders are any better than the others. "No. Of course not," he replies. "But I still prefer the people they lead—even if they lead them all wrong." "The poor, right or wrong," she scoffed. "It's no worse—is it?—than my country, right or wrong. You choose your side once and for all—of course, it may be the wrong side. Only history can tell that."

The passage throws some light on my attitude in the depths of the Stalin cult. But I now have no doubt about the verdict of history. My persisting faith in Communism does not mean that my views and attitudes have remained fossilised for thirty-odd years. They have been influenced and modified, sometimes rudely, by the appalling events of my lifetime. I have quarrelled with my political friends on major issues, and still do so. There is still an awful lot of work ahead; there will be ups and downs. Advances which, thirty years ago, I hoped to see in my lifetime, may have to wait a generation or two. But, as I look over

Moscow from my study window, I can see the solid foundations of the future I glimpsed at Cambridge.

Finally, it is a sobering thought that, but for the power of the Soviet Union and the Communist idea, the Old World, if not the whole world, would now be ruled by Hitler and Hirohito. It is a matter of great pride to me that I was invited, at so early an age, to play my infinitesimal part in building up that power. How, where and when I became a member of the Soviet intelligence service is a matter for myself and my comrades. I will only say that, when the proposition was made to me, I did not hesitate. One does not look twice at an offer of enrolment in an elite force.