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# Enemies Within the Gates?

*The Comintern and the  
Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939*

William J. Chase

*Russian documents translated by Vadim A. Staklo*

Yale University Press  
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IN MEMORIAM  
Nikolai Petrovich Yakovlev  
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*For*  
Matthew, Alex, and Donna  
*May they be spared the self-righteous*

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lished and unpublished works and of documents in his possession, and his insights have greatly enhanced my understanding of the Comintern during this period. In the notes I acknowledge specific contributions that he has made, but such acknowledgments cannot convey the full measure of his influence and impact on me and this volume. To him I owe a special and profound debt of gratitude. Of course, I am responsible for any mistakes and other problems that may afflict this volume.

Acknowledgments usually have a celebratory tone. Sadly, this is not always the case. In May 2001, Nikolai Petrovich Yakovlev died unexpectedly. Not only did Petrovich provide me with considerable help, he was also a dear friend. He was a wise and gentle man and a bit of a rascal. In his capacity as coordinator for the *Annals of Communism* series as well as for the *Russian Archive Series* and other projects he has enabled many scholars to pursue successful careers. Thank you, Petrovich, for your friendship and labors. We will miss you.

Finally, my wife, Donna, and our sons, Matthew and Alex, tolerated my long absences while researching this work and my presence while writing it. For their patience and support, I dedicate this book to them.

## A Note on the Documents

This book has two integrated elements: (1) translations of original documents that illuminate the dynamics and consequences of the repression within the Comintern and (2) a narrative text that provides the political and historical contexts for the documents and an analytical framework for interpreting them. The book is therefore neither a traditional monograph nor a traditional document collection, but a combination of both. The documents come from the Comintern collection in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialnoi i politicheskoi issledovani, RGASPI). Commonly known throughout most of its history as the Central Party Archive, from 1992 to mid-1999 it was the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialnoi i politicheskoi issledovani, RTsKhIDNI). The Comintern collection there is massive. For a survey of the Comintern holdings in this archive, see J. Arch Getty and V. P. Kozlov, *Kratkii putevoditel fondov i kollektzii, sobrannye Tsentral'nyim partiinyi arkhivom* (Moscow, 1993), 70–103. In selecting the documents presented here, every effort was made to strike a balance between those that illuminate the Comintern's roles as agent, instrument, and victim of repression and those that convey the administrative, political, and cognitive processes that helped to set the stage for and drive the repression. Of necessity, many intriguing documents were excluded. Many of those selected are reproduced here in full; where excerpts of

very long documents are used, every effort has been made to preserve the essential elements. The selection of documents for this volume occurred over four years, from 1992 to 1996. During this time, many files that had been open in 1992 were reclassified. In August 1996, RTsKhIDNI (now RGASPI) closed a considerable portion of the Comintern collection to the public.

Most of this book is organized chronologically so that readers can appreciate not only the way the repression unfolded but also the synergy and dialectical relationships of the Comintern's multiple roles. Chapter 1 presents a survey of aspects of the Comintern's history and a discussion of its bureaucratic structure, the relationships among its many sections, and its relationships to the Communist Party and the security organs. Chapters 2–6 conform to notable political subperiods of the years 1934–1939. Chapter 7 consists of case studies of selected victims of the repression. The case studies are of two different groups: people who worked in the Comintern apparatus and political émigrés. As rich as the Comintern collection is, it is not complete. Readers should bear this in mind. The Executive Committee of the Comintern, its Cadres Department, and its party committee sent many materials to security and judicial organs that those bodies did not return. Those and other materials that would fill in gaps in the volume and in our knowledge reside in other archives that are closed.

The documents in this volume, very few of which have been published previously, were selected from the collections of the leading organs of the Comintern, various branches of the apparatus of its Executive Committee, and the party committee and organization of the All-Union Communist Party. Unless otherwise noted, the documents published in this volume are located in the Comintern collection at RGASPI. The records there are organized by *fond* (collection), *opis* (inventory), *delo* (file), and *list* (page) or *listy* (pages). Source references are abbreviated as f., op., d., and l. or ll.

The vast majority of the documents published here are translated into English from the original Russian. In a few cases, Comintern translators had already translated a document from Russian into English, in which case the English version is used. Other documents were originally written in other languages (Hungarian, German) and were translated into Russian by Comintern translators; the English translations here generally come from the Russian translations. In translating these documents into English, Vadim Staklo, the translator, and I adhered to one rule: be faithful to the original document. Some documents contain the written or transcribed language of non-native Russian speakers and consequently contain turgid formulations. Although it

was tempting to render these passages more fluid, we avoided the temptation so that readers could appreciate what a person said or wrote and what people heard or read. In the same spirit, we have attempted to preserve a visual sense of the original—headings, underlinings, and the like. We have, however, corrected obvious misspellings and some mistakes and turned some abbreviations into whole words. We have also standardized certain items, such as typed dates (by replacing roman and arabic numerals with the names of months), and standardized the classifications of documents.

For ease of use, each document has been assigned a number and a title indicating its contents. The numbers do not appear in the original documents, nor in many cases do the titles. Typed documents appear here in regular roman type. Handwritten comments, notations, and documents appear here in *bold-face italic*. Typed underlining is indicated here with a single underscore. Underlining by hand is indicated with a double underscore. When we know who underlined the text, we give the name. Ellipses in brackets [ . . . ] indicate editorial omissions. Ellipses in angle brackets < . . . > indicate illegible words or signatures. Ellipses without brackets are in the original document.

In transliterating from Russian to English, we have used a modified version of the standard Library of Congress system. Hard and soft signs are omitted. For familiar names, the common English spelling is used (e.g., Leon Trotsky, not Lev Trotskii; Joseph Stalin, not Iosif Stalin). Certain changes have been made in initial letters (e.g., *E* is *Ye*, as in Yezhov; *Iu* is *Yu*, as in Yudin; *Ia* is *Ya*, as in Yagoda). Many foreign personal names appear in this volume. In the original documents, these names appear in their Russified form. In the English translations published here, every effort has been made to present those names in their original spelling. The Asian names posed a particular problem, and mistakes may well have occurred. We apologize for any errors.



## Abbreviations and Acronyms

agitprop	agitation and propaganda
BSDWP	Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party
BSDWP(T)	Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party (Tesniak)
C., c.	comrade
C.c., c.c.	comrades
CC	Central Committee
CCC	Central Control Commission
CEC	Central Executive Committee
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counterrevolution, Sabotage, and Speculation (state security)
CI	Communist International
Com., com.	comrade
Comintern	Communist International
CP, CPs	Communist Party or Parties
CPA	Communist Party of Austria
CPBel	Communist Party of Belgium
CPBul	Communist Party of Bulgaria
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPCan	Communist Party of Canada
CPCz	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPFin	Communist Party of Finland

CPFr	Communist Party of France
CPG	Communist Party of Germany
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of Italy
CPLat	Communist Party of Latvia
CPLith	Communist Party of Lithuania
CPM	Communist Party of Mexico
CPP	Communist Party of Poland
CPR	Communist Party of Romania
CPSp	Communist Party of Spain
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPSwed	Communist Party of Sweden
CPSwit	Communist Party of Switzerland
CPT	Communist Party of Turkey
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
CPWB	Communist Party of Western Belorussia
CPWU	Communist Party of Western Ukraine
CPYu	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
EC	Executive Committee
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FEC	Far Eastern Committee
Glavlit	Main Administration for Literature
gorkom	city party committee
GPU	Main Political Administration (state security)
GUGB	Main Administration for State Security
ICC	International Control Commission
IMEL	Institute of Marx, Engels, and Lenin
KGB	Committee for State Security
KIM	Communist International of Youth
Komsomol	Communist Union of Youth
kraikom	regional party committee
KUNMZ	Communist University for National Minorities of the West
KUTV	Communist University for Toilers of the East
MAI	International Agrarian Institute
MCC	Moscow Control Commission
MiUD	International Youth Day
MGB	Ministry for State Security, 1946–1953



MLSh	International Lenin School (Communist school administered by the ECCI for foreign and Soviet Communists)
MOPR	International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters
MVD	Ministry for Internal Affairs, 1953–1954
MVO	Moscow Military District
NKID	People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs
NKTP	People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
obkom	<i>oblast</i> (provincial) party committee
OC	<i>oblast</i> committee
OGIZ	Association of State Publishing Houses for Books and Periodicals
OGPU	Unified Main Political Administration (state security)
okhranka	contraction of Okhrannoe Otdelenie, the police in tsarist Russia. The term was used in the 1930s to refer to police abroad, especially in Poland.
OMS	Department of International Relations (in the ECCI apparatus; later it was renamed the Communication Department)
Orgburo	Organizational Bureau (of the CC VKP)
ORPO	Department of Leading Party Organs (of the CC VKP)
OSO	Special Council of NKVD
partkom	party committee
PCC	Party Control Commission
Politburo	Political Bureau
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxists (Spain)
POW	Polish Military Organization
PPS	Polish Socialist Party
Profintern	Trade Union International
Rabkrin	Workers and Peasants Inspectorate
raikom or RK	district ( <i>raion</i> ) party committee
Razvedupr	Military Intelligence
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History
RK	See <i>raikom</i>
RKI	Workers and Peasants Inspectorate
RKKA	Workers and Peasants Red Army
RKP(b)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)
ROSTA	Russian Telegraph Agency

RSDRP	Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party
RSDRP(b)	Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
RUNAG	Rundschau, the information agency of the Comintern
SD, S.D.	Social Democrat
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SDPKPiL	Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania
SFIO	French Socialist Party
SNK	Council of People's Commissars
SPD	Socialist Party of Germany
SR, S.R.	Socialist Revolutionary
SSR	soviet socialist republic
TASS	Soviet news information service
TsIK	Central Executive Committee
USPD	United Socialist Party of Germany
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UVO	Ukrainian Military Organization
VKLSM	Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Youth League)
VKP	All-Union Communist Party
VKP(b)	All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)
VSNKh	Supreme Council of the National Economy
VTsIK	All-Union Central Executive Committee
VTsSPS	All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions
YCL	Young Communist League
YCLP	Young Communist League of Poland

# Chronology

2–9 March 1919	First Comintern Congress
19 July–7 August 1920	Second Comintern Congress; passage of the Twenty-One Points
22 June–12 July 1921	Third Comintern Congress
24 February–4 March 1922	First Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI)
7–11 June 1922	Second Enlarged ECCI Plenum
5 November–5 December 1922	Fourth Comintern Congress
1923	Left Opposition (Trotsky et al.) censured for factional political activities
12–23 June 1923	Third Enlarged ECCI Plenum
1924	New Opposition (Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others) censured for factional political activities
17 June–8 July 1924	Fifth Comintern Congress
12–13 July 1924	Fourth Enlarged ECCI Plenum
21 March–6 April 1925	Fifth Enlarged ECCI Plenum
17 February–15 March 1926	Sixth Enlarged ECCI Plenum
October 1926	Zinoviev removed as chairman of the Comintern
22 November–16 December 1926	Seventh Enlarged ECCI Plenum
18–30 May 1927	Eighth ECCI Plenum
November 1927–early 1928	United (Left) Opposition condemned for factional political activities; many expelled from the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), or VKP(b)
9–25 February 1928	Ninth ECCI Plenum
17 July–1 September 1928	Sixth Comintern Congress (“Third Period” begins)
1929	Trotsky exiled from the USSR

3–19 July 1929	Tenth ECCI Plenum
26 March–11 April 1931	Eleventh ECCI Plenum
27 August–15 September 1932	Twelfth ECCI Plenum
January 1933	Hitler comes to power in Germany
January 1933–December 1934	Purge ( <i>chistka</i> ) of the VKP
28 November–12 December 1933	Thirteenth ECCI Plenum
1 December 1934	Assassination of Sergei Kirov
16 December 1934	Arrest of Zinoviev, Safarov, and others in connection with Kirov's murder
28 December 1934	Meeting of the ECCI party organization regarding the case of Magyar (see Document 4)
January–December 1935	Verification of party documents ( <i>proverka</i> )
20 February 1935	Closed meeting of the ECCI party organization, dedicated to the lessons flowing from Kirov's murder (see Document 5)
25 July–20 August 1935	Seventh Comintern Congress; adoption of the Popular Front; Georgi Dimitrov elected general secretary of the Comintern
21–25 December 1935	Plenary meeting of the Central Committee
2 January 1936	Manuilsky's letter to Yezhov regarding the closing of special routes ("green passages") into the USSR and measures against "spies and saboteurs disguised as political émigrés" (see Document 6)
February 1936	Special commission formed to oversee verification of émigrés
3 March 1936	Resolution of the ECCI Secretariat on the obligations of the Cadres Department regarding émigrés (see Document 10)
March 1936–late 1936	Exchange of party documents
July 1936	Spanish Civil War begins
29 July 1936	Secret Central Committee letter "concerning the terroristic activity of the Trotskyist- Zinovievite counterrevolutionary bloc"
11 August 1936	Memorandum from Kotelnikov to Dimitrov, Manuilsky, and Moskvín about the work of exposing "the wreckers in the ECCI" (see Document 11)
19–24 August 1936	Trial of the "Anti-Soviet United Trotskyist- Zinovievite Center"
4 September 1936	Cadres Department memorandum "On Trotskyist and other hostile elements in the émigré community of the German CP [Communist Party]" (see Document 17)
	A list of VKP members "formerly in other parties, having Trotskyist and Rightist tendencies," sent by Kotelnikov to the NKVD (see Document 18)
26 September 1936	Yezhov appointed head of the NKVD
3 January 1937	Trotsky arrives in Mexico from Norway

23–30 January 1937	Trial of the “Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Center”
5 February 1937	Memorandum “On the results of the work of the ECCI Secretariat’s commission to verify the qualifications of the ECCI apparatus” (see Document 29)
23 February–4 March 1937	Plenary meeting of the Central Committee
22 June 1937	Closed meeting of VKP members and candidate members in the ECCI Secretariat (see Document 32)
30 July 1937	NKVD issues Decree No. 00447 targeting “former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements”
	Arrests per NKVD Order No. 00439 (“German operation”) begin
5 August 1937	Arrests per NKVD Order No. 00447 begin
9 August 1937	Politburo confirms NKVD Decree No. 00485, “On the liquidation of the Polish sabotage-espionage group and the POW organization”
11 August 1937	Yezhov issues NKVD Order No. 00485
15 August 1937	Arrests per NKVD Order No. 00485 (“Polish operation”) begin
28 November 1937	ECCI resolution on the dissolution of the Polish CP (see Document 38)
2–13 March 1938	Trial of the “Right-Trotskyist Bloc”
17 May 1938	ECCI directives on carrying out a campaign of enlightenment in connection with the trial of the “Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites” (see Document 39)
15 September 1938	Politburo orders creation of commissions in each region to review national operations and resolves to create special troikas to review “remaining unconsidered cases of those arrested” under national operations
17 November 1938	Politburo resolution suspends all national operations
25 November 1938	Yezhov removed as head of NKVD



Enemies Within the Gates?





# Introduction

Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few, and the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we inquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find that, as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded, and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments as well as to the most free and most popular.

— DAVID HUME

THIS IS A STORY of idealism twisted into carnage, of comradeship betrayed, of hopes deformed by fear, of conspiracies perceived. It is another of those many stories that detail human brutality in the name of a higher good: a story told and retold until it almost numbs us to people's capacity for rationalized fear and wasteful violence. We give such phenomena labels—Stalinism, Nazism, Maoism, McCarthyism, nationalism, racism—but all labels mask the complex realities. This is not a story easily told, for it defies anyone's skill to recapture the anxieties and fears, to express the coherence underlying seeming contradictions, to trace the logic, to penetrate the rhetoric, to separate personal from political motives, to comprehend people's simultaneous capacity for idealism, obedience, and betrayal. This is a story about how the Stalinist repression affected the Communist International, the Comintern, a revolutionary organization born of sectarian idealism in 1919 and decimated by an implosion of fear and suspicion in 1937–1938.

At the founding congress in 1919, the Comintern set as its goals the destruction of a world ravaged by war, poverty, greed, and exploitation and the con-

struction of a new world of collective abundance, enlightenment, and equality. It demanded that those parties that wished to join it adhere to a strict set of organizational and behavioral rules, which mirrored those that governed the Bolshevik Party.<sup>1</sup> Although its headquarters were in Moscow, and although the Bolshevik Party was the preeminent party within it, the Comintern was not the Bolshevik Party. Precisely because it was the headquarters of the world revolutionary movement, because many of its leaders were not Soviet citizens, because it attracted political refugees from countries that had outlawed or repressed communist and radical activities, the Comintern was distinct—not independent, not autonomous, but nonetheless distinct in small ways that by their accretion became notable. These distinctions were subtle and were often hidden by the membership rules and by the Bolshevikization of the Comintern, which began in the mid-1920s and was well advanced by the time our story begins in 1934.

This is not a history of the Comintern but rather a study of what happened in its headquarters during the mass repression that swept the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. Known by various names—the Great Terror, the Great Purges, the Stalinist Terror, the *Yezhovshchina*—the mass repression destroyed the lives of many residents of the USSR, native-born and foreign-born, and profoundly altered, even deformed, the Bolshevik Party and Soviet society. It mortally wounded the Comintern.

Although the historiography of the mass repression and its consequences is substantial, there remain many questions about the reasons it occurred, Stalin's role, the role played by other party leaders and institutions, the attitudes and behaviors of rank-and-file party members and Soviet citizens, and its dimensions.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the opening of Soviet archives in 1991–1992, the lack of access to internal party and state documents constrained scholars' efforts to answer certain questions essential to understanding it.<sup>3</sup> The opening of many formerly closed archives has yielded a veritable treasure trove of materials through which scholars are still sifting. How the newly available materials will affect the historiography and our understanding of the Stalin era remains to be seen. But the evidence presented in this volume challenges all of us to reconsider the forces and concerns that fueled the repression, the role of popular participation, and the attitudes of persecutors and victims alike.

This book originated in my belief that to understand the repression, we must ascertain how it unfolded in a variety of contexts. To base overarching interpretations on the existing literature is presumptuous. Only when the re-

pression has been examined from various angles will it be possible to grasp and appreciate its dimensions and dynamics. This volume, like others in the *Annals of Communism* series, is an attempt to illuminate this historical period and provide readers with insights into how people devoted to constructing a world free of the cruelties that had defined the previous social order participated in new cruelties in the name of another.

Examining how the mass repression unfolded within and affected the Comintern headquarters in particular offers numerous advantages.<sup>4</sup> The most obvious is that it enables us to understand the ways a specific organization and its members interpreted and acted on party policies that contributed to the repression. It thereby allows us to examine individual and group behaviors as well as the relationship over time between the leaders of the organization and the rank and file. For much of the period discussed here, late 1934 to 1939, Comintern headquarters was a relatively stable institution. Although the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in July–August 1935, occasioned the removal of certain members of its Executive Committee (ECCI), most ECCI members were reelected. The organizational reforms approved by that Congress affected the ECCI's administrative structure more than its personnel. The reviews of party members from 1933 to 1936 resulted in some people being relieved of work. Yet from late 1934 to spring 1937, when the mass repression erupted, the composition of the ECCI apparatus (bureaucracy) and its party organization and committee changed relatively little. The mass arrests in 1937–1938 dramatically affected the composition of these bodies. But as we shall see, the political values and campaigns that were preconditions for the mass repression had by that time become accepted frames of reference and social norms within the ECCI apparatus.

Using the Comintern headquarters as a case study has several other advantages. It was home to both a central political organization and a local party organization. The Comintern directed the international communist movement from Moscow. The presence on the ECCI of Stalin, members of the Central Committee (CC) of the All-Union Communist Party (VKP), and leaders of the fraternal parties abroad attests to the importance of this mission, as does the fact that the Central Committee of the VKP assigned one of its members to be its representative in the ECCI.<sup>5</sup> Although the ECCI Secretariat, ECCI Presidency, and ECCI apparatus ran the Comintern's day-to-day operations, the presence of powerful VKP members on the ECCI tightly linked the Comintern headquarters to high-level VKP politics. That Georgi Dimitrov, the Com-

intern's General Secretary from mid-1935 until 1943, socialized with Stalin and other Politburo members reinforced the political ties between the Comintern and the party leadership. These ties significantly influenced the political dynamics within the ECCI and its apparatus.

The Comintern headquarters also hosted a local party organization. The vast majority of workers in the ECCI apparatus, who numbered about six hundred in early 1937, were Communist Party members—either VKP members or members of fraternal Communist Parties—who belonged to the ECCI party organization. Like all local party organizations, the ECCI party organization applied VKP policies to local realities and dealt with a myriad of internal issues. Precisely because the membership of the ECCI party organization was relatively stable, its local character allows us to observe behaviors over time and thereby identify both specifically Soviet or Stalinist behaviors and universal human behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

One distinctive feature of the Comintern headquarters makes it especially valuable as a case study: its international composition. Among the members and staff of the ECCI were Soviet citizens and foreigners, native-born VKP members, foreign-born VKP members, and members of fraternal parties. It had the most diverse ethnic composition of any institution on Soviet soil; more than half the members of its party organization were foreign-born. Its ethnic composition made that organization different from all others in the USSR and meant that the mass repression unfolded in somewhat different ways than it did in other party organizations. Still, it housed a sizable VKP party organization, so VKP policies that contributed to the repression profoundly affected it.

Not only were many who staffed the ECCI apparatus foreign-born, but most of them came from countries where the Communist Party was illegal and operated underground. Many Communists who resided in the USSR in the 1930s had been arrested and interrogated by police back home; many had been convicted and served prison time there. Their experiences were analogous to the Bolsheviks' with the Okhrana (the tsarist political police) in pre-revolutionary Russia. The suspicions engendered among one's comrades by being arrested and interrogated remained latent but, at times, powerful reasons for suspecting someone's loyalty to the party. Divisions often ran deep among the members of fraternal parties who resided in the USSR. Away from home those parties were quite fractious. Removed from the daily underground struggles that provided a common sense of purpose (or at least persecution), foreign-born Communists in the USSR commonly split into groups of trusted

friends who feuded with others over political and personal issues and who jockeyed for favor with their Soviet hosts. Native-born Soviet comrades viewed foreign comrades and their squabbles with attitudes that ranged from annoyance to suspicion.

As the international situation deteriorated in the 1930s, suspicion of foreigners, especially those from the western borderlands, intensified, weakening the bonds of comradeship and strengthening the importance of ethnicity. The 1930s in the USSR were a decade of mounting suspicion of foreigners, spy mania, and xenophobia, which reached their peak in 1937–1938 with the mass arrests of foreigners and Soviet citizens accused of participating in hostile conspiracies, often allegedly directed from abroad. Precisely because the Comintern was a central and local party organization staffed by native-born and foreign-born comrades who had pledged their allegiance to the VKP, we can use it as a case study to chart the emergence, evolution, and consequences of political campaigns and xenophobia, as well as the dynamics of the mass repression, in ways that no other case study permits.

The mass repression evolved in a sequence of steps between 1934 and 1939, although at no point before 1937 was it apparent that the repression would take the violent form and scale that it did. The assassination of Leningrad party leader Sergei Kirov in December 1934 was followed by the assertion that a secret faction within the VKP was engaged in treasonous activities directed at the VKP and its leaders—the first time such an assertion was made. The Politburo of the VKP demanded that party members heighten their political vigilance to expose any and all threats. Under this charge, from early 1935 to mid-1936 the vigilance campaign against “Trotskyists” unfolded. From late 1935, as VKP leaders’ suspicions of foreigners mounted, the vigilance campaign focused increasingly on foreign comrades. During 1936 all foreigners in the USSR were subjected to political review. Arrests ensued. In August 1936 the first of the Moscow show trials occurred; several of the defendants were foreigners. The defendants’ confessions, convictions, and executions intensified the vigilance campaign and skewed other policies that antedated the trial.

From the August 1936 trial until spring 1937, when members of the military high command were arrested, party leaders and members pressed the vigilance campaign with increasing stridency. The appointment of Nikolai Yezhov to head the NKVD, the state security organ, in September 1936, together with the January 1937 show trial contributed to the shift in tone, but so, too, did the revelations from various personnel review boards that “suspicious” and

“hostile elements” existed within the VKP and émigré communities.<sup>7</sup> In June 1937, Stalin unleashed the NKVD and the search for “enemies” took on hysterical dimensions. Yezhov and his minions conducted that search with brutal enthusiasm until December 1938, when he was removed. Only then did the hysteria begin to subside.

This is the larger context within which the decimation of the ECCI apparatus took place. Some historians see in these events a conscious long-term plan directed by Stalin to rid himself of potential enemies. True or not, those who lived through the events did not see it that way. The authors and subjects of the documents found in this volume had no such privileged perspective on the events unfolding around them. Their words and actions are often incomprehensible unless we appreciate that the events of 1934–1938 often came as a shock (or, as some of them put it, revealed their “lack of vigilance”), that they had no reason to doubt—on the contrary, they often believed they had good reason to believe—that “enemies” threatened the VKP and the USSR. None knew where these events were tending; many vigilant denouncers were, in the fullness of time, themselves denounced and arrested. Even in prison they clung to the values and perspectives that had earlier led them to demand vigilance and denounce others. The roles played by those who appear in this volume were multiple.

The Comintern itself was an agent, instrument, and victim of repression. It had always been a sectarian organization, but in the aftermath of Kirov’s assassination and in conformity with VKP directives, it implemented a political vigilance campaign against critics of the party line, in particular Leon Trotsky and international Trotskyists. From then until late 1938 the ECCI’s leaders demanded increasingly heightened vigilance from their staff and comrades worldwide. The conspiratorial logic that underpinned the campaign returned to haunt the Comintern. Many members of its apparatus and many political émigrés living in the USSR fell victim to that campaign. This was the most obvious way in which the Comintern was the agent of repression. But it was not the only way.

Besides being the headquarters of the world Communist movement, the Comintern was responsible for political émigrés who, having fled persecution in their native countries, had taken up residence in the USSR. The largest European émigré groups came from Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Finland, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Not without cause, increasingly from 1933 the Soviet government viewed the governments of those nations as threats.<sup>8</sup> During 1935 the VKP’s and ECCI’s leaders had become

convinced that spies, saboteurs, and enemy agents existed among the political émigrés, and at year's end they ordered VKP and ECCI commissions to review every political émigré in the country. The ensuing reviews resulted in the accumulation of considerable information on people, some of whom were ordered to leave the country, some of whom were further investigated, and others of whom were arrested. These commissions sent their materials and conveyed their conclusions to the ECCI's Cadres Department, which maintained careful files and, when it deemed it appropriate or when the security organs requested it, forwarded information in the files to the NKVD. Because Yezhov, head of the NKVD, considered the Comintern to be a "nest of spies," the NKVD frequently requested and received such information.<sup>9</sup>

As the orchestrator of the international vigilance campaign and a key actor in the domestic campaigns to identify "hostile" and "suspicious" elements among its members and political émigrés, the Comintern had a substantial role as an agent of repression. Those campaigns, which came before the mass repression, affected the attitudes and beliefs of ECCI's leaders and staff. Convinced as they were of the dangers posed by Trotskyists and spies, "real" Bolsheviks in the Comintern became the instruments of repression. At ECCI party organization meetings, party members, native-born and foreign-born alike, demanded vigilance against "enemies," closely scrutinized some comrades' political pasts and behaviors, denounced others, and recommended the expulsion (and on occasion the arrest) of still others. The Cadres Department continually investigated party members' pasts and augmented its lists of alleged oppositionists and suspicious people that later provided the "evidence" that the NKVD used to arrest people.

Even fraternal party members who resided in the USSR acted on occasion as the instruments of repression. Many members of the Communist Parties of Poland, Hungary, Germany, and elsewhere lived in the USSR. Political differences and schisms in the parties, as well as personal frictions among members, led some to denounce others of Trotskyism or other political "crimes." When fraternal party members denounced their comrades to the ECCI, the Cadres Department, VKP authorities, or the NKVD, they put all party members at risk.

In acting as an agent and an instrument of repression, the ECCI and its apparatus contributed to legitimizing a process initiated by VKP leaders that was a precondition for the mass repression—the dehumanization of selected groups. Labeling a person a Trotskyist or Zinovievite, a spy or an enemy agent, transformed him or her from a comrade into someone outside the

group, into a threat to the group. Denouncing people as possible enemy agents, hostile elements, or Trotskyists transformed them into the “Other.” If former comrades were Others, it was easier to accept and explain when they became victims of repression.

The Comintern was also a victim of repression. The ECCI and its apparatus, as well as the ranks of fraternal parties, suffered greatly during the mass repression of 1937–1938. Exact figures are unavailable, but many Comintern members residing in the USSR became victims.<sup>10</sup> Because NKVD materials remain closed to the public, the specifics on each case are not always clear. Whatever the precise figures may be, what unfolded within the Comintern in 1937–1938 was primarily a repression of Communists by Communists in the name of protecting Soviet Communism.

In examining the Comintern as an agent, instrument, and victim of repression, we can glimpse the mindset, the *mentalité* of the period. It is not surprising that dedicated VKP members and foreign Communists adopted the VKP’s rhetoric and political line. Yet it may surprise some to learn that many foreign Communists shared the belief of VKP leaders that spies and enemy agents had penetrated the party and state bureaucracies. It seems paradoxical that some foreign Communists believed in what Gábor Rittersporn has called the “omnipresent conspiracy,” because foreigners were obviously at risk to be accused.<sup>11</sup> But they did believe in it.

What enhanced the widely shared belief among Comintern members that the enemy was within the gates was that the VKP’s leaders, the Comintern, and its member parties followed with alarm and horror the spread of fascism, right-wing dictatorships, and military imperialism throughout the world in the 1930s. Although the brief successes of the Comintern’s anti-fascist Popular Front in France and Spain offered occasional glimmers of hope, the realities of the 1930s were grim for Communists and the USSR. From 1933 the USSR was a country besieged, facing the prospect of a two-front war. The fear of war permeated a society that in 1914–1921 had experienced a world war and one of Europe’s most brutal civil wars and had repulsed many foreign armies. Two decades of “capitalist encirclement” and foreign hostility, of periodic public trials of alleged foreign agents, and of harsh economic conditions created fertile soil in which the seeds of suspicion, spy mania, and xenophobia could sprout, mature, and spread.

There were no doubt spies in the USSR in the 1930s. What modern state has ever been free of them? The USSR had enormous and somewhat porous borders. It was a haven for political émigrés fleeing oppression and the object of



antipathy of many governments. Soviet security officials were convinced that German, Polish, Japanese, and other intelligence agencies engaged in disinformation and other activities designed to destabilize the USSR.<sup>12</sup> To believe that there were no spies is naive. To believe, as Stalin, Yezhov, and others did in 1937–1938, that the country was awash with spies bespeaks the conspiratorial worldview that propelled the mass repression. Who the real spies were and whether NKVD agents ever arrested them is unknown, perhaps unknowable. What is clear is that, in the effort to ferret out spies and enemy agents, the NKVD repressed many innocent people, many dedicated Communists, many noble idealists. No spy network could have inflicted the damage that the NKVD did.

The perceived political and military threats to the USSR contributed to what one historian has dubbed political and social “psychoses” that gripped many VKP and Comintern leaders, Soviet citizens, and even political émigrés in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> These psychoses produced and made credible the fears and accusations that fueled the mass repression. It is indeed a tragic story.

Precisely because the Comintern was a many-tentacled organization that oversaw its own bureaucracy, political émigrés, and the activities of its fraternal parties within the USSR and abroad and that was linked in many ways to the VKP and Soviet state bureaucracies, this book cannot be and is not an exhaustive study. The organs of the Comintern and the ECCI, as well as some fraternal parties, particularly the Polish and Hungarian parties, receive considerable attention here; others receive less attention, not least because of the unavailability of materials and the work being done by other scholars.

Let me note what this volume does *not* do. It is not an exhaustive study of the Great Terror, the Yezhovshchina. No case study could be. Nor does it explain how and why the mass repression of 1937–1938 began, although it offers some insights into the constellation of political, administrative, and psychological factors that contributed to it. Nor does it fully explain Stalin’s, the Politburo’s, or Yezhov’s direct role in the repression. The available Comintern materials do not allow that. Rather, this is a case study of how the mass repression unfolded within and affected one key Soviet organization. The story is well worth telling.

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Comintern

The psychological mechanism whereby each single militant becomes progressively identified with the collective organization is the same as that used in certain religious orders and military colleges, with identical results. . . . The links which bound us to the Party grew steadily firmer, not in spite of the dangers and sacrifices involved, but because of them. . . . The history of the Comintern was therefore a history of schisms, a history of intrigues and arrogance on the part of the directing Russian group toward every independent expression of opinion by the other affiliated parties.

— IGNAZIO SILONE

A GROUP OF Bolsheviks and representatives of a few Communist trends and groups who happened to be in Moscow in March 1919 constituted the founding Congress of the Comintern. During World War I, Lenin had condemned the Second International, a loose coalition of socialist parties, because most of its leaders had voted for war credits and supported participation in the war. To Lenin, socialists who supported the imperialist war were traitors to Marxism and the proletariat. During the war years, he and other socialists who opposed the war convened conferences in Switzerland and Sweden to condemn the war and the behavior of the Second International. Before and after the Bolsheviks' victory in 1917, Lenin repeatedly called for the creation of a new international, a Communist international, that would lead the workers of the world to socialism.<sup>1</sup>

The Comintern's founding Congress was the first step toward the realization of Lenin's dream. The first Congress accomplished little other than to announce the birth of the Comintern, to promulgate its basic principles, and to make plans for a future Congress. But the hopes expressed at the Congress remained those of the Comintern until its dissolution in 1943. The delegates to

the 1919 Congress fervently believed that the hoped-for world socialist revolution was imminent, and not without good cause. Revolutionary unrest was widespread in Europe and beyond, and a socialist state existed in Soviet Russia. Yet there was also much cause for concern. Embroiled in a vicious civil war, the new Soviet government struggled to fend off its domestic enemies and armed intervention by France, England, the United States, Japan, and other nations. To Lenin and the delegates, these realities instilled a sense of urgency into creating the Comintern—"a unified world Communist Party, specific sections of which were parties active in each country," which Soviet leaders hoped would exploit the postwar political instability and increase domestic pressures on the interventionists.<sup>2</sup>

In that perilous but optimistic year, when revolution seemed both imminent and endangered, solidarity with the Soviet state became the bedrock of the Comintern's adherents as well as a criterion for Comintern membership. A sectarianism born of conviction and disdain proved to be the major legacy of the first Congress. Member parties gave their unswerving allegiance to the VKP and the Soviet government and set as their goal the political destruction of both the imperialist world and the Social Democratic parties that Communists deemed hopelessly reformist and incapable of igniting, let alone leading, a socialist revolution.

In 1920 the Second Comintern Congress convened in Moscow. The elected delegates represented newly formed Communist Parties. The adoption of the Twenty-One Points, written by Lenin and Grigori Zinoviev, which defined the criteria for and rules of membership, proved crucial to the Comintern's development.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, certain of the Twenty-One Points deserve special note.

To guard against the "danger of dilution by unstable and irresolute elements which have not completely discarded the ideology of the Second International," the Comintern demanded that "every organization which wishes to join . . . must, in an orderly and planned fashion, remove reformists and supporters of the center from all responsible positions . . . and replace them with tried Communists" (point 5). Such a purge was essential to creating a militant, revolutionary party. To further enhance that goal, the Comintern insisted that member parties "be based on the principles of democratic centralism" because a party could "fulfill its duty only if its organization is as centralized as possible, [and] if iron discipline prevails" (point 12). To ensure that "unstable and irresolute elements" would not corrode a party's revolutionary élan, it demanded in point 13 that "Communist Parties . . . must from time to time un-

dertake a cleansing [re-registration] of the membership of the party in order to get rid of any petty-bourgeois elements which have crept in.” The principles of democratic centralism applied not only within member parties but also to the member parties in relation to the Comintern: “The programme of every party belonging to the Communist International must be ratified by the regular congress of the Communist International or by the Executive Committee” (point 15); “All decisions of the congresses of the Communist International, as well as the decisions of its Executive Committee, are binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International” (point 16).<sup>4</sup>

Adherence to these conditions was intended to ensure that all member parties would “subordinate so-called national interests to the interests of the international revolution” in order to avoid what happened in August 1914, when the elected representatives of some socialist parties placed national interests above those of international revolution by voting for war credits.<sup>5</sup> The Twenty-One Points accomplished that goal to some degree, but they also accomplished something much more immediate—they provided the mechanism for centralization.

The Second Congress also approved the Comintern’s organizational structure.<sup>6</sup> Henceforth, the Comintern was not only the leader of the world Communist movement but also a bureaucracy in its own right, a bureaucracy headquartered in Moscow and therefore inevitably influenced by the Bolshevik Party and Soviet state. In 1920 the Comintern was already becoming a complex institution that played many roles. It was the leader of the world Communist movement and a collective organization of fraternal parties; it was also a bureaucracy that had many obvious and subtle ties to the VKP and the Soviet state.

## Comintern Policies for World Revolution

The primary function of the Comintern was to identify and enact the proper strategies and tactics to hasten international socialist revolution. During its existence the Comintern elaborated several policies to achieve that goal. Until 1921 it urged Communist Parties to pursue the policy of the united front from below, the goals of which were to win workers away from Social Democratic and radical parties, to reject any cooperation with Social Democratic leaders, to use all appropriate revolutionary methods to win workers’ allegiance, and to seize power in their respective countries. An unshakable belief in the inevitability of revolution drove this policy. But by 1921 the prospects for revo-

lution had ebbed dramatically, and the Comintern adopted a more flexible set of united front tactics, which did not exclude cooperation with Social Democratic parties if it served the Comintern's strategic goals. In 1924 the Fifth Comintern Congress stressed that it was essential "always and everywhere" to pursue the united-front-from-below tactic, but allowed for the possibility of discussions with Social Democratic leaders. The Congress characterized this tactic as the "method of agitation and revolutionary mobilization for the entire period."<sup>7</sup> The tactic required member parties to concentrate their energies on extending and strengthening Communist Party influence among rank-and-file workers and trade unionists. In this way, Communists hoped to win workers to their cause, to turn workers against moderate socialist and reformist union leaders, and thereby to radicalize both the working class and trade unions. Success would transform the unions into instruments of the Communist Party.

At its Sixth Congress in 1928, the Comintern adopted a far more strident policy toward Social Democrats. From then until the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935, Social Democrats and reform socialists became the main enemy; they were dubbed "social fascists." Any collaboration with social fascists became unthinkable. Henceforth the goal was to work from below to turn workers, unions, and other mass organizations against the Social Democrats and destroy them. The Congress resolved that the "center of gravity of the united front from below is to carry out decisively the intensification of the struggle against Social Democrats, but it does not replace, but on the contrary strengthens, the duty of Communists to make distinctions between sincerely mistaken Social Democratic workers on the one hand and Social Democratic leaders, the lackeys of imperialism, on the other." Many delegates disagreed with this formulation. Acceptance came only after the Tenth ECCI Plenum in June 1929, which removed Nikolai Bukharin, then the chairman of the ECCI and one of Stalin's political rivals, and only with the formulation "a special form of fascism in countries with strong Social Democratic parties is social-fascism."<sup>8</sup>

During what is known in Comintern history as the Third Period, this policy proved to be a disaster. Despite the hardships inflicted on workers and working people by the Great Depression—objective conditions that might otherwise have enhanced the possibility of socialist revolution—the gains made by Communist Parties were minor and ephemeral. Only in Germany, where animosity between Communists and Social Democrats ran deep, did the policy produce even short-lived success, and even then at great cost. Both parties' sectarian behaviors divided the discontented population, reduced their electoral

influence, and thereby promoted the Nazis' electoral success and rise to power in 1933.

Social Democrats were not the only recipient of the Comintern's vitriol. Throughout its history, the Comintern was embroiled in the political struggles within the VKP. In accordance with the rules of democratic centralism, it sided with the party majority, although many members of the fraternal parties expressed public support for the various opposition groups within the VKP. Following the VKP's lead, from 1923 it condemned Leon Trotsky and his followers for their leftist opposition to the party line. Expelled from the VKP in November 1927 and exiled from the USSR in 1929, Trotsky remained a staunch critic of Soviet domestic and foreign policies—and those of the Comintern. In 1926–1927 the Comintern took up the VKP leadership's struggle against Grigori Zinoviev, chairman of the Comintern until 1926, and his supporters, who at first constituted the New Opposition and who later joined with Trotsky's Left Opposition. In 1928–1929 the Comintern helped to carry out the party leadership's campaign against Bukharin and the so-called right deviation. From the mid-1920s, first Trotskyists, then Zinovievites, and later Bukharinists (real or alleged) were expelled from the Comintern and its fraternal parties, expulsions that sharply split many of those parties.<sup>9</sup> Strident opposition to cooperation with tendencies, movements, and parties to the VKP's right and left defined the Third Period, which marked the height of Comintern sectarianism and, outside Germany, the nadir of its influence abroad.

Although the policy of the Third Period remained the Comintern's official policy until 1935, doubts about it and demands for a change of policy appeared as early as 1933. The Spanish revolution of 1931, the Nazis' coming to power in Germany in 1933, and the abortive fascist coup in France in February 1934 sharply altered the dynamics of European politics and created demands within some fraternal parties for a change of Comintern tactics.<sup>10</sup> Among those who advocated a change was Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist. Dimitrov was one of the defendants at the Reichstag fire trial in Leipzig in 1933, a show trial orchestrated by the Nazis to justify the outlawing of the German Communist Party, which, alleged the Nazis, had organized the burning of the German Reichstag. Dimitrov used the trial to turn the evidence against his accusers and emerged the moral victor in the eyes of antifascists around the world. In 1934, Dimitrov took up political exile in the USSR, where he advocated a change in Comintern policy to Stalin and the VKP leadership, as well as within the Comintern.<sup>11</sup>

In a May 1934 conversation with Maurice Thorez, the French Communist Party leader, Dimitrov said: "The wall between Communist workers and Social Democrats should be destroyed. It is necessary to use all means that hasten that goal. It follows to free the policy of the united front from the old dogmatic ideas [*shkemy*] of Zinoviev's time: 'from above,' 'in the middle,' 'from below.' We should prove that the Communist Party wants to conduct an active and concrete cooperative struggle and is able to fight. The experience of February [1934 in France] and after prove just how successful this is."<sup>12</sup>

The Seventh Comintern Congress (July–August 1935) approved a dramatic change in Comintern policy. Henceforth fascism was the primary enemy. Member parties were required to drop their attacks on Social Democrats and other reformists and to forge broad antifascist coalitions. Known as the Popular (or United) Front, this new policy brought a stunning reversal in the Comintern's fortunes. Its call for a broad-based antifascist struggle won many supporters and catapulted the Comintern to the forefront of the international antifascist movement. In 1936, Popular Front coalition governments came to power in France and Spain. The ascendancy of a Popular Front government in Spain triggered the onset of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. During that war, which proved to be a dress rehearsal for World War II, the USSR and the Comintern took the lead in organizing international support for the democratically elected Spanish Republic and the International Brigades, a ragtag army of international volunteers who flocked to Spain to defend a progressive government besieged by the armies and air forces of the Spanish, German, and Italian fascists. The Comintern's popularity reached a hitherto unknown peak in 1937. Ironically, at that very time many Cominternists fell victim to the mass repression in the USSR.

After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact in August 1939, the Comintern abandoned its antifascist policy. From then until the Axis invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941, its policy, like that of the Soviet government, was that the war in Europe was an imperialist war that deserved no support from Communists, whose primary purpose now was to fight imperialism. Following the invasion of the USSR, Comintern policy changed again, calling on supporters to oppose fascism and defend the USSR. In 1943, on orders from Stalin, the Comintern disbanded, a symbolic gesture of friendship toward Moscow's British and American allies, which ratified its *de facto* death in 1938.

Throughout its existence, with one brief but notable exception, Comintern policies reflected the domestic and foreign policy needs of the USSR. This is

hardly surprising given that defense of the USSR was one of the Twenty-One Points. There were times when Comintern activities created problems for Soviet foreign policy toward a given country, but such incidents were short-lived. The notable exception occurred during 1933–1935, when, in the aftermath of Hitler's rise to power, Soviet foreign policymakers sought to forge an international coalition to stem the spread and influence of fascism while the Comintern pursued its campaign against "social fascists." This policy of collective security placed the USSR in the forefront of international antifascist efforts. But it was not until mid-1935 that the Comintern officially dropped its Third Period policies. The seeming discrepancy between Soviet foreign policy and Comintern policy should not be construed to mean that the Comintern operated independently of the Kremlin. On the contrary, Stalin was actively involved in Comintern policy. The Comintern's leaders in 1933–1935, Osip Pyatnitsky, Dmitri Manuilsky, and Wilhelm Knorin, regularly sought Stalin's approval for an array of policy documents. Stalin and the Politburo also exercised control of Comintern policies and activities through Molotov, formal leader of the Comintern. Stalin himself was a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. What remains less well understood is the logic behind maintaining the policy of social fascism while simultaneously pursuing collective security. This seeming anomaly stands as but one example of those distinctive features of the unique dependent relationship of the Comintern to the Soviet government and the VKP.

The twists and turns of Comintern policies and the Comintern's active political struggle against groups that opposed the VKP's and Comintern's lines created considerable confusion, disorientation, and discontent within the fraternal parties. Foreign Communists and VKP members who supported the various criticisms of VKP policies were reprimanded or expelled from their parties; those who criticized Comintern policies, such as the Third Period policies, experienced similar fates. Such periodic purges of "errant" party members served the long-standing Bolshevik tradition of ensuring party unity, but it also produced other effects. One of these was that sincere Communists, true believers, who were committed to the Communist vision and had no desire to leave the movement, endorsed the political line of the moment and gave at least rhetorical support to it. Such was the price one paid for belonging to a movement that promised to create a socialist world; such was the price that committed revolutionaries had to pay to fulfill their dreams. It seemed a modest price. But the true costs of compliance and party discipline ultimately proved to be much higher.



## The Comintern and the VKP

The Comintern was a collective body composed of fraternal Communist Parties from around the world. Any party that agreed to subscribe to the Twenty-One Points was welcome to join. In reality, the VKP was the most influential party within the Comintern. There were reasons for its primacy. The most important was that it was the only party within the Comintern to have seized power and established a socialist government. Who could argue with success? Certainly not the smaller Communist Parties, such as those in the Baltic states, Finland, England, or South America, where the prospects for revolution were remote; and most certainly not those parties that were illegal in their own countries. Other factors were also at work. The VKP took the lead in organizing the Comintern and provided it and its member parties with ideological, political, organizational, and financial assistance—and a home. Such largess guaranteed the VKP decisive influence within the Comintern. The delegates to the founding Congress agreed that all member parties must “subordinate so-called national interests to the interests of the international revolution.”<sup>13</sup> Because of the VKP’s success and its support for the Comintern, its views determined what constituted those interests.

The VKP’s role within the Comintern is hard to exaggerate. The principles enunciated in the Twenty-One Points and other Comintern directives reflected the organizational and operative principles of the VKP. VKP leaders prepared and decided many of the Comintern’s major decisions. Until 1935 the VKP delegation constituted a plurality within the Executive Committee of the Comintern and its Presidium; as a rule, fraternal parties had one representative in the ECCI, although the more important parties (e.g., the German, French, Chinese) had more.<sup>14</sup> From 1935 five members of the ECCI—Stalin, Dmitri Manuilsky, Meer Moskvin (Trilisser), Nikolai Yezhov, and Andrei Zhdanov—were members of the VKP Central Committee (CC). Stalin, Manuilsky, and Moskvin sat on the ECCI Presidium; Manuilsky was a member and Moskvin a candidate member of the ECCI Secretariat.

The presence of five Central Committee members, together with Dimitrov’s social ties to Stalin and other Politburo members, ensured that the ECCI and hence its apparatus were aware of the details and nuances of VKP policies. There was no Central Committee secretary assigned formal responsibility for the Comintern. The presence of three Central Committee secretaries—Stalin, Zhdanov, and Yezhov—on the ECCI obviated the need for any. Stalin, however, seems to have been the Comintern’s *de facto* overseer on the Central

Committee. Otherwise, the ECCI worked with the Central Committee along functional lines; for example, on membership matters the ECCI dealt with ORPO (the Central Committee Department of Leading Party Organs); on finances, with its financial department, and so on.

So predominant was the VKP's power and influence within the Comintern that its delegation often decided among themselves not only which tactics and strategies the Comintern would pursue but who to remove from and appoint to the Central Committees of fraternal parties.<sup>15</sup> They also determined who would attend Comintern Congresses and which VKP members would serve on various Comintern leadership bodies. One ECCI member was the representative of the Central Committee of the VKP. Throughout the late 1920s and the early 1930s, that person was Osip Pyatnitsky. In 1935, after Pyatnitsky's transfer to work in the Central Committee offices, Manuisky assumed that role. On certain occasions Dimitrov attended Central Committee meetings and plenums. He was also among a small group of individuals who regularly met and socialized with Stalin and other Politburo members.<sup>16</sup>

Many political émigrés in the USSR became VKP members, which augmented the party's predominance because the émigrés espoused VKP policies, values, and perceptions among their fellow citizens. The effective political results were that the principles by which the Comintern and its member parties operated, as well as their organizational structure, principles, and rules, reflected those of the VKP.

Within the ECCI apparatus, there were VKP committees (*partkom*) as well as Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) cells. They performed the roles and functions of any other party organization in the USSR. They issued directives from the party's central organs, discussed issues relating to policy implementation, collected party dues, attended to personnel issues, conducted verifications of party members, and so forth. The secretary of the ECCI party committee from 1935 was Fyodor Kotelnikov. In February 1935 the membership of the ECCI party organization totaled 468.<sup>17</sup> This organization provided a strong institutional link between the workers in the ECCI apparatus and the VKP and played an important role in the unfolding of the mass repression within the Comintern's headquarters.<sup>18</sup>

By the 1930s the ethos of the VKP had saturated the Comintern, the ECCI, and its apparatus. Historians date the Bolshevization of the Comintern from the mid-1920s, by which they mean that the VKP's values and behaviors became those of the Comintern and its fraternal parties.<sup>19</sup> A variety of factors enhanced this process, the most notable being the removal of people who op-

posed the VKP line or the Comintern line or who supported people who did so. In the 1920s, on direct orders from the VKP leadership, the ECCI first removed the followers of Grigori Zinoviev, chairman of the Comintern from 1919 to fall 1926, for joining the Trotskyists, and later the followers of Nikolai Bukharin, Zinoviev's successor, for their opposition to the party line in 1928–1929.

The Bolshevization of the Comintern disheartened some Communists outside the USSR, some of whom quit their parties or were removed, others of whom endured the Bolshevization in silence. Among the latter was the German Communist Clara Zetkin, who wrote to Jules Humbert-Droz, a Swiss Communist and an adherent to the Bukharin line, that the Comintern had become “a dead mechanism that swallows orders in Russian and issues them in different languages.”<sup>20</sup> Those who supported the party and Comintern viewed things very differently and justified the oppositionists' removal as a necessary action to guarantee the Comintern's political identity, health, and unity. By the 1930s the Bolshevization of the Comintern was well advanced. And as it advanced, the virulent campaigns against the deviant isms (Trotskyism, Zinovievism, Bukharinism, etc.) became defining realities and normal practices within the Comintern.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of its Bolshevization, the Comintern possessed some distinctive characteristics—in part because it was an international political institution. Most members of the ECCI and of the Comintern's apparatus were foreigners, who resided in the USSR for varying lengths of time. Delegations and representatives from abroad frequently came to participate in Comintern activities, to attend Comintern Congresses, or to report to the ECCI on their parties' activities. The ECCI was responsible for fraternal parties, each of which was assigned to a national or regional section (*seksiia*) in the ECCI and had an official representative (*predstavitel'*) who reported to a designated ECCI Secretary. The ECCI was also responsible for thousands of Communist émigrés from countries where Communist Parties had been outlawed or from which individuals had fled to avoid persecution. These foreigners had had very different political, social, and cultural experiences than their Soviet comrades—experiences that Bolshevization could not entirely eradicate or replace. In short, the Comintern staff and those for whom they were responsible differed dramatically in composition from the staff and clients of all other Soviet institutions, including the VKP. That the Comintern was a polyglot organization symbolized its distinctive nature. German was its official language, although Russian effectively displaced it in the 1930s. But on any given day, Polish,

Hungarian, Bulgarian, Italian, French, Chinese, or other languages could be heard in its offices. Comintern documents, reports, and directives routinely appeared in a variety of languages, as did the books, pamphlets, and brochures that it published.

The Comintern, therefore, existed in two worlds: in the USSR, the socialist world; and in the international arena, the capitalist world. Within the USSR, its roles were to elaborate policies to hasten world Communist revolution abroad and to strengthen the international Communist movement, to defend Soviet foreign and domestic policies, and to cooperate with the appropriate party and Soviet offices (e.g., intelligence and security organs). In the capitalist world, the Comintern's role was multifaceted: it guided and directed Communist Parties, helped to build their organizational structures, worked to ensure party discipline, educated fraternal party members in Marxism-Leninism, and demanded that its followers defend USSR's policies and leaders.

Members of fraternal parties who lived in the USSR had grown up and become acculturated in societies very different from Russia. Although they had made conscious choices to destroy the social and economic orders of their native lands, their personal, social, cultural, and political experiences there had been formative. However much members of fraternal parties may have dedicated themselves to the USSR and to revolution, they carried within them the experiences and identities of their native lands. Although they may have been VKP members, they retained other identities—they were Poles, Germans, Bulgarians, Hungarians; they were members of other political parties or movements; they had been persecuted and arrested abroad; they were workers, intellectuals, teachers, employees; they were the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, of workers, policemen, peasants, military officers, clerks, and factory owners. Although these foreigners may have believed that they had shed their pasts and become “real Bolsheviks” and, in some cases, loyal Soviet citizens, these identities became an increasing cause for concern to VKP leaders from 1934 on.

### The Comintern Bureaucracy

To manage and coordinate its various activities, the Comintern had a large bureaucracy.<sup>22</sup> Formally, Comintern Congresses determined its policies. In reality, the policies and nominees put forth by the VKP delegation were those approved by the Congresses. The Congresses were held in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1924, 1928, and 1935. Before each Congress, plenary meetings were

held at which the various representatives hammered out a wide array of issues and policies to present to the Congress for approval—which was always granted, though not without debate. The Congresses also elected the members of the Executive Committee (ECCI), which administered and interpreted policies between Congresses.<sup>23</sup>

The ECCI was the Comintern's counterpart to the Central Committee of the VKP and, like that body, had both full and candidate members. The ECCI's members were among the most important and powerful members of the international Communist movement and the VKP. Some ECCI members resided in the USSR, others in their native countries. The number of ECCI members varied somewhat over time; from 1935, there were 46 full members and 33 candidate members. Within the ECCI was a Presidium, a smaller and more powerful body.<sup>24</sup> Between 1926 and 1935 the Presidium elected a Political Secretariat, and the latter elected from its ranks the Political Commission of the ECCI Political Secretariat.<sup>25</sup> The Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 approved a reorganization plan that simplified this layered leadership bureaucracy. From 1935 there existed only the ECCI, the ECCI Presidium, and the ECCI Secretariat, which was the key leadership body.<sup>26</sup> Georgi Dimitrov was the General Secretary of the ECCI.

Between 1926 and 1935, within the ECCI, there also existed Lendersecretariats, which were "obliged to keep up with developments and situations in the appropriate countries and appropriate Communist Parties, to support these parties in their current work, and to keep up with these parties' fulfillment of [Comintern] resolutions." Leading ECCI members headed the Lendersecretariats, which provided the ECCI's leaders with information about the parties for which they were responsible and transmitted to those parties ECCI resolutions and policies. After the Seventh Congress, the Lendersecretariats were renamed Secretariats, but their functions did not change.<sup>27</sup>

Each fraternal party had a representative in the ECCI who was the *de facto* head of that party on Soviet territory and who was expected to monitor and report on its activities, performance, successes, and weaknesses to the appropriate ECCI office and Secretariat. According to a February 1936 ECCI directive, the representatives in the ECCI were to be members of the Politburo or Central Committee of their party and were responsible to both the ECCI and their party. Each member party also belonged to a section within the ECCI.<sup>28</sup> Among those subordinate to each Secretary were analysts (*referenty*), whose primary responsibility was to monitor the political, economic, and social conditions in an assigned country or region.

Finally, there existed an International Control Commission (ICC). Its primary role was to act as an appeals board for those expelled or reprimanded by the fraternal parties. The ICC was also empowered to investigate and pass judgment on Comintern members accused of inappropriate political or personal conduct. Like its VKP counterpart, the Central Control Commission, ICC members could not serve on the ECCI, the ECCI Presidium, or the ECCI Secretariat.

The ECCI had functional departments to attend to routine operations. From 1935 they included the Cadres Department, the Department of Propaganda and Mass Organizations, the Administration of Affairs Department, the Translation Department, the Archive, and the Communications Department (formerly known as the International Relations [OMS] Department). For our purposes, the most important was the Cadres Department.<sup>29</sup> Like any other personnel department, the Cadres Department maintained files on its members, not only on persons living in the USSR for which the ECCI was responsible but also on many Communists who lived abroad.<sup>30</sup> Such files included routine information like name, date of birth, class background, occupational history, date of joining the party, and other parties to which one had belonged. Some people's files contained records of deviations from the party line; associations with people dubbed "Trotskyists," "provocateurs," or "renegades," or with others deemed "suspicious"; formal and sometimes informal complaints lodged against a member; and other types of political information, including denunciations.

A Cadres Department table compiled no later than 1934 and based on a review of the files of fraternal party members shows that, in the department's opinion, there were quite a few "Trotskyists and renegades" and other allegedly "suspicious" elements within each fraternal party. According to the report, the French Communist Party (CP) had 482 "suspicious" members; another 70 people had already been expelled for being "Trotskyists or renegades" or "provocateurs," or for other reasons.<sup>31</sup> By what criteria the Cadres Department or its party representatives judged a member to be "suspicious" or a "Trotskyist" is unclear. Nor is it clear how many of these people resided in the USSR or later suffered during the mass repression. What *is* clear is that the Cadres Department kept careful and extensive files on Communists. Those files played a crucial role during the repression.

The ECCI periodically created commissions to deal with important but unusual activities and problems that inevitably arose in an organization as complex as the Comintern. The Secretariat or Presidium usually created these com-

missions, defined their responsibility and mandate, and appointed their personnel. During the years after 1934 the ECCI created commissions to review the credentials of its apparatus, to investigate problems within fraternal parties, and to investigate charges against individuals. Each of these commissions played a significant role in the unfolding of the repression, although none was created with that role in mind.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the governments of many European states (Poland, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Finland, Romania) outlawed the Communist Party. Nonetheless, these local parties maintained underground organizations, and the governments used a variety of tactics to infiltrate them. Many people who fled persecutions in those countries emigrated to the USSR, where they were originally welcomed as political refugees. Several of these outlawed parties (e.g., the German, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslav parties) established headquarters in Moscow; others (e.g., the Italian and Polish parties) established their headquarters in Paris. The ability of the ECCI to directly influence the parties in Moscow was considerable. Overall responsibility for the affairs of political émigrés and refugees in the USSR was the responsibility of MOPR (International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters), which was responsible to the ECCI. Although some of these refugees were Communist Party members, many were not. MOPR's responsibilities included locating housing, work, schooling, and other types of aid for these refugees.<sup>32</sup>

Every worker in the ECCI apparatus underwent a verification procedure (*proverka*) conducted by the Cadres Department as a condition of employment. The verification of foreigners for employment or a visa consisted of two steps: the Cadres Department verified the person's political credentials, and then it sought approval from Soviet security organs. Issues regarding foreigners required that the Cadres Department routinely cooperate with the Third Department of the Main Administration for State Security (GUGB), a department of the NKVD.<sup>33</sup> The GUGB had responsibility for personnel issues relating to the Comintern, such as issuing visas to visiting foreign Communists and giving clearance for personnel to work in secret activities or to travel abroad. Such security clearances were necessary before foreign Communists received a Soviet visa, were promoted to a leading or sensitive post, or were granted asylum. For example, in January 1937 the ECCI wanted to invite fraternal party leaders, radicals, and journalists from abroad to attend the show trial of Yuri Pyatakov, Karl Radek, and others. Before it could issue invitations, it had to submit the names and a brief biographical sketch of those it wanted to invite.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, the Cadres Department forwarded to the security organs information that it believed warranted their attention. In February 1933, for example, the Cadres Department passed on to Sosnovskii, a NKVD official, the following denunciation: "Paul Hengst lives in N[izhnyi] Novgorod, USSR. During [his] vacation, he was in Germany. He slandered the USSR—about the famine, about shadowing, [and stated] that, as a soldier, the Russian proletariat is rotten to the core."<sup>35</sup> Who sent the denunciation to the Cadres Department and whether or not it had any basis in fact are unknown. As we shall see, in many cases the author of a denunciation was known. Quite often the author was a comrade in a fraternal party (the denunciation was often transmitted to the department via MOPR), a fellow party member in emigration, a member of a local VKP committee, an informant, or simply a coworker or acquaintance. That the Cadres Department forwarded the denunciation of Hengst to the security organ illustrates an anxiety that increasingly defined Soviet life as the 1930s progressed—that foreigners who emigrated to the USSR posed potential security threats.

In short, the Cadres Department had regular dealings with the security organs. Given that neither security clearances for foreigners nor the sharing of intelligence information was an unreasonable bureaucratic activity, cooperation was hardly auspicious, although in hindsight it appears portentous.<sup>36</sup> In fact, in the Soviet context it would have been highly unusual for the Cadres Department not to have shared information with the security organs. More significantly, the long-standing relationship between the security organs and Comintern created a routine of compliance and cooperation that abetted the mass repression.

From 1933 the VKP, the ECCI apparatus, and the fraternal parties conducted political purges (*chistka*) and verifications of their members. These involved reviewing each member's credentials and, if the situation warranted it, either reprimanding the member or recommending the member's expulsion. Students from abroad who attended one of the educational institutions administered by the ECCI were also required to undergo periodic political verifications, the results of which were forwarded to the Cadres Department. An 8 May 1934 list of former students in the Communist University of Peoples of the East, entitled "Characteristics of Some Individuals Rejected During the Verification," contained the following information: "Wang, Sen Min, Korea. Suspected of espionage in the service of the Japanese. Kim, Fyodor, Korea, Neighbors [*sosedy*; i.e., NKVD] categorically object to his trip to the country [Korea]. . . . Li Wang, China. Leader of the right oppositionists, actively strug-



gled against the CPC [Chinese CP]. . . . Sokol, Romania, Neighbors categorically object to [his being] dispatched to the country [Romania].”<sup>37</sup> The recording of the “neighbors’” opinion underscores the working relationship between the security organs and the Cadres Department on issues relating to foreigners.

These purges and verifications did not, however, portend the dramatic expansion of police powers in 1937–1938.<sup>38</sup> Purges and verifications of members of the VKP and some fraternal parties had occurred regularly since 1921, and none had led to mass police repression.<sup>39</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the Comintern and party officials who recommended and conducted the verifications of different groups had any idea that the materials thus generated would later be used as the basis for the 1937–1938 mass repression.

Given the Comintern’s activities abroad and its responsibilities for foreign Communists and political émigrés, it, not surprisingly, also routinely cooperated with the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (NKID), as well as with military intelligence and security organs. The nature of the Comintern’s relationships with these bodies evolved over time. During its early years, relations between it and Soviet security and intelligence services were defined with some measure of administrative precision. In August 1921 leading representatives of the Comintern, the Cheka—the state security service—and the military intelligence service established precise limits on the use of personnel and committed the Comintern to “close cooperation” with the intelligence services. Henceforth, a “representative of the Comintern is not able to simultaneously be a plenipotentiary of the Cheka and Razvedupr [military intelligence] and, conversely, representatives of the Razvedupr and the VChK [Cheka] may not function as representatives of the Comintern or its departments.” Representatives of the Cheka and military intelligence were forbidden to finance foreign parties or groups. Only the ECCI could do so, although it could delegate to the People’s Commissariats of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade the right to finance foreign parties. Even though “representatives of the VChK and Razvedupra cannot appeal to foreign parties or groups with suggestions for cooperation . . . representatives of the Comintern [are] obliged to offer those agencies and their representatives close cooperation.”<sup>40</sup>

Over time mutual relations between Comintern organizations and Soviet intelligence and diplomatic organizations became more regularized. On 14 August 1925, Aralov, a member of the Collegium of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, wrote to Chicherin, the People’s commissar of foreign affairs, that the ECCI had agreed that the “ambassador should be the only contact point for

passing information between the local country and Moscow. All work should be done within our official institutions.”<sup>41</sup> Thereafter, cooperation between the Comintern and the NKID, security organs, and the military intelligence service increased. The ECCI’s Communications Department (before 1935, the OMS) often cooperated with these agencies to gather and convey information, political documents, and other materials in a given country. ECCI personnel and fraternal party leaders routinely sent information of intelligence value to high-ranking Soviet state officials.<sup>42</sup>

One of the Comintern’s major functions was to gather and analyze information about the political, economic, and social conditions in various countries. Although such information served the needs of intelligence organizations, it also served the ECCI’s needs by providing information that allowed it to adapt legal and illegal political activities abroad, to adapt political tactics in a given country, to keep an eye on fraternal parties and their members, and to acquire organizational skills.<sup>43</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, that VKP leaders often assigned people with experience in intelligence operations to the Comintern and Comintern officials with such experience to Soviet state agencies. Several examples will illustrate the practice.

From 1935 until his arrest in November 1938, Meer Trilisser, known in the Comintern as M. A. Moskvin, was a member of the ECCI Presidium and a candidate member of the ECCI Secretariat and worked closely with the Communications Department of the ECCI. He chaired the 1936 and 1937 commissions to verify the workers of the ECCI apparatus. As ECCI Secretary, Moskvin also played an active role in the verification of members of the Communist Party of Poland (CPP) living in Soviet emigration. Before joining the ECCI in 1935, Moskvin’s experience had been in intelligence and investigation. From 1921 to 1929 he headed the Foreign Department of the Cheka and the Cheka’s successor, the OGPU, and for a while was the deputy head of the OGPU. In the late 1920s, Moskvin was a leading official in the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate (Rabkrin).<sup>44</sup>

Bronislav Bortnovskii (aka Bronkowski) joined the ECCI apparatus in 1929 and became the CPP representative in the ECCI. In December 1933 he became a candidate member of both the ECCI Presidium and the Political Commission of the ECCI’s Polish Secretariat; a year later he became the Secretary of the Polish-Pribaltic Lendersecretariat. At the Comintern’s 1935 Congress, Bronkowski was elected an ECCI member and a candidate member of its Presidium as well. Bronkowski’s work experience, like Moskvin’s, was in intelligence. After serving in the Cheka and OGPU from 1918 to 1924, he worked for five years

in the Red Army staff's Fourth Department, which specialized in intelligence. In fact, several ECCI officials at one time or another had worked in the Red Army's Fourth Department. Among them was Boris Melnikov (aka Müller), the head of the Communications Department from 1935 until his arrest in May 1937; Müller had worked in the Fourth Department from 1931 to 1933, before moving on to intelligence work in the NKID.<sup>45</sup>

The presence within the ECCI apparatus of people with close ties and experience in the security and intelligence services made sense from an organizational standpoint. The ECCI needed experienced and talented intelligence experts in order to properly assess political conditions abroad. But it also served those services' interests. The presence of so many foreigners in the ECCI apparatus and the close ties between the ECCI and the fraternal parties meant that the Comintern headquarters needed to be monitored. These people brought with them not only experience but also attitudes fashioned in the Cheka, OGPU, Rabkrin, or Red Army, as well as close professional ties to those staffs. Precisely what those attitudes were is today difficult to discern, but many appear to have shared Stalin's and the NKVD's belief that "enemy agents" disguised as émigrés operated within the VKP and the USSR. Ironically, all of those ECCI officials who had security or intelligence experience fell victim to the repression. Precisely why each did cannot be ascertained until the appropriate archives are open.

The Comintern not only had members with ties to various intelligence and security organs but members who engaged in clandestine activities abroad, which often required that they travel under assumed identities and with false passports. Usually the Communications Department (or its predecessor) directed and coordinated their operations. These people were multilingual, and many were not Soviet citizens. Their activities abroad included acting as couriers for the ECCI, intervening in the affairs of fraternal parties, and engaging in clandestine operations and intelligence work. The suppleness of their identity was an asset to the ECCI, but during the repression it attracted the suspicions of NKVD investigators. The Communications Department and its operatives were especially hard hit during the repression.

## Penetrating Party Discipline and Political Rhetoric

The ECCI and its apparatus were complex political and bureaucratic institutions. The ECCI was the directing body of the worldwide Communist movement, but the bureaucracy that administered that movement was politically

and financially dependent upon the VKP. It operated under the watchful eyes of the VKP and security organs in the Soviet bureaucratic and cultural context. There is little doubt that Comintern organizations had been Bolshevized, or perhaps more precisely Sovietized, by the mid-1930s.

Yet it would be a mistake to view all who served the Comintern as political or bureaucratic automatons. Although Clara Zetkin privately condemned the Comintern as a “dead mechanism,” she nonetheless remained a party member until her death, as did Humbert-Droz, to whom she confided her opinion. They stayed in the party for many reasons, not least because, for all its shortcomings and failures, the Communist movement was to them the best hope for the realization of the political dreams to which they had dedicated their lives. Others in the ECCI apparatus and among the political émigrés living in the USSR must have shared Zetkin’s opinion. But some people wholeheartedly embraced the VKP’s values and perspectives; for them the rhetoric had meaning. Others fell somewhere between Zetkin, with her cynicism, and those who hung on Stalin’s every word. Comintern members were, after all, human beings. Like all members of the species, they were capable of a bewildering variety of beliefs and behaviors.

Although the Comintern and fraternal parties were politically and financially dependent on the VKP, many of their members did not view themselves as subservient. Rather than sharing Zetkin’s cynicism, they proudly viewed themselves as partners in the struggle to create a socialist world; and Soviet socialism, was, they were convinced by the mid-1930s, besieged from within and without by recent and long-standing enemies. They struggled against what they perceived as ultra-leftism, as well as reformism, against reaction and fascism, so that their dreams would one day be realized.<sup>46</sup> They were, in short, true believers who shared and proselytized the VKP’s policies and values, not to mention its fears and anxieties, and who risked everything for the cause.

The ECCI and its apparatus were more than political appendages of the VKP and Soviet bureaucracies. They were also complex social institutions. The Comintern was a collective movement of international Communist Parties, a movement that drew together people of different nationalities, races, class backgrounds, cultures, and languages, a movement of people who shared a common political ideology but whose personal, political, social, and cultural experiences differed significantly, a movement that used a common political language but whose members interpreted it in terms of their own, often foreign experiences. It was, in short, a collective whose members shared certain identities but differed in other ways. Complex identities were as typical of

those who staffed the ECCI's sprawling administrative offices as they were of those who pledged fealty to the Comintern. The differences could not help but affect the Comintern and its apparatus and contribute in some measure to the distinctive perceptions and behaviors of its members. For those who lived outside the USSR, the differences proved to be of less consequence than for those who lived there in the late 1930s, when the demands of party discipline meant that differences aroused suspicions and often led to tragic consequences.

The ECCI oversaw and administered the Comintern's fraternal parties. The important and petty internal debates, factional struggles, and personal squabbles of the parties also affected the Comintern, its policies, and its behavior, sometimes as much as did the domestic and foreign policies of the governments from which its members had fled. Within the USSR, foreigners who worked for the Comintern, the ECCI, or exiled fraternal parties used a common political rhetoric in an alien culture to fight battles over international, national, and intraparty issues. They worked in international bureaucracies, whose personnel spoke different languages and had varying backgrounds. In this context, they sought to administer the worldwide Communist movement in a way that balanced the "correct" line of the USSR and VKP against the unique realities of each country.

However powerful the identities and divisions within the Comintern, the VKP provided a common supra-identity for all those affiliated with the Comintern. Nowhere was this more evident than within the ECCI party organization. In early 1935, Dimitrov described that body as possessing a "special character" because "out of 468 members of the party organization, 280 are foreign comrades of different parties."<sup>47</sup> For members, the demands of party discipline were paramount. Party discipline and the homogeneity of party rhetoric during the Stalin era served to mask individual perspectives and opinions, making it difficult for historians to ascertain the dimensions of wholesale belief, selective belief, careerism, opportunism, and fear among Communists.<sup>48</sup> The documents in this volume regrettably shed limited light on private opinions and attitudes. But that need not blunt our ability to appreciate why they behaved as they did. To comprehend the behaviors of the groups and their members, theories of social psychology, particularly those relating to obedience to authority, group identity, and group behavior, are particularly fruitful. A brief discussion of the theories that inform this work is therefore appropriate.

Party discipline was a defining feature of Communist Party, especially VKP, membership. The member parties of the VKP and the Comintern demanded

that party members adhere to and carry out the policies and directives of party authorities. Whereas strict party discipline distinguished Communists from members of most other political parties, it served to routinize a universal behavioral tendency—obedience to authority. As Stanley Milgram's classic experiment on obedience to authority demonstrated, human beings, regardless of class, race, age, and education, possess a powerful tendency to obey authority, even when the consequences of doing so inflict harm on others. As long as people acknowledge an authority to be legitimate and accept the authority's orders as being consistent with the setting from which authority is derived, people will obey orders even if doing so induces in them considerable strain and tension. The tendency for human beings to obey is a powerful one.<sup>49</sup>

Members of Communist Parties willingly joined those parties and hence explicitly acknowledged the authority of the party and their superiors within it. Obedience flowed naturally from the situation. Within Communist Parties obedience to authority was a collective behavior, as well as an individual behavior. As such, it provided a powerful inducement to conformity.<sup>50</sup> That disobedience could result in expulsion from the party reinforced members' obedience.

Obedience to authority plays an important behavioral and interpretive role in any history of the Comintern. Members of the Comintern acknowledged the VKP as the supreme authority on political matters and Stalin as the personification of the VKP. The Comintern's leaders derived their authority from the VKP's leaders. Each invoked Stalin, the Central Committee of the VKP, or some other authority in the political hierarchy to justify and rationalize their behavior. The staff of the ECCI and the members of the party organization did the same. In so doing, they behaved the same way as ordinary people everywhere do in the face of authority. Party discipline was a distinctive feature of Bolshevism, but its consequences—obedience and conformity—were universal.

No less important than party discipline was group identity and behavior. Although the VKP was the governing party after 1917, it retained many characteristics common to social movements that do not possess state power. As with religious movements, cults, and sectarian political movements, VKP members constituted a small minority of the national population and shared a distinctive and internally coherent worldview—Marxism-Leninism—from which they derived a shared set of values and assumptions and common frames of reference. The VKP promised a better life for its members and society, provided an avenue for social and economic mobility and status for those for-