

An Irish Communist and MI5 contra-intelligence in the 1930's

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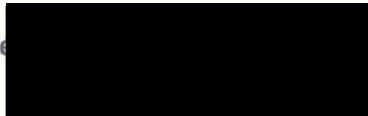
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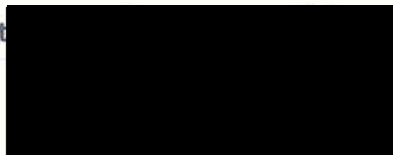
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Abstract

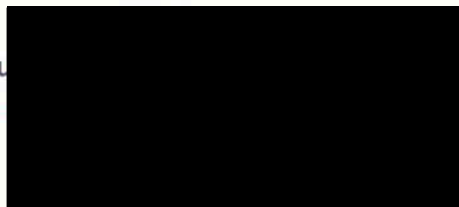
In the existing historiography of intelligence and espionage studies, there has been little to no examination of the humanistic element of espionage and counter-intelligence of either the agents that did the spying, or the institutions like the MI5 that were set in place to monitor them other than biographical works which neglect many important concepts. Thus, concepts like ideology, motivations, the fight for what is right and human agency have been conventionally ignored in favour of institutional or biographical narratives. What follows is a study of Brian Goold-Verschöyle, a young Irish Communist, as an individual case and as someone representative of a larger set of persons who not only served a cause in the secret world against their own state, but on behalf of something larger than themselves in a decade, the 1930s, that saw many such endeavours.

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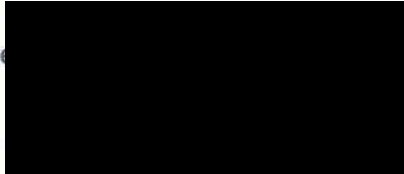
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Introduction

For the historian of intelligence and espionage, assessing the impact of the men and women who fought for their respective countries in unconventional ways during the twentieth century is a difficult task for several reasons. Firstly, there is the lack of legitimate data on individuals who made it their aim to be unnoticed, and whatever information is available through the process of de-classification is finely filtered by respective governments.¹ Secondly, popular portrayals of these individuals as seen in the espionage and intelligence works of the Ian Flemings of the world, while accurate in some senses, are totally off of the mark in others. Moreover, the importance of some agents goes unnoticed, while others such as the Cambridge Five² get glorified as the nexus of the espionage world and in doing so paint a picture of espionage and intelligence that is not wholly balanced and representative of the bigger picture.

For students of Anglo-Soviet relations, the British institutions set in place to combat enemy spies and their operatives, and the specialized agencies of MI5 are also portrayed in a skewed light that does not wholly address the human element of the spy world. Rather, institutional histories of the MI5 perpetuate imagery of bureaucratic government agencies that leave no room for assessing things like ideology, non-political motivations, and generally lack

¹ Various government intelligence agencies limit or comb through what is officially released to the public sphere. See Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, And Cold War Secret Intelligence* (USA: Penguin Publishing Group, 2003), in which the author posits, "The story of modern secret service offers us a clear warning. Governments are not only adept at hiding substantial secrets, they are quick to offer their own carefully packaged versions of the past." Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, 1.

² The Cambridge Five was a Soviet spy ring that operated in the United Kingdom starting in the 1930s and lasting until after the Second World War. Their name derived from the fact that all the men turned towards Communism while attending Cambridge University. The group consisted of Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt, Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and John Cairncross. See Chapman Pincher's *A Web of Deception* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987) or Peter Hennessey's *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (United States: Penguin Books, 2004).

any discussion of competing concepts of morality as they operated in this dark world. This study begins with the assumption that each spy or agent had their own blend of motivations for what they did.

Some may question why it is important to examine the world of spies and espionage post Cold War, in that the proverbial thaw between the Eastern bloc and Western powers has dissipated with the dismantling of the U.S.S.R in 1991. One reason is that, as William Stevenson argues in his *A Man Called Intrepid*, “{spies} assumed frightful risks, had no protection or privilege of uniform, carried the responsibility of countless lives in the solitary missions they accepted on trust, and often were forced to make lonely decisions that could mean merciless death to their families or countrymen.”³ Yet, many of them, save the few exceptions like the Cambridge Five, or Igor Gouzenko have received the attention and respect they deserve. An example of such a person is Brian Goold-Verschoye, a young Irish communist O.G.P.U agent who essentially tied together Soviet spy rings across Northern Europe and the United Kingdom.

Thus far in the historiography of espionage and intelligence and on the MI5 and O.G.P.U, Goold-Verschoye has been nothing more than a footnote in history and mentioned in depth only in government files such as those of the KV2 series from MI5. Studies such as Richard Thurlow’s *Soviet Spies and British Counter-Intelligence in the 1930s: Espionage in the Woolwich Arsenal and the Foreign Office Communications Department*, Nigel West’s *MASK- MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain* or Tom Power’s *The Perfect English Spy* all allude to Goold-Verschoye in his dealings as a courier for the spy networks, yet devote limited attention or detail as to his significance. Case in point is Thurlow’s *Soviet Spies and British*

³ William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid* (Guilford Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 2000), 2.

Counter-Intelligence in the 1930s: Espionage in the Woolwich Arsenal and the Foreign Office Communications Department, in which Goold-Verschoye is mentioned only briefly. There is no elaboration on why he might be important or how he might be considered alongside the other Soviet agents with whom he worked. Thurlow writes of the espionage and treason case against John Herbert King that, “For the King case the important new files were for the cipher distribution manager, Ernest Holloway Oldham (KV 2/808), the courier Brian Goold-Verschoye (KV 2/817)...”⁴ As can be seen, there is no real elaboration on Goold-Verschoye or his involvement and activities within the spy rings other than stating he was a courier.⁵ This is problematic because in the number of studies that even address Goold-Verschoye’s existence, most of them (i.e. Thurlow’s text) only make note of his supposed job as a courier and nothing more. While Nigel West’s *MASK- MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain* goes further than Thurlow in identifying Goold-Verschoye as “the young Irish CPGB zealot who Krivitsky insisted he believed he was engaged on purely political work...”⁶ its analysis of Goold-Verschoye ends briefly thereafter and does not take into account what Goold-Verschoye himself believed he was doing, as opposed to what Krivitsky said. West’s text goes on to provide a few biographical details on him, stating that he was a courier, was interested in a German woman named Charlotte Moos, and that he met his fate mysteriously in Spain in 1939 according to the New York *Saturday Evening Post*.⁷ With only these limited accounts of Goold-

⁴ Richard Thurlow, “Soviet Spies and British Counter-Intelligence in the 1930s: Espionage in the Woolwich Arsenal and the Foreign Office Communications Department” *Intelligence and National Security*, 19: 4, (2004), 614.

⁵ The fact that King had arguably produced more intelligence than any other Soviet agent compounds this factor. See- Thurlow- “Soviet Spies and British Counter-Intelligence in the 1930’s: espionage in the Woolwich Arsenal and the Foreign Office Communications Department” for an assessment of the damage of King’s activity.

⁶ Nigel West, *MASK- MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*(New York: Routledge, 2005), 208.

⁷ *Ibid.* Goold-Verschoye’s story in Spain was briefly told by Krivitsky in an article in the newspaper following his defection to elaborate on how the Soviets operated in liquidating their own agents in things like the Purge of 1937.

Verschoyle scattered throughout a small section of the historiography on intelligence and espionage, it is difficult to piece together a more complete understanding of just how significant he was.

Goold-Verschoyle has become one of the many that get no recognition beyond confidential archives, yet paid the ultimate price of his life in order to fulfill what he thought was doing the right thing in joining the Soviets in the interwar period to fight the fascists and what he saw as the corrupt Western powers. For him, ideology was his driving force; however it was arguably what also led him to perish at the hands of the Soviet purges in the interwar period. One of the seminal texts to gain an understanding of how ideology was a driving force that relates to the young Irishman is Barry McLoughlin's *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalin's Terror*. In the existing historiography it is the only text that focuses on providing any sort of biographical background on Goold-Verschoyle aside from a footnote or brief paragraph, and helps account for how he developed his ideological views.⁹

In doing so, McLoughlin uses various primary as well as secondary sources to account for his information on Goold-Verschoyle that are verifiable. In terms of primary sources, McLoughlin relies both on Soviet and British intelligence and documentation¹⁰ as well as first hand information from personal interviews/transcripts with people such as Sheila Fitzpatrick (nee Goold-Verschoyle) who was Goold-Verschoyle's sister as well as an accomplished

It was apparently done so that Krivitsky could raise American consciousness of Soviet practices – Speculation on whether he thought it would save him in turn is still undecided.

⁹ As can be seen in the above texts from Power, West, Thurlow etc.

¹⁰ In terms of Soviet files, McLoughlin examined what Goold-Verschoyle himself had 'wrote in his own hand writing for the Comintern bureaucracy' in terms of a biography. It is identified as (RGSAPI, f. 495, o.198,d.1324,11.5-8) He also was able to access intake forms from the Gulag and Prison in which Brian had been interrogated in and consequently was interned in. In terms of British primary sources McLoughlin used the KV2 series files which are used in this paper as well as those on Moos KV2/1241, 1242.

historian.¹¹ While these documents may sometimes be questionable in terms of potential exaggerations or human error, they divulge much in terms of the actors, motivations and actions of the intelligence and espionage world that would not have otherwise been revealed. McLoughlin uses a wide variety of secondary source material that helps to contextualise Goold-Verschoye's biography. Case in point is McLoughlin's use of Wendy Z. Goldman's *Women the State and Revolution, Soviet Family and Social Life 1917-1936* to relate how life in the U.S.S.R was in reality in comparison to Goold-Verschoye's idealisations of it for his lover Moos and himself. McLoughlin's use of primary and secondary sources is therefore legitimate in terms of what can be truly discerned about Brian Goold-Verschoye's life.

One of the early driving forces behind the young Irishman's move to England was his nationality. Tensions between the two nations fuelled some Irishmen like Goold-Verschoye, as "For Irish radicals, the USSR was also attractive because it was anti-imperialist, the greatest threat to the British Empire until the rise of Hitler."¹² In becoming a Communist in Ireland, a new avenue to express dissatisfaction and tensions with their colonial neighbour allowed Irish men such as Goold-Verschoye to fight for what they thought ideologically was right. Not only was he fighting what he saw as the dangerous fascist ideology, but was concurrently expressing dismay at the appeasement policies of the traditional enemy of his own nation. This attitude can also be seen in the motivations of other Irish Communists such as Phil McBride who, like Goold-Verschoye, went abroad to fight the fascists as depicted in Robert Stradling's *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War* and Peter O' Connor's *A Solider of Liberty: Recollections of a Socialist*

¹¹ McLoughlin talked with Sheila on June 30 1989. See McLoughlin ref. 7 chapter "Youngest Son of the Manor House", *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*.

¹² Barry McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*, (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 4.

and Anti-Fascist Fighter.¹³ However, as will be seen in the case with Goold-Verschoyle, his ideology shifted to a large scale world view that took into account more than just Anglo-Irish tensions. While these views may have permeated his idealisations of Soviet lines of thinking as a youth, it was to be in England that his support for Communism took on a more international context that went beyond simply the Irish question. Rather he became interested in Communism and anti-fascism on a world stage.

Goold-Verschoyle's motivation to serve in the Communist cause was compounded by the fact that his older brother, Neil, was a committed Communist and anti-fascist who was married to a Soviet citizen, was recruited in the Soviet intelligence services and would later live in the U.S.S.R. McLoughlin emphasizes that, "Brian, who in his formative years at least, looked up to Neil as a role model."¹⁴ The MI5 files on Goold-Verschoyle also document him visiting his brother in the U.S.S.R on more than one occasion and having regular communication with him in the hope of furthering the Soviet cause.¹⁵ Along similar lines, his neighbours growing up (and especially one Francis Fforde) 'got Communism' in an international respect and undoubtedly held many discussions with him on the possibilities of what it could achieve. Moreover, his college roommates were Communists; this also speaks to the communist movements at universities like Cambridge that would produce the Cambridge spies as well as reinforces how he started developing his world view of Communism.¹⁶

¹³ Robert Stradling *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) Peter O' Connor. *A Solider of Liberty: Recollections of a Socialist and Anti-Fascist Fighter* (Dublin: Reprint Ltd. 1996).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁵ KV 2 817 " JB-4/R4 Testimony of Charlotte Moos: Brian's Journeys to Russia", April 25, 1940,1.-4.

¹⁶ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of the Stalinist Terror*,123.

Anti-fascism was a primary factor in Goold-Verschoyle's admiration of the communist beliefs, which were quite similar to the other Soviet spies working in Britain such as the aforementioned Cambridge Five. McLoughlin argues that, "Brian Goold-Verschoyle, at first glance, seems to belong to the former group: upper middle-class origin, public school education, a gift for languages, long terms of domicile in the United Kingdom, membership of the CPGB and a British passport."¹⁷ In examining the other studies that deal specifically with these other more famous spies, this is proven time and time again. Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev's *The Crown Jewels*, Nigel West's *Molehunt*, Yuri Modin's *My Five Cambridge Friends*, and Gordon Brook-Shepherd's *The Storm Petrels* are examples of texts that focus extensively on these more famous spies and elucidate the commonalities between them.

In contrasting these works with the MI5 files on Goold-Verschoyle and McLoughlin's biographical work on him, the commonalities far exceed the simplistic elements that these people were Soviet spies living in the United Kingdom. The most basic example of this is the very name given to the Cambridge spies. They all received upper class post secondary education at Cambridge; Goold-Verschoyle similarly received an upper class education in going to elite private boarding schools his whole life such as Marlborough in England. What the historiography lacks however in failing to group him with this group is the significance of their post-education careers in terms of what they did and what they represented. While the aforementioned texts that deal with the Cambridge Five detail how they were significant, the ones that note Goold-Verschoyle alternatively do not. This in turn connotes a skewed image of intelligence and espionage in interwar Britain.

¹⁷ Ibid., 117.

What follows is a study of Goold-Verschoye as an individual case and as someone representative of a larger set of persons who not only served a cause in the secret world against their own state, but on behalf of something larger than themselves in a decade, the 1930s, that saw many such endeavours. This paper does not make the claim that he was more important than other agents like the Cambridge Five; rather that his actions as a Soviet agent were as important as these people's and heretofore have not been acknowledged because he has been conventionally portrayed as a technician and courier as opposed to actual spy. However, it must be remembered that without him acting as courier for the documents that the abovementioned agents were smuggling, then nothing could have been produced from them and the intelligence would have gone to waste at the rate in which it was being produced. Moreover, the various Soviet networks operating throughout Northern Europe (Netherlands, France, and Britain) could not have been so successfully tied together. Therefore, within the bounds of what follows there is no scale or measure of importance in technical or numerical data, but rather the argument that Goold-Verschoye as a representative of the lower level agent should find their rightful place in our portrait of this conflict and their historical agency understood alongside the better known and even sensationalised spies.

While it is difficult to measure the importance of an agent like Goold-Verschoye because there has been conventionally less documentation and secondary source material on him, the recent release of MI5's KV2 series of de-classified files provides noteworthy evidence on his importance to the Soviet espionage networks of interwar Britain. As will become clear in the study, MI5's aim as a counter-intelligence agency led them to be suspect of him almost immediately as his application to live in England went through; this allows historians to examine

his actions from his earliest forays into the Communist Party of Great Britain to his later actions in the Spanish Civil War. It is with this knowledge and these files that this study seeks to establish historical agency for the lower level agents like Goold-Verschoye, and provide them with the necessary respect that they deserve.

However, the idea of agency is complex and is a term that can be thrown around to mean various things to various people. This is especially true in looking at how MI5 viewed Goold-Verschoye and more generally how they viewed most suspected Soviet agents. In the historiography thus far on the MI5 and of intelligence and espionage, spies and Soviet agents are treated generally two ways in terms of whatever diminutive existing historical agency they already have. Firstly, they are written about in texts that focus on the intelligence agencies and shed little light on the spies themselves, which my paper intends to do through use of primary source materials on Goold-Verschoye. A prime example of this is Christopher Andrew's official history that is produced of MI5, *Defend the Realm*. In examining the text, the spies and agents that gave MI5 its very purpose in existing are given very little attention. Instead, these men and women are mentioned only when it comes to detailing MI5's exploits in the interwar period. No attention is paid to the spies themselves as individuals and texts such as these give historical agency to the spies and agents insofar as identifying their existence, but not significance. Little can be gleaned from texts such as these on agents and spies because these works are primarily institutional histories which provide little information on the people that MI5 dealt with. There is no evidence in these works on what the MI5 thought of these agents or spies, why they took the approach they did (if any), or moreover what the policy was for understanding these people in order to understand them and subsequently catch them. Goold-Verscholye is just such an

example of this, in that in all the existing texts in the historiography of the intelligence and espionage, his existence is oftentimes confined to a paragraph detailing that he was a courier for the three main Soviet spy rings in the England. There is no analysis on motivations and no effort is made to understand him as an individual or as part of a wider drama. There is also no serious analysis of how MI5 sought to understand such agents in general. This leads to a huge gap in the historiography of British intelligence and counter-intelligence in 1930s Europe. The agency of actors such as Goold-Verschoyle in this respect is limited to being mentioned in these institutional histories. This is especially problematic for the lesser known agents because they receive significantly less attention than the well known spies to begin with.

The second way in which agency is sometimes accorded to agents and spies is in terms of biography or narrative. Autobiographical works such as Yuri Modin's *My Five Cambridge Friends*¹⁸ usually detail how agents operated, how they got into the spy game and reminisce about encounters and relationships between the agents. In this respect, the spies or agents are being given historical agency for their actions as individuals in terms of their production of materials, how they operated, and to a lesser extent, some of their relationships amongst each other. However, again the idea of including their motivations, ideology and conceptualising the fight for what is right versus what is wrong are misplaced notions at the hand of these often narrative texts. While providing invaluable information that is undoubtedly significant for analysing intelligence and espionage in the interwar period, these texts similarly leave a

¹⁸ Yuri Modin was the Soviet KGB agent controller for the Cambridge Five and personally met with them on occasion. He also helped direct the defections of Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess. See Yuri Modin's *My Five Cambridge Friends* (London: Headline Publishing 1994).

substantial gap to be filled, just like the abovementioned institutional metanarrative histories which this paper hopes to develop.

The existing historiography then leaves much to be examined in terms of the more human element of intelligence and espionage, and Goold-Verschoyle is a perfect example of someone who can bring this element to the fore. By examining Goold-Verscholye and his interactions with counter-intelligence in interwar Great Britain and Northern Europe, an understanding of how ideological motivations, the idea of what is right versus wrong and a more extensive understanding of how spy networks operated can be developed. This will be done through first addressing the MI5 primary source declassified files on Goold-Verschoyle. It will allow historians to better understand the counter-intelligence agencies such as the MI5 that targeted Goold-Verschoyle and concomitantly examine how they understood the threat that he represented while developing a portrait of how they pursued agents like him. What follows will address why he was significant by tracing his impact throughout the various spy networks both in Europe and specifically in the United Kingdom. This will be done through analysis of the Goold-Verschoyle KV2 files as well as those of Walter Krivitsky, Goold-Verschoyle's handler. Secondary sources which discuss the spy networks will also be used to understand the impact of these networks. Lastly, I will analyse his importance in light of the Spanish Civil War -- he was sent there on behalf of the O.G.P.U in order to fight against the fascist forces, while training other agents on behalf of the Soviet state. Sadly this would be the end of Goold-Verschoyle's active duty with the O.G.P.U and Soviet intelligence as well as his life.

The Idea of Historical Agency in Relation to MI5 and Goold-Verschoye

Examining the MI5 and its understanding of Goold-Verschoye in order to improve our understanding of his historical importance and what he represents is especially important because of the impact that the individuals can have on institutions. Whereas institutional histories such as the aforementioned ones by Andrew, or West largely focus on the metanarrative approach to understanding the facts of the MI5, they accord little value to the individuals it dealt with or that operated within it. Particularly useful in understanding this is *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence* ed. by Loch K Johnson which helps identify just how important the individual is in relation to the institution. In respect to Goold-Verschoye then, it is possible to learn not only what the intelligence agency thought of him, but more importantly how he impacted it and it impacted him as representative of a larger set of lower level agents, which has yet to be done in the existing historiography. While he was never officially caught by the MI5, the de-classified files provide substantial information on him and the institution's dealings with him. It is possible to therefore glean an understanding of the institution that has been previously ignored while understanding what it thought of him.

In Peter Gills' "Theories of Intelligence", the author notes that of intelligence studies thus far,

our agenda consists of macro and structural issues; clearly we need to consider actors also-what is the contribution to intelligence of the people working within it, individually and in small groups? How are they recruited, what are the consequences of vetting, and how are they trained or managed? In addition to structures therefore,

we must pay attention to the impact of organizational cultures on intelligence agencies.¹⁹

This agency afforded to the individual in influencing the structures that surrounded them is an important theoretical outlook or approach for historians because, as in the cases of individuals like Goold-Verschoyle or the very agents assigned to watch him, these people were shaping history as well as operating within the framework of the counter-intelligence systems during this period.

In assessing the KV2 series files that were released on Goold-Verschoyle, it must be acknowledged that the files themselves are part of a new wave of historical evidence in that they are part of previously unreleased classified files of the state. In the wake of the ending of the Cold War in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the ensuing policies such as *Glasnost*,²⁰ archives throughout Europe started opening their doors to outsiders such as historians who had previously never had a chance to examine their contents. As Richard Thurlow identifies,

For the historian the failure to open the records of Britain's intelligence and security communities has represented the main problem in assessing the impact and contribution of the secret world to twentieth century history. Indeed, such was the caution of the authorities, that even as recently as the Thatcher years the government still tried to maintain that the very existence of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) was still a state secret.²¹

¹⁹Peter Gill, "Theories of Intelligence" in *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, ed. Loch K Johnson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 50.

²⁰Glasnost was a Soviet policy of openness and transparency as well as freedom of information on behalf of the Soviet government under Mikhail Gorbachev. This policy led Western Powers to take similar action later on. See Richard Thurlow's, "The charm offensive: The 'coming out of MI5", *Intelligence and National Security*, 15: 1 (2000).

²¹Ibid.,183.

What this means then is that while intelligence and espionage were and continue to be vital elements of the state and protecting it, their impact was previously immeasurable because their work was essentially hidden from the public for the 'security of the state'. Therefore not only did historians lack the appropriate evidence to examine how intelligence and espionage operated, they also lacked the evidence to understand the people involved in it and how they were affected by it and in turn affected it.

While there were a select few accounts of the MI5 being made publically notable, such as Walter Krivitsky's defection in 1937, or the confessions of respective spies like Anthony Blunt (of the Cambridge Five), the institution remained largely secretive. As this relates to Goold-Verschoyle, any information collected on him was essentially non-existent in relation to the public sphere up until the release of these files in 2002. While several-autobiographical works like the aforementioned work by Modin, or Krivitsky mention meetings Goold-Verschoyle, there was no mention of him as a potential threat to the state or his significance. With the release of these files and the information contained within them, what ensues will assess what the MI5 thought of Goold-Verschoyle and lower level agents like him. This has yet to be examined within the historiography of intelligence and espionage in interwar Britain. It will also simultaneously provide insight into the more humanistic element of the intelligence agency, whereas previous histories have only framed MI5 in the context of its institutional framework in narrative forms.

The Files Themselves

The total number of reports in the KV2 817 files that specifically deal with Goold-Verschoye number approximately 95. It includes correspondence between the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, various police agencies and the MI5, as well as copies of letters and memorandums from Goold-Verschoye himself, his mother and documentation on others he associated with, such as his lover Charlotte Moos. The files begin in 1931 when the MI5 first became aware of Goold-Verschoye because of his application to the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B).²² He had arrived in England from Ireland in 1929 for an apprenticeship at the English Electric Works in Stafford and was still quite young and idealistic, at the age of only 19.²³ At the onset of the files, little is known about him other than his age, occupation and the fact that he had an older brother Neil, who had left for the U.S.S.R.²⁴ As mentioned above, the younger Brian Goold-Verschoye was heavily influenced by his older brother Neil, who had in fact lived in London and attended Communist meetings prior to his departure to the Continent.²⁵ However, as can be seen later in the files, he was much more idealistic and driven to the Communist cause and lifestyle than his older brother, which would unfortunately lead to his demise.²⁶

In analysing Goold-Verschoye through the MI5's understanding of him, the picture that emerges is one of a highly idealistic and eccentric young man, who did not get along especially

²² This institution as will be seen later was a somewhat significant stepping stone for Goold-Verschoye to establish himself as a Soviet agent.

²³ KV 2 817 "To Commissioner of Police (Special Branch) N.S.Y", July 24, 1931.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ KV 2 810 "Note on the Goold-Verschoye Family", July 1940. 1-4.

²⁶ In several of the files, it is seen that Brian insists on going to U.S.S.R despite being potentially exposed because he admired the Communist state so much. See KV2 817 files "Brian's journeys to Russia".

well with others. Though he did have a few Communist acquaintances through his involvement in the Communist Party of Great Britain as well as the other Soviet O.G.P.U.²⁷ agents he worked with, he largely kept to himself within his private residence as several of the reports state. For example, reconnaissance of Goold- Verschoyle led agents to note that, “he spends a good deal of time alone in his private residence reading”²⁸ or that “he is studious but very reticent and most of his time, when not at work, is spent reading Russian literature and Communist papers.”²⁹ Moreover the MI5 agents and police watching him could not seem to understand his lifestyle as “his outside movements and hours are very irregular-he occasionally leaves the house between 4 and 5 a.m.”³⁰

What does this say then about lower-level agents like Goold-Verschoyle? The picture that emerges portrays a semi-hermetic ideologue that occasionally left the house, but the agents did not know why. Though they had been keeping watch over him for months, they could not fully develop an understanding of him or his habits, and yet developed a picture of him that suggested he was potentially threatening. MI5 had also lost track of the nature of his work after his apprenticeship at the Electric Works had expired, but maintained regular surveillance of him in order to continue to develop an understanding of what it was that he did. The result then from first glance at the MI5 reports on him is that the agents developed a picture of him as somewhat of an outsider and an oddity. This was because they had no conception early on as to what his motivations were and what he could be doing. Goold-

²⁷ O.G.P.U was essentially the Secret police of the Soviet Union until 1934. It also concerned itself with intelligence and counter-Soviet activity in the West. See Gordon Brook Shepherd’s *The Storm Petrels* for an analysis of their methods.

²⁸ KV 2 817 "Special Branch: Metropolitan Police", November 20, 1935,1.

²⁹ KV 2 817 "To Commissioner of Police (Special Branch) N.S.Y", July 24, 1931.

³⁰ KV 2 817 "Special Branch: Metropolitan Police", November 20, 1935,2.

Verschoyle left the house at odd hours because he was in fact picking up documents from King that were copied from the Foreign Office and was delivering them to Theodore Maly who was the resident³¹ of O.G.P.U in England. He kept an inconspicuous and sheltered life because he did not want excess attention in any way shape or form directed towards him that could jeopardize his role as an O.G.P.U agent. He was motivated to intentionally compromise his role in the public sphere so that he could perform his job which he believed in was essential to helping the Communist cause in any way possible.

Brian Goold-Verschoyle, Motivations and his Significance

As alluded to above, there were ideological motivations for Goold-Verschoyle in becoming an active communist. These motivations were not steadfast throughout his life, but rather shifted with his moving to England from Ireland at the age of 19. Firstly there was the traditional Anglo-Irish rivalry, which was at this time exacerbated by the quest for identity. Ireland's continued quest for an answer to the 'national question' in relation to its dominance by its neighbour the United Kingdom had by no means dissolved in this period. Although Goold-Verschoyle, as a well-educated and highly idealistic youth engrained this into his mode of thinking as a youth, it would later take a back seat to his zest for the international aspect of the larger Communist movement.

This anti-imperialism at a young age was compounded by the effects of the Great Depression and the economic lull that came to dominate the United Kingdom and was referred

³¹ Resident in this case means the O.G.P.U agent that would be sent to a particular country with false papers and essentially supervise the spy ring and collect the intelligence from the agents and in turn send it to the U.S.S.R. Maly replaced Pieck in the English spy rings and oversaw both the Woolwich Arsenal ring as well as for King.

to as 'The Slump'.³² Although the Great Depression arguably affected the United States more than any other nation, Ireland's economic vitality was by no means great, and the support from the United Kingdom was not much better.³³ One common response to difficult times such as these was the rise of extremist or fringe political parties and ideologies, which would cater to the public in offering them a new platform or governing style that would correct the errors of the old system which had currently led them to their current problematic states.³⁴ One has only to look at both the fascist and communist states that developed in this period such as Hitler's *National Socialists*, Mussolini's *National Socialist Party* or even Stalinism in the U.S.S.R to see that platforms such as these catered to the idea of fixing a broken nation to the masses.

Communism had a very special relationship in Ireland in the interwar period because the ostensibly 'godless' Communist movement took hold in a traditionally very Catholic nation and was nowhere close to as popular as rightist movements like that of the fascists. Some undoubtedly thought, as did Goold-Verschoyle, that a new mode of thinking in adopting the Communist ideology could solve the problems inherent in their current western democratic states as well as the larger world as a whole. While religious ministers and the Papacy were anti-Communist, some disaffected individuals acted upon their motivations in the face of religious turmoil in interwar Ireland and chose a non-religious avenue to advocate for the interest of the state,³⁵ and in Goold-Verschoyle's case the larger interest of the international

³² See Rob Skidelsky *John Maynard Keynes: Hopes Betrayed, 1883-1920 Vol.1* (Viking Adult, 1986) or Isabella Marres "Economic Insecurity and Social Policy Expansion: Evidence From Interwar Europe" *International Organization* 58:4 2004 on interwar economic status'.

³³ Stradling. *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39: The Catholic Crusade*, 3.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Communist movement (or Comintern). The civil war that had plagued Ireland some ten years earlier had left large rifts of disenchanting people who were fed up with traditional methods of dealing with things, and for Goold-Verschoyle the way to deal with this was to adopt a more international approach through Communism and move to somewhere like England where there was potential to meet similarly minded people and take action.

Additionally, the disbanding or dismantling of Irish nationalist groups such as the I.R.A. in the early 1920s left many youth with no place to voice their opposition to current trends to the 'national question' or to questions in terms of international order.³⁶ With the rise of Communism, young intellectuals like Goold-Verschoyle could identify with a new ideology that provided new avenues to voice traditional discontents as well as new ones internationally. Communism was but one example of these new ideologies and was in fact the mindset that appealed to Goold-Verschoyle because of its emphasis on egalitarian society.³⁷ Yet Communism in Ireland in the interwar period compared to other more radical groups like the fascist *Blueshirts* was not a forerunner in popularity.³⁸ Because Ireland was a traditionally agricultural and agrarian economy, there was limited interest in trade unions and workers revolts, despite the similarities between the U.S.S.R and Ireland. The limited amount of communists that did in fact exist were therefore extremely dedicated to its cause, despite the traditionally weak labour movement on the left.³⁹ As one of these communists, there was little that was possible to achieve in Ireland for Goold-Verschoyle and little point in staying. Although the Communist

³⁶ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalin's Terror*, 2.

³⁷ Walter Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), 104.

³⁸ According to historian Robert Stradling, the Blueshirts were in 1933-34 "the largest non-governing fascist organization in the world."- Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 1.

³⁹ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*, 2.

Party of Ireland had been created in 1933, he had already left for England and applied for membership in the C.P.G.B by this point. Despite Ireland's issues being a motivating factor for him growing up, Goold-Verschoyle now had a bigger international scope that went beyond independence movements; he became focused on the international scene of Communism and its potential for a new world order.

His fervour for the Communist way of life however transcended the traditional motivations of Irish dislike of the English as well as the notion of Communism providing an answer for the 'national question' of Ireland in terms of its identity. It was ultimately a way of life for him, which meant that in reality Goold-Verschoyle took on a "world-view" towards the communist lifestyle that went beyond simply politics and those in the UK specifically. Although he did have Irish nationalistic and anti-Imperialistic motivations early on in his life in gravitating towards the political left, he ultimately embraced an internationalist ideology that took into account Soviet doctrine (regarding lifestyles, modes of thinking, economics) that was much larger than his own home state of Ireland's problems. His world view therefore, was just that, in that he idealised the Soviet way of life internationally and not just specifically in application to Ireland. This also helps account for his journey to Spain on behalf of the O.G.P.U in 1937 wherein he thought he was fighting for communist ideology on the world stage and not simply that of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Moreover, his conception of Communism was not dependent or relative to one man or leader's interpretation of it. As will be focused on more extensively later on in what follows, Goold-Verschoyle's disenfranchisement with Stalinism as an interpretation of Soviet ideology in the U.S.S.R and later on in Spain elucidates that his

ideology was based on his own conception of Soviet principles and related to all aspects of developing and maintaining a successful state that went beyond simply politics.

According to Walter Krivitsky, one of Goold-Verschoye's handlers, he "was an ardent Communist and idealist..." and this would lead to his demise ultimately.⁴⁰ From what can be gathered from the MI5 files on his fondness for the Soviet way of life, the picture that emerges is that he idealised a few basic principles in several aspects of a true utopian communist world.⁴¹ He believed in Soviet social principles which took into account things like eradication of classes and the poor treatment of the lower classes, economic/agrarian ideas like collectivization and mass ownership of the land and the ending of ownership of private property as well as believing in the notion that decisions on a large scale should be decided by the masses in the best interests of the larger collective.⁴² In this sense his ideology transcended the Irish state and was applicable to a world system as opposed to strictly focusing on the United Kingdom. Therefore by eventually coming to work for the O.G.P.U on an international scale, Goold-Verschoye thought he was 'fighting' for this ideology and these principles.

The MI5 reconnaissance also speaks to his commitment to Soviet principles in continually citing him as reading Russian and Communist literature in his spare time and helps to develop a picture of Goold-Verschoye as a communist and as a person. This element has heretofore been ignored in that surveillance records have been conventionally examined only insofar as to provide information on what individuals were doing as opposed what to the

⁴⁰ KV 2 817 "Brian Goold Verschoye", Date -n/a, 3.

⁴¹ In several of the files from Moos' testimony in the KV2 series, she speaks to how Goold-Verschoye talked to her about Communism as an active system which was more than simply a political ideology and elaborated on what in particular he embraced about the U.S.S.R in its attempt to model the state after these principles.

⁴² Ibid.

records could say about the individuals and their ideas/motivations. What is significant about Goold-Verschoye acting as a case study and representing more is that this romanticising of the Communist ideology pervaded his life; he wanted to move to the U.S.S.R and visited on several occasions so that he could truly embrace his idealised notions of a perfect egalitarian society, despite his Soviet handlers warning him not to in order to avoid suspicion on behalf of agencies like the MI5.⁴³ In this sense he provides an excellent example of how someone could inherit and develop the core principles of Soviet ideology and perpetuate them in his own life in order to demonstrate how intelligence and espionage studies in this time frame were relative to the individual. Goold-Verschoye had in fact visited the Soviet Union twice on his own accord and sought out work for them in any way possible without his handlers having any prior notice.⁴⁴ MI5 agents did know about him however, and were aware that he could potentially have travelled to the U.S.S.R. In relation to the MI5 files on him, understanding Goold-Verschoye's motivations helps understand how a young Irish communist such as him got caught up in the international scene of intelligence and espionage.

One may ask why focus on Goold-Verschoye and why he is significant both as a case study of a larger group of persons as well as in terms of the historiography of intelligence and espionage in interwar Europe. Moreover one may ask how his conception of Soviet ideology fit within the MI5's conception of communists or socialists operating both in the United Kingdom and internationally. In examining the early reports and reconnaissance on Goold-Verschoye by the MI5 agents, the picture that emerges is that they realised his significance, but failed to

⁴³ KV 2 817 "JB-4/R4 Testimony of Charlotte Moos: Brian's Journeys to Russia", April 25, 1940.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

really understand his motivations and the ideological underpinnings of his activities in England. Although they had identified him correctly as a Communist, they were not aware of the specific Communist ideals that he identified or agreed with.

The early surveillance composed by the MI5 agents watching Goold-Verschoye provides some material for identifying the potential human element in intelligence and espionage as well as helps to cast him as a reflection of the larger international Communist movement as opposed to strictly an Irish communist living in England. In terms of the human element, the agents that composed these reports and intelligence on him carried out their methods of analysis of him by watching his place of residence, following him to work, opening and photographing his mail as well as inquiring at work about his general habits. In essence, they were developing a human profile of him. Despite this, these early reports that the counter-intelligence agents filed leave out any indication of their assessment of his motivations or probable reasons for his odd behaviour as they were still beginning to try and understand him. They assess his actions taken, but not the motivations behind the actions, because at first, Goold-Verschoye was a conundrum to them and they could not fully develop a cohesive or logical picture as to what or who he was. However, as reconnaissance continued to develop on him, historians can get a sense of how the MI5 portrayed potential threats to the state. As well, they can identify how they operated and on what ideological grounds, which speaks to his significance as representative of a larger group of Soviet agents internationally.

Moreover Goold-Verschoye's importance as a case study can be signified by the actual files themselves, and not simply what they represent in terms of motivations, ideology and

agency. One noteworthy element of the files is that they were released in conjunction with those on John Herbert King, Henri Christian Pieck, Walter Krivitsky as well as George Whomack and Percy Glading. If historians were to gauge the relevance of Soviet agents by the company that their files kept, then this would only further prove Goold-Verschoye's significance to espionage in this period as this group is essentially responsible not only for an overwhelming amount of the intelligence that was produced in this period, but of establishing the spy networks themselves. Henri Christian Pieck was chosen by the OGPU to establish the spy networks throughout Europe and operated in France, England and the Netherlands.⁴⁵ Walter Krivitsky was eventually to become the "Chief Officer of Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe" and was responsible for monetary issues in terms of the various spy networks, while Percy Glading and George Whomack were Soviet agents that passed on military secrets and blueprints from the Woolwich Arsenal in England to the U.S.S.R. John Herbert King, was a Foreign Office cipher clerk and was arguably responsible for producing more intelligence for the Soviets than any other agent.⁴⁶ The fact that Goold-Verschoye was the courier found by Pieck that dealt with Krivitsky and handled the documents produced by King, Whomack and Glading underscores just how essential he was in maintaining these networks.

As well, the files allude to his significance in terms of the historiography of the spy rings themselves. Report number 5 helps identify early on how important knowledge of Goold-Verschoye was for the MI5. While it only contains the limited information on him in terms of his habits with his spare time, it was written from the Chief Constable of the Stafford police to

⁴⁵ Thurlow, "Soviet Spies and British Counter-Intelligence in the 1930's", 618.

⁴⁶ West, *MASK-MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 208.

the Commissioner of Police at the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, which are both important positions as their titles suggest.⁴⁷ As the files progress and the case develops with increasing intelligence and resources being devoted to him, so too does the correspondence and levels of security that deal with him. Sir Vernon Kell, who established the MI5 in its modern form and was its General Director during the period in which Goold-Verschoye lived and worked in England, made personal enquiries himself about the young Irish communist. On several occasions he consulted the head of Scotland Yard about him and if there was any additional or new information pertaining to him that would help them develop any leads on his motivations for being in England.⁴⁸ For example, on March 31, 1933, Kell writes to the Chief Constable of the Stafford Police, Colonel Hunter enquiring about Goold-Verschoye's place of employment, as well as his status with the local Communist party.⁴⁹

The fact that the head of the counter-intelligence agency (Kell) was making personal enquiries into Goold-Verschoye's status as well as his activities elucidates just how important Goold-Verschoye really was both in terms of his threat level to the state as well as what he represented to Kell. It was not only field agents and officers in the institution that were concerned with him, but rather the very head of contra-intelligence and espionage for the entire country. It is not documented whether Kell made personal enquiry into the other 25, 250+ names on the potential threats list, yet it is highly unlikely as only a certain number of agents and resources were available at any one time as identified above. In fact by 1938, there

⁴⁷ KV 2 817 "To Commissioner of Police (Special Branch) N.S.Y. From Chief Constable Stafford", July 7 1931.

⁴⁸ See- KV 2 817 "PF 41525/ DS10.", March 31 1933 Pp-1, KV 2 817 Document Titled "Staffordshire County Police, Criminal Investigation Department", April 12 1933,Pp-1, KV 2 817 Document Titled "Seditious Activities and Propaganda", June 12 1933.

⁴⁹ KV 2 817 "PF 41525/ DS10.", March 31 1933,1.

were only 26 officers involved in working in the institution.⁵⁰ This line of thinking suggests that in fact only the most important or significant potential threats were monitored and moreover only the most significant of these received the personal attention of the director of counter-intelligence.

MI5, Kell, Motivations and Reconnaissance

This increased attention was due to the nature of Goold-Verschoye's arrival in England. Almost immediately upon entry, he had applied to become a member of the C.P.G.B, which in turn roused the suspicion of Kell and his agents. This was due to the fact that the MI5 had been closely watching the Communist party of Great Britain for potential threats and traitors to the state. As Andrew identifies, "MI5 followed the formation of the British Communist Party in 1920 with as close attention as its declining resources allowed."⁵¹ As soon as Goold-Verschoye applied for membership to the party, MI5 agents began to make a file on him. His name therefore made the 'Precautionary Index' of names that could be a potential threat, and this was to be the start of intelligence developed on him.

Goold-Verschoye's relationship with the C.P.G.B was reflective of his career as a Soviet agent and also helps to contextualise the larger framework of MI5 counter-intelligence in this period in that he had pushed to be both a Soviet agent and member of the C.P.G.B. While his Soviet handlers were content to have him as an active agent in the United Kingdom, MI5 and Kell were less excited to have him as a member of the Communist Party. Kell was vociferously anti-communist as he saw Communism as one of, if not the biggest threats to national security

⁵⁰Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Official History of the MI5* (New York: Alfred a Knopf, 2009), 182.

⁵¹ Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Official History of the MI5*, 143.

and of a potentially treasonous nature. In fact, as *British Intelligence* makes clear, “without the spectre of Communism stalking the land, it is doubtful whether MI5 would have continued to exist. Fears of Communist subversion grew to be conceived of in similar terms to the ‘invasion’ fear rampant at the turn of the century.”⁵²

Kell’s suspicion of Communist, or even foreign subversion was not totally foreign in that MI5 as an institution developed in light of suspected German espionage in 1909.⁵³ The institution’s development thereafter grew because of mounting fears from mediums such as Edwardian spy novelists like William Le Queux, as well as the uncovering of a number of Catholic Plots, and undoubtedly the First World War.⁵⁴ It was during World War 1 in fact that the MI5 became a formidable institution that was essential to the security of the English state in that ‘spy mania’ was taken to a whole new level. As Andrew identifies, “War with Germany raised British spy mania to unprecedented heights.”⁵⁵ Basil Thompson, Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard wrote, “spy mania assumed a virulent epidemic form accompanied by delusions which defied treatment: it attacked all classes indiscriminately...reports flooded in of German agents planning mayhem and communicating with the enemy by a variety of improbable means. All were false alarms.”⁵⁶ During the course of the war however and despite these ‘false alarms’, the MI5 did round up a considerable number of German ‘agents’ that had been engaged in some form of espionage on some level. However, with the rise of Communism

⁵²Stephen Twigge, Edward Hampshire, Graham Macklin, *British Intelligence: Secrets, Spies and Sources*,(London: The National Archives, 2008), 29.

⁵³ Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Official History of the MI5*, 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and the development of the U.S.S.R, Kell and the MI5 had a new focus to concern themselves with.

Despite MI5's original mandate to focus solely on the British military, Kell gradually broadened MI5's aim to include civilian movements as he claimed that MI5's responsibility for military counter-subversion required it to keep track of 'civilian pro-Bolshevik movements'.⁵⁷ In the late 1920's, Kell's main concern was in fact the military, and potential subversion or infiltration of it by Soviet spies. While his suspicions would later prove to be correct in light of the Woolwich Arsenal spy ring's operations some time later, he exclusively thought that if the Soviet's agents were to penetrate the United Kingdom it would be aimed at the military.

However, with the increasing resources eventually given to MI5 its scope broadened to include Bolsheviks in general and not just specifically within the military. The US deputy military attaché to the United Kingdom stated as such that,

Officially the British MI5 is only concerned with civilian activities as they affect the army, but in reality and especially recently, they have concerned themselves in general with revolutionary and Bolshevik agents, using the Suspect List, built up during the war and since added to, as a basis for operations.⁵⁸

It was with this increased scope that Kell came to identify Goold-Verschoye as a potential threat, in that if he had not applied for membership to the C.P.G.B it is unlikely that his demure nature would have roused inquiry into him on behalf of Kell and the MI5. This was especially true because Kell conceived that all communists generally were bent on revolution and overthrowing political/social/economic trends in Western Europe at the time in favour of Soviet

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

methods/principles. The first report to the Chief Constable of police on behalf of the Stafford police chief outlines this. He writes that, "With reference to Intelligence Report No. 400 of 10th instant of Revolutionary Activities, I observe that the above named is shown as having recently applied for membership of the Communist Party."⁵⁹ The report continues that the police chief then goes on to make enquiry into the nature of Goold-Verschoyle's activities and past in the United Kingdom due to the fact that Goold-Verschoyle had applied to the Communist Party.

However the MI5's motivations in watching him were also due to his relationship with his older brother Neil. MI5 had learned that his older brother had lived in England and moved to the U.S.S.R and consequently married a Soviet woman. This did not help to ease the case against Goold-Verschoyle as being a potential threat, especially when it was later on revealed that Neil's wife had in fact been a member of the O.G.P.U herself. As identified above, he had always looked up to Neil and internalised his beliefs and interests to make them his own.

Although there is no sufficient information in the MI5 agents' reports on him to suggest that they knew of this admiration, the idea that his brother had been in the country before him and was a communist sympathiser undoubtedly did not sit well with Kell. While it must be noted that the MI5 and Special Branch had a list of potential threats to the state other than Goold-Verschoyle because of similar suspicions,⁶⁰ none of these other suspects played the role that Goold-Verschoyle did in tying together the spy networks in Britain and Europe. They turned out to be non-threatening or purely suspect and were not pursued or watched to nearly the same level as Goold-Verschoyle as MI5 had far too few resources to watch this many suspects.⁶¹ MI5

⁵⁹ KV 2 817 "To Commissioner of Police.", July 7 1931.

⁶⁰ In 1925 there was a list of approximately 25,250 names on the suspect list-Andrew, *Defend the Realm*, 143.

⁶¹ Ibid.

was therefore correct in acting on its motivations to watch him; however, it ultimately failed to capitalize on them.

The MI5 reconnaissance on Goold-Verschoye and his affiliations with the C.P.G.B contextualizes him in relation to the larger picture of intelligence and espionage in this period because it provides a previously unexamined view of how the MI5 operated in watching and developing a case on spies or foreign agents. This is especially true of the lower level agents who worked behind the scenes as well as identifying how MI5 conceptualised communists such as Goold-Verschoye in this period in terms of a humanistic perspective versus that of the conventional institutional approach.

The report between the police chief to the head of police starts off the development of reconnaissance of Goold-Verschoye. Immediately what can be learned from the files of MI5 and its operations is that because of his application to the C.P.G.B, Goold-Verschoye automatically became added to the suspect list and had a background check done in terms of his past activities as well as his character and potential for treason. This speaks to the methodology of the MI5, in that almost immediately with his entry into the country the agency had a file on him because of his ostensible political ideology. Because Communism was a global threat to MI5, it meant that Goold Verschoye was not only an enemy to Britain but was also seen as a potential traitor in adapting a foreign way of life that Kell associated as threatening to the British military. What the MI5 did not know yet however, was that to Goold-Verschoye political ideology was but only a small part of his adoption of the Soviet ideology which in actuality took into account various aspects of Soviet life.

The agents were quick to act on his application to the party, in that surveillance of him began almost immediately. The report goes on to detail that he spent most of his spare time when not working, alone reading Communist and Russian literature at his house.⁶² The police chief goes on to say that he “has not been seen to mix with or have any connection with the people in Stafford known to have Communist sympathies...”⁶³ While this information may seem somewhat inconsequential at first, it is proof that the MI5 was indeed keeping a very close eye on Goold-Verschoye and moreover that this extended beyond what he did in his spare time. It included mentioning who he was associating with in terms of potential fellow Communist ideologues. This elaborates on the relationship between how MI5 went about reporting and observing those they deemed potential Communist threats to the state. It identifies the incentives of MI5 in developing a file on suspects like Goold-Verschoye and moreover how they carried out their counter-intelligence in this period because firstly, they were communists and secondly may have acted in potentially threatening ‘Bolshevik ways’. The picture that emerges is that any potential suspect was added to the watch list and then from there, depending on other factors like familial background, other friends and known acquaintances as well as occupation and Communist Party status, one was further monitored extensively or merely kept in mind.

The MI5 reports on Goold-Verschoye demonstrate the belief on behalf of the MI5 and especially Kell, that one of the most dangerous threats to the security of the nation was the C.P.G.B because of its potential to start a revolution or conduct traitorous acts by sabotaging

⁶² KV 2 817 "Staffordshire County Police re Goold-Verschoye, Brian.", April 12 9133.

⁶³ Ibid.

state institutions. Krivitsky himself stated that the Communist Party organisation was a very real danger.⁶⁴ Moreover he was “genuinely astonished that he cannot in our press, or periodicals or in the speeches of Ministers find any indication that the British people realise the gravity of the existence of such an organisation as the Communist Part of Great Britain in time of war.”⁶⁵ According to Krivitsky, Stalin had regarded the Soviet Union as “in a war position, and from that date Communist parties and Intelligence Services have been functioning in preparation for war.”⁶⁶

While some historians would argue that monitoring the party of some 17,000-20,000 members was pedestrian because of its low membership numbers,⁶⁷ it actually was a formidable breeding ground for idealistic youth like Goold-Verschoyle and was in fact in preparation mode for war as Krivitsky had stated. Moreover, it was part of a larger international movement through the Comintern, which undoubtedly made it seem more of a threat. Although there are no concrete numbers on the amount of disaffected Irishmen like him that were in the party, he was by no means the only one. This can be safely said because of the various other Irish communists who had immigrated to England and who would later fight in the Spanish Civil War. A number of these had been members of the C.P.G.B at one point in their

⁶⁴ KV 2 804 "Chapter: The Communist Party- § 2 The Communist Party of Great Britain .", Date-n/a, 6-7.

⁶⁵ *Walter Krivitsky:MI5 Debriefing and Other Documents*, ed. Gary Kern (Riverside, California, Xenos Books, 2004), 183.

⁶⁶ KV 2 804 Document Titled "Chapter: The Communist Party- §2 –The Communist Party of Great Britain.", Date-n/a,7.

⁶⁷ Twigge, Hampshire, Macklin, *British Intelligence: Secrets, Spies and Sources*, 29.

lives.⁶⁸ Although these men may have shared similar ideological mindsets as Goold-Verschoyle, they by no means can help to shape the historiography of intelligence and espionage like him.

Goold-Verschoyle's relationship with the C.P.G.B and other communists however evolved to become more active. A report dated June 1, 1933, details how in fact contrary to earlier intelligence reports on him not associating with other Communist sympathisers, he actually is becoming quite prominent in terms of the local Communist community. The police chief reported to Kell that,

We have received information from a confidential source that Harold I. Phipstone... invited Stephen Jacoby, a young Birmingham Communist (who is well known to you)...to address a meeting at the Friends Hall...and it was suggested that he should be accompanied by a Mr. Goold-Verschoyle.⁶⁹

With this information, it was becoming clear that Goold-Verschoyle was more of a potential threat to the state according to Kell's anti-Communist ideology, as he continued his apprenticeship in England. Because of this, intelligence on him kept being generated despite the few agents and resources MI5 had at its regular disposal.⁷⁰

Goold-Verschoyle was very quick to act in becoming more than just an associate of well documented suspected Communists in the United Kingdom however. It was reported that some eight days after his association with Jacoby that he had in fact become the organiser of local Communist branch of the C.P.G.B in Stafford.⁷¹ This jump to local party leadership undoubtedly hinted that he was in fact more of a threat than originally thought by both Kell and

⁶⁸ See- Peter O' Connor, *A Solider of Liberty: Recollections of a Socialist and Anti- Fascist Fighter & Stradling, The Irish and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict.*

⁶⁹ KV 2 817 "Steven Jacoby and Harold J. Phipstone.", June 1 1933.

⁷⁰ In 1938 for example, the MI5 only had 26 officers operating within it and an estimated 40 actual agents. Andrew, *Defend the Realm*, 182.

⁷¹ KV 2 817 "PF 41426/ D.S 10.", June 9, 1933,1.

his agents. With this move, surveillance of him became much more important and consistent in accordance to Report No. 400 on Revolutionary Activities within Great Britain. It was at this point that the agency became much more involved with counter-intelligence on him. The agents began to open and photograph his mail to see if there was any subversive material that could lead him into questioning. Although there was no evidence of any correspondence with the Soviets per se within what was released from the files, there are copies of correspondence between the younger Brian Goold-Verschoye and his older brother Neil from the U.S.S.R which unquestionably exacerbated their potential case against him being a threat.

Though contact between him and his brother was limited throughout the years, their admiration for the Communist ideology had kept them in touch. An intercepted telegram that the MI5 case file contains from the older Neil in the U.S.S.R to Brian explains that he cannot leave the country and in turn asks for Brian's phone number so that he can contact him. The reason that Brian had been contacting Neil and asking him to come to United Kingdom was so that Brian could be further put into contact with the Soviet Union in order to potentially render his services for them according to later testimony by Moos.⁷²

Although the files do not explicitly state the exact manner in which he became an agent according to the MI5 agents' surveillance, there were several avenues through which it is likely he became active. It is highly likely that he had the opportunity to become an agent through Cadres Department of the Communist International, which had in fact received a long biographical report on him in 1933 that explicitly stated that he could read and speak German, Russian, and French as well as his native English. Moreover, he had acted on his dreams of

⁷² KV 2 817 " JB-4/R4 Testimony of Charlotte Moos: Brian's Journeys to Russia", April 25 1940.

visiting the U.S.S.R and had travelled there in 1933. This trip however was not for social reasons as Neil, his older brother, had left the Continent for England already. Therefore by visiting the U.S.S.R which was the birthplace of the very ideals that he tried to live his life by, Goold-Verschoye was ultimately and perhaps naively somehow fulfilling his dreams of visiting a utopian Communist society.

Upon return from this trip, MI5 agents reported that Goold-Verschoye had almost immediately stepped down as the leader of the local branch of the C.P.G.B.⁷³ Given the timing of this move and its novel character, it is likely that Goold-Verschoye has been recruited to become an agent during this trip. Other agents, such as members of the Cambridge Five also distanced themselves from the C.P.G.B. in order to reduce the likelihood of their discovery.⁷⁴ The move confounded the MI5 agents assigned to him who could not fully understand his motivations for doing this. He switched locations of residence at the behest of his handlers to get a fresh start. The reports show that MI5 was aware of his movement to the new place of residence, yet they cannot exactly decode why it is that he has moved. File number 21 identifies that, "During the course of enquiries I {agent Smith of Special Branch} ascertained that Brian Goold-Verschoye... will shortly be residing at 9 Lawn Road...where he will occupy a large unfurnished room. It is believed that he is arranging for the installation of a telephone."⁷⁵ The significance of the telephone remark is quite obvious, in that MI5 was planning on tapping the phone pending its installation. What makes this more noteworthy is that MI5 could only

⁷³ KV 2 817 "Brian Goold-Verschoye.", Date-n/a.

⁷⁴ Other Soviet agents pretended to be fascists to avoid being cast as Communist spies. Goold-Verschoye essentially stopped drawing attention to himself by not attending meetings and being the leader of the Stafford branch of the C.P.G.B. The MI5 surveillance in this period reported very little on Goold-Verschoye's life as an active Communist. As well, see McLoughlin (139) who identifies that Brian had "dropped out of political life."

⁷⁵ KV 2 817 "S.B. 301/ C.M.C 459. Brian Goold-Verschoye", August 16 1935.

monitor approximately 38 phones throughout the entire country at one time. The fact that his phone was in fact to eventually become one of the select few that was tapped reflects how highly MI5 thought of him as a threat, and yet they had no real sound knowledge that he was in fact a Soviet agent. Rather this relates to their motivations in beginning to monitor him, in that he was an Irish Communist and moreover had a brother who had lived in the U.S.S.R. MI5's conception of Goold-Verschoyle as a Communist therefore broadened to see him in an international scope well beyond just simply focusing on Anglo-Irish relations.

MI5's agents also continued to monitor those who Goold-Verschoyle associated with. However, several elements had changed on his return from a trip to the Soviet Union in 1933. Aside from his new location, MI5 agents recorded that he had a new potential love interest. Charlotte Moos had been his German teacher in England, with whom he subsequently developed a relationship. He had been taking German lessons outside of his apprenticeship at the English Electric Works. Though Moos was already married to a German economist named Siegfried Moos, the two developed a romance of sorts, which is actually quite significant because it would later be Moos who gave much of the testimony on Goold-Verschoyle that helps elaborate on his significance to the spy rings as well as speaking to the ways in which Goold-Verschoyle thought and acted. In fact, MI5 surveillance noted that she had accompanied him on several outings throughout London before they were to eventually discover the truth about the young couple. Agent Kitchener reported in 1935, that Goold-Verschoyle and his love interest Charlotte Moos, whom Krivitsky later claimed was a Soviet agent, had been "seen

recently in the flat occupied by Mrs. Edith Tudor-Hart.”⁷⁶ The interesting thing about this report is that Tudor-Hart herself was a spy for the Soviet Union in this period and Goold-Verschoyle had in fact been in her flat delivering the Foreign Office documents from King that would be photographed.⁷⁷ These documents would then be delivered to Theodore Maly who was the OGPU legal resident in England who would then relay them to the U.S.S.R.⁷⁸

Money was also carried from the Soviet Foreign Embassy to the agents operating in the spy rings in exchange for their work.⁷⁹ Although there is no substantial consistent evidence relating to if Goold-Verschoyle had handled and photographed the documents himself at Tudor-Hart’s flat, the reconnaissance reveals that he was there several times and for longer than just a quick drop off, which suggests that ultimately he was aware of how significant the documents he was dealing with were. As well, his own confession when he was detained in a Soviet prison in 1937, revealed that he had “destroyed a film after developing, forgetting that a senior colleague should have been present when the film-roll was burned”⁸⁰ in London. Therefore he had actually been handling and reviewing the documents that he had been couriering from King which speaks to his actual significance as an agent, as opposed to a young naive idealist caught up in a world in which he failed to understand. Goold-Verschoyle knew what he was doing and what the documents contained undeniably—something that contradicts Krivitsky’s claims about his role as solely a courier. Therefore while MI5 was in fact following Goold-Verschoyle to these locations they had no real substantial evidence on what was going

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of the Stalinist Terror*, 144.

⁷⁸ West, *MASK- MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 208.

⁷⁹ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of the Stalinist Terror*, 144.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

on inside or how significant his actions and role truly was, and moreover what he could represent.

However, Moos was not totally aware of what exactly Goold-Verschoye had been doing either at first, but had gradually found out because of her constant presence with him. He had told her vague stories about what he did, and had in fact brought her on these outings around London. Generally, however, he maintained the impression that everything he was doing was legitimate until his arrival in the U.S.S.R. He had brought Moos to the U.S.S.R with him on one of his trips to meet his handlers, where he hoped that the two might stay forever and build a life together. However, when Goold-Verschoye was sent to Spain as a radio operator for the Soviets in the Spanish Civil War and consequently a victim of Stalin's purges, it was ultimately Moos's decision to come clean on him at the behest of Krivitsky, who had now defected to the United States and convinced MI5 she was a Soviet agent as well.⁸¹

Through examining Moos's statements to MI5, it is possible to get an understanding of how significant Goold-Verschoye was to both the MI5 and the Soviets. The MI5 examiners were relentless with Moos and demanded to know everything possible about Goold-Verschoye and his activities both abroad and within the country. Although the questioning is obviously standard practice in terms of trying to ascertain as much information as possible, her testimony to them is largely revealing of his work for the Soviets and its significance. Through her statements, the MI5 was able to learn the real reasoning that he had travelled to the U.S.S.R, which was to get in touch with his Soviet handlers. Moreover, they were able to learn the nature of his activity in his stopovers in The Hague and Paris, which was to meet Krivitsky and

⁸¹ KV 2 817 "Brian Goold-Verschoye." Date-n/a.

Pieck specifically and set up and plan the spy networks in the United Kingdom and the aforementioned Paris and Hague.

Moos's testimony however is also significant in what it details about Goold-Verschoye and how ideology and non-political motivations drove some to perform acts of espionage in this period because she was present during some of his assignments, as well as intimate with him. For example, what her testimony can identify that MI5 agents surveillance would not be able to, is that she thought Goold-Verschoye was in reality too high strung and idealistic to be a spy or cut out for such type of work.⁸² Moreover she could identify that he truly idealised the Soviet Union and wished for nothing else than to live there with her.⁸³ His sense of right versus wrong was therefore guided by a sense of morality that was based on how he perceived the Soviet Union would treat people as opposed to how England for example, did. His international conception of the Communist ideology permeated his sense of moral rightness in that its ostensible aims (in his views) provided a lifestyle wholly superior to that of Great Britain, and moreover the rest of the non-Communist world. Moos's recollections of conversation with him (which would often lead to her observations like the above) led to her realisation that he was totally engrained in the Soviet ideology, and that the reality of what he was doing as an agent was legitimised by this.

Another significant person in the files to help elaborate this is Goold-Verschoye's mother, who had been in regular contact with both her son as well as Moos following Goold-Verschoye's departure to the frontlines of the Spanish Civil War. Mrs. Goold-Verschoye was

⁸² KV 2 817 "JB-3/84.Brian Goold-Verschoye.", Retrieved November 10 1951, 4.

⁸³ Ibid.

also aware of her son's ideological drive as shown in her concern in her correspondence with Krivitsky. She wrote to Krivitsky asking if he knew anything concerning the whereabouts and activities of Goold-Verschoye after his involvement and disappearance in the Spanish Civil War because she was gravely concerned that he would not make it back.⁸⁴ He had been writing to her off and on from Spain according to her letters to Krivitsky, and outlined that he had become disenchanted with his work there and moreover that his very ideals that he lived by were becoming questionable in reflection of Stalin's policy in Spain.

The MI5 was able to make copies of the letters which essentially ask for aid in any way possible to bring the young O.G.P.U agent home and detail correspondence between her and the Soviet ambassador in the Foreign Office. The correspondence between the Foreign Office essentially connotes that the case with Goold-Verschoye is an extremely delicate matter in light of the negotiations ongoing between U.S.S.R and Britain in August 1939.⁸⁵ The ambassador continued that should Mrs. Goold-Verschoye continue to push the matter, it could go too far and jeopardize relations between the two nations.⁸⁶ The significance of this is quite revealing, in that any negotiations or pressing concerning the whereabouts of Goold-Verschoye could have resulted in influencing the relations and negotiations between the two nations which had become strained in light of the Spanish Civil War and England's lack of action in it.

Because of the lack of aid through the Foreign Office for her son, Mrs. Goold-Verschoye pleaded with Krivitsky to help as he was "the only person to help save his life for us as you

⁸⁴ See KV 2 817 "Copy of Correspondence from Mrs. Goold-Verschoye to Krivitsky.", May 8 1939 1- 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

{Krivitsky} knew him personally during all his adventures.”⁸⁷ The fact that she was relying on the “Chief Officer of Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe” to vouch for or save her son hints at the significance of the relationship between Goold-Verschoye and Krivitsky. Moreover, as touched on above, Krivitsky was aware of how ideologically driven Goold-Verschoye was, and so was his mother. This indisputably would have exacerbated her fears about her son’s welfare in Spain, and rightly so, for it was in fact his dissolution with Stalin’s policy in Spain that would lead to his demise at the hands of the Great Purge of 1937.

1937, The Spanish Civil War, Ideology and Agency

The year 1937 was perhaps the most significant year in terms of truly understanding how ideology, motivations, and agency operated in the world of Anglo-Soviet espionage in relation to Goold-Verschoye. As noted above, it was this year in which he met his demise because of a clash in ideology and policy in the Spanish conflict. Operating as a radio transmitter for the N.K.V.D on behalf of the Popular Front government (specifically Stalin’s PCE), Goold-Verschoye was working for the Abramoff organization which was essentially Soviet Intelligence’s main organization for maintaining contact with other Communist parties throughout the World.⁸⁸ According to Moos’s testimony, his role in Spain was to train other intelligence agents in the operation of radio transmitters in code so that they could maintain contact with Communist Parties such as the C.P.G.B.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ KV 2 817 "Copy of Correspondence from Mrs. Goold-Verschoye to Krivitsky.", August 10 1939,1.

⁸⁸ KV 2 804 Document Titled "Chapter: The Communist Party- The Abramoff School ." Date-n/a,3.

⁸⁹ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*, 171.

According to the files on Krivitsky, as well as Moos's testimony, there were two reasons why Goold-Verschoye's ideology had gotten him into trouble in Spain. Firstly, he was disenchanted with the role of the Stalinist Soviet military advisors of the P.C.E, who he thought essentially used their position to their advantage in Spain and taken over the local towns and cities without the consent or serious input of both the Spanish people as well as the various left-wing Marxist movements that had already developed in the area such as the P.O.U.M.

Secondly, and closely related, Goold-Verschoye disliked the systematic surveillance and persecution of dissidents who did not agree with the Soviet advisor's policies.⁹⁰ Although the number of members of the P.O.U.M who disappeared to Gulags, or just simply murdered in Spain, is not definitively known, the number was enough to disenchant him with his admiration for the Soviet Union.⁹¹ Under the direction of Alexander Orlov, Republican left-wing opponents to the P.C.E in groups such as the aforementioned P.O.U.M, the National Confederation of Trajabo (C.N.T) and Federacion Anarquista Iberica (F.A.I) were assassinated or sent to Gulags by N.K.V.D agents so that Stalin could further establish the P.C.E as the formidable leading group and head of the Popular Front government.⁹² He worked as a radio transmitter for the N.K.V.D in analysing and relaying messages about what in fact was going on behind the scenes (and sometimes blatantly).⁹³ At this point Goold-Verschoye was more than simply a courier or radio operator; he was an active agent who was not only bearing witness to the corruption of his conception of how Soviet principles should operate, but also the deaths and imprisonment of many people who were targeted because of their own ideologies and beliefs. Because of this he

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

became resentful of both his role in Spain as well as the N.K.V.D whom he worked for and believed in previous to going to Spain. We know from testimony from Goold-Verschoyle in a Soviet prison in the northern U.S.S.R in 1937 that he had been developing photographs and film-rolls as part of his job in Spain. There were undoubtedly pictures of assassinations and deaths as a result of differences in ideology that he was witness to and he could have easily had enough testimony to implicate several higher ranking N.K.V.D officers for their acts in the Civil War. This speaks to his significance once again in that he was not merely a radio operator, but was in fact a trained agent who dealt with Soviet intelligence against other Marxist groups like the P.O.U.M, the F.A.I and C.N.T.⁹⁴

Additionally, the infighting within the Republican Popular Front in Spain elucidated to Goold-Verschoyle that the Soviet policy that Stalin and the P.C.E was pursuing was not in line with his conception of how the Comintern should operate. He could not associate his idealised morally correct conception of Communism with the version that the Soviet advisors were pursuing in liquidating all of these people who were also fighting against the fascist cause like him. This clash was not only because of the liquidations and ideology, but the power struggle between some of the Soviet advisors in the N.K.V.D and P.C.E, which in turn separated the forces into various camps that tried to use anti-Communist ideology against each other to get the upper hand.⁹⁵ Claims of 'Trotskyist' behaviour abounded and would eventually come to find Goold-Verschoyle as well, wherein he shifted from an ostensible traitor to Great Britain to a traitor of the U.S.S.R.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 172.

As Goold-Verschoye's foray into Spain relates to motivations, ideology and quest for what is right in terms of developing agency, it must be acknowledged that various other Irishmen had gone to Spain in order to fight against the fascist forces as part of the International Brigade.⁹⁶ Robert Stradling's *The Irish and the Spanish Civil war 1936-1939: Crusades in Conflict* identifies other Communist Irishmen, who like Goold-Verschoye had gone to Spain in the hope that they could serve some role in toppling the fascist forces under Franco. Although many Irishmen were fascists themselves and supported Franco and his nationalist forces, there were others like Goold-Verschoye who perhaps thought in an international Communist context and journeyed to Spain to fight against the fascist ideology from spreading throughout Europe. Each of these men had their own motivations and ideology as to why it was significant to intervene, just as Goold-Verschoye did. Stradling identifies two examples of Irishmen, Phil McBride and Tom Murphy to further contextualise this in that for McBride the persecution of the Catholic Church in Spain was his motivating factor, while anti-fascism motivated Murphy to join.⁹⁷ In this sense several ideological factors come to the fore. Spain was essentially the ideological clash between the fascist and communist ideology and men such as Goold-Verschoye or Murphy were there to fight against it, while other Irishmen such as Eoin O'Duffy fought on behalf of the fascists. However, there is a distinction to be made between these other Irishmen and Goold-Verschoye. While all of them may have propounded an international attitude towards Communism, they, unlike Goold-Verschoye could fight as part of

⁹⁶See Robert Stradling's *The Irish and the Spanish Civil war 1936-1939: Crusades in Conflict*, Peter O'Connor's *A Soldier of Liberty: Recollections of a Socialist and Anti-Fascist Fighter* or Patrick Byrne's *The Irish Republican Congress*.

⁹⁷ Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 7.

a so-called 'international force',⁹⁸ while he was ostensibly fighting for the N.K.V.D and more specifically Stalin's P.C.E. This, along with the abovementioned factors of corruption, and assassinations in turn dissuaded him from the 'fight for Communism' and would eventually lead to his downfall.

Because Goold-Verschoyle had witnessed the corruption of his vision of the Communist ideology, he became miserable in Spain and this, in turn, affected his work habits. However, his significance in Spain to the agents he used to work with in England was still in existence in 1937. Goold-Verschoyle was actually partnered up with one of the Cambridge 5 agents to assassinate Franco himself on behalf of Stalin and the N.K.V.D's orders. Kim Philby, like Goold-Verschoyle had similar motivations and background as Goold-Verschoyle in that as Krivitsky's file elaborates, "He did in fact contact and send to Spain a young Englishman, a journalist of good family, an idealist and a fanatical anti-Nazi."⁹⁹ Although the plot never went through, despite Philby interviewing Franco twice for the newspaper he was working for, the significance of his pairing of an agent of such significance with an assignment of such magnitude speaks to the importance of Goold-Verschoyle himself. It also elaborates that Goold was more than simply a radio operator; he was trained and was familiar with death as a result not only of politics but ideology.

The year 1937 also saw Krivitsky and many other Soviet agents either disappear into the Soviet Gulag system or assassinated at the hands of Stalin's paranoia. The ideological reasons for Stalin's purging of the Soviet intelligence system were due to his mistrust of saboteurs

⁹⁸ It was titled so because of it was made up of militants and volunteers from all over the world; at its peak apparently there were members from 53 different countries.

⁹⁹ KV 2 804 "Walter Krivitsky."Date-n/a. 2.

within his own intelligence system. As a result of this, Krivitsky as well as Goold-Verschoyle found themselves victim of Stalin's ideology and in turn labelled as traitors to the Soviet state. However, while Krivitsky was able to flee safely to France and then later defect to the United States, Goold-Verschoyle was not so lucky. In May 1937 he was asked to report to Barcelona Harbour to fix a radio transmitter on the Magalennes.¹⁰⁰ As soon as he stepped into the room where the radio was said to be, the door was locked behind him and the room turned out to be a storage room. The ship landed on Soviet soil on May 6, and from then on Goold-Verschoyle was 'prisoner no. 500' in the Soviet prison system because of his apparent traitorous turn towards 'Trotskyist' ideology.

After the initial report of his checking into the prison and subsequent interrogation, there are scattered traces of evidence concerning what happened to him as Soviet reports of the Gulags and their activities are quite sparse. What is known about his internment in the prison camp is that he was treated unusually by the officers and was regarded as a very high threat.¹⁰¹ He had been charged with Trotskyist activities against the state of the U.S.S.R,¹⁰² which again speaks to the idea of motivations and ideology. In fact, Krivitsky had heard of Goold-Verschoyle's imprisonment while he was in Moscow and queried into the status of the young Irishman.¹⁰³ Nikultsev, an acquaintance of Krivitsky, summarised his findings on the young Irishman on May 29. He found that case no. 11993 against Goold-Verschoyle justified further investigation as,

¹⁰⁰ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*, 177.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 179.

¹⁰² *Ibid*.

¹⁰³ Krivitsky had been in Moscow in this period because it was before news of other agents he worked with such as Poretzky (Ignace Reiss) being assassinated. He decided to defect in September to Paris following the death of Poretzky- McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror*, 178.

During the period in which he worked as an operative for the NKVD abroad on an important mission {as a courier in England, and operator in Spain} he joined a Trotskyist organisation and carried out active work prejudicial to the interests of the working people. Charged under Article 58/§1a, 58/ §10 and 58/§14 of the Criminal Code of the U.S.S.R.¹⁰⁴

Though his interrogations were quite intensive and ended up with Goold-Verschoyle being forced to admit to his guilt on such activities, he was treated rather unusually despite being such an ostensible 'grave' threat to the state. Though the charges against him were quite standard and were the most common of all accusations that the Soviet Union used against victims of 'the Purge', Goold-Verschoyle's sentence was anything but typical for three reasons. He was sentenced to 8 years of solitary confinement in prison for his Trotskyist sympathies, whereas most others were sent to the Gulag Archipelago as work slaves.¹⁰⁵ The rapidity with which his trial was conducted and in turn carried out was atypical of other trials against Soviet agents. Lastly, another atypical aspect of his trial was that he received more interrogation post-sentencing.¹⁰⁶ While there is no documented reasoning as to why Goold-Verschoyle received such unusual treatment at the hands of his Soviet captors, these three factors hint once again at his significance. If he was a devalued lower level agent ideologue that did not represent anything greater than a radio operator turned Trotskyist traitor, he undoubtedly would have been sent to the Gulag Archipelago and would have received far less interrogation for information. Instead, he was sent to solitary confinement where he could not talk to anyone, was interrogated relentlessly which included post sentencing interrogations in order to ascertain as much information as possible from him, and was brought to trial almost immediately. The Soviet agents may have wanted to keep Goold-Verschoyle quiet by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 180.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

sentencing him to solitary confinement and not to a Gulag, but the question of why not just liquidate him arises.

While there is no clear answer to this, one factor that re-appears could have been the relations between Britain and the U.S.S.R at this time. As the correspondence between Mrs. Goold-Verschoyle and the Soviet ambassador in the MI5 file shows, pushing too far into her son's whereabouts could have had grave effects between Britain and the U.S.S.R; a factor to which the Soviet ambassador hinted. Krivitsky's testimony elucidates this in that he recounted telling Mrs. Goold-Verschoyle that asking the foreign embassy would "not only prove fruitless, but embarrass the treaty negotiations that were then taking place between the U.K and U.S.S.R."¹⁰⁷ While Krivitsky's testimony is useful in this sense, it must however be taken with a grain of salt as he did in fact have his own agenda similar to other agents such as Goold-Verschoyle. In the end, sadly the Soviet plan to quieten him was effective; he died in confinement in a jail in Sol'-Iletsk (Orenburg Province) on January 5 1942.¹⁰⁸

MI5 and the Aftermath of Spain

MI5 had in fact lost track of Goold-Verschoyle once he had departed for the U.S.S.R and thereafter arrived in Spain. The information from Mrs. Goold-Verschoyle and Moos that the MI5 had received was as a result of Krivitsky's defection. Moos had met Krivitsky during one of her trips with Goold-Verschoyle to the U.S.S.R and guessed that he had known the whereabouts of him pending his disappearance in Spain. She in turn contacted him following a lack of

¹⁰⁷ KV 2 817 "Brian Goold-Verschoyle 32a ." November 1946.

¹⁰⁸ McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of the Stalinist Terror*, 195.

response from Goold-Verschoyle to her correspondence.¹⁰⁹ He had previously engaged in regular correspondence with Moos from Spain, but it had stopped with his kidnapping and transport to the U.S.S.R. She in turn sought out Krivitsky, who then contacted the MI5 and claimed that he was certain that she was an O.G.P.U agent. MI5 in turn arrested and questioned her on her relationship with him. Additionally, Mrs. Goold-Verschoyle's correspondence to Krivitsky was the result of her son's disappearance in Spain. This was because Moos had told her to contact Krivitsky.¹¹⁰ The MI5 files on Goold-Verschoyle end shortly after Moos's testimony as well as the letters from Mrs. Goold-Verschoyle to Krivitsky.

There are a few more scattered documents in the file on him, such as a journal entry from Pieck on Goold-Verschoyle as well as a few documents concerning Krivitsky's knowledge of him and MI5 reports that document any correspondence between Pieck, Krivitsky and Goold-Verschoyle. These select few pieces of intelligence essentially speak to Goold-Verschoyle's role in the spy rings as a courier and technician, and reveal little in terms of how ideology, motivations and agency operated in the world of intelligence and espionage but do illustrate that he was a central figure in their operation.

In order to understand these aspects it is necessary to reflect on the larger case file as a whole and reflect on what studying a case file on Goold-Verschoyle can provide historians of intelligence and espionage. Firstly, as MI5 reconnaissance on him has shown, while MI5 agents were focused on documenting the activities of Goold-Verschoyle, they were also trying to develop an understanding of why he was doing what he was doing in questioning his activities,

¹⁰⁹ KV 2 817 "JB-3/84" Retrieved November 10 1951.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*,8.

and who he was associating with. Therefore while they were reporting that he had made a trip to the provinces or that he had visited the home of Edith Tudor Hart, they were trying to contextualise these visits in light of their reconnaissance of him. Although they would never find out what he had in fact been doing in relaying and sometimes developing Foreign Office documents until the testimony of Moos as well as Krivitsky, they tried to hypothesize on the significance or meaning of these visits and moreover developed a portrait of his motivations for them. MI5 thus attempted profiling of suspects in order to try and grasp how it was that potential threats like Goold-Verschoye thought, so that MI5 could further understand what their aims were in carrying out their daily business. They used a wide variety of surveillance techniques that foreshadow the more invasive weapons of the Cold War state. These agents did in fact give Goold-Verschoye historical agency, which as noted above has not been accounted for in terms of the historiography of intelligence and espionage. They did this by identifying him as a threat and compiling the surveillance and intelligence that was collected on him.

In conducting their investigations MI5 gave the spy world human agency. The correspondence between the various agents and Kell speaks to each actor's motivations in reporting on certain elements of Goold-Verschoye's life that they deemed significant or worthy to report on. Central to the thrust of these efforts was the role of Kell who was interested in Goold-Verschoye's relationship with the C.P.G.B and would ask the agents specifically about this element of his life. In relation to the historiography, this speaks to the work of Gill in that contrary to the lack of existing material on how the institution affects the individual and vice versa, we see how an institution can operate according to one person's direction. Moreover the intelligence that was developed on Goold-Verschoye for MI5 was subjectively reported on by

various agents. As the reconnaissance shows, each had their own observations of him which in turn reflects what they deemed important as well as answering to Kell, the head of MI5.

It is here that the motivations of the individual in the world of espionage and intelligence are critical. Goold-Verschoyle had many motivations in carrying out the work that he did as an O.G.P.U agent. It is clear that he was an idealistic young Irish Communist caught up in a period of time that was wrought with instability; ideologically, economically, politically and morally. For Goold-Verschoyle the alternative that seemed to account for fixing all these facets of a dishevelled world was turning into an active Communist. His persistence in becoming an agent of the O.G.P.U confirms this as well, and his various trips to the U.S.S.R likely helped confirm his idealised conception of a model society. Although his crusade to Spain on behalf of Soviet intelligence would ultimately lead to his demise, he stayed ideologically true to his conception of a morally perfect version of Communism. MI5's motivations in turn for watching the young Irishman derived from ideology as well. Kell was an anti-communist and he rightly believed that the C.P.G.B was a serious threat to Britain. Motivated by his distrust of its potential for subversion and sabotage on behalf of the members of this political body, he expanded MI5's mandate to include civilians which is how Goold-Verschoyle became noticed in the first place. Being siblings with a documented Communist sympathizer (his older brother Neil) that had moved to the U.S.S.R did not help the younger Brian Goold-Verschoyle's case either.

The idea of a moral crusade and engaging in a fight for what was right versus wrong was also touched upon in the file on Goold-Verschoyle, but largely through the testimony of other

actors close to him as opposed to the surveillance compiled by the active agents watching him. The documents from Pieck, and Krivitsky as well as the correspondence from Moos, Mrs. Goold-Verschoye speak more to this element, in that each of these individuals knew that Brian Goold-Verschoye was fighting for what he thought was ideologically right. As his Soviet handlers, Krivitsky and Pieck knew he was quite dedicated to his idealisations of Communism and the Soviet Union which they remarked or noted in their own notes on him. Although the select pieces of intelligence from them in the file mostly focus on his role in London as well as Spain, they do show that Goold-Verschoye was extremely motivated by the Communist cause. Given the fascist threat to democracy in Spain and the class conflict that most Irish witnessed in their own lives, the red crusade was one that Goold-Verschoye undertook with commitment.

This study has examined how ideology, agency, the fight for what is right and motivations have impacted both the individual (Goold-Verschoye) as well as the institution (MI5) that dealt with him. The results of research in the files of MI5 show that a single idealistic 'lower-level' agent like Brian Goold-Verschoye can simultaneously unite spy rings throughout the U.K and Europe while providing a never seen before picture of the effects of how ideology, motivations and human agency can affect espionage and intelligence studies. The conclusions reached impact the existing historiography in several ways. Firstly they give a heretofore unacknowledged group of people historical agency in realising that those who worked behind the scenes like Goold-Verschoye were actually quite significant in the spy world during the interwar period in Europe. Secondly, it gives the historiography a sense of human agency and how it affects the espionage and counter-intelligence world in following the motivations and ideologies of Goold-Verschoye and MI5 which had also been heretofore ignored in light of

institutional histories. These conclusions also impact the historiography in contextualising the morals, ideals, and broader movements of interwar Europe through examining those who fought in unconventional methods in unconventional times. In illuminating all of this as representative of a larger set of person's and their actions in what can be considered a dark time in the 20th century, Brian Goold-Verschoyle's significance to the world of espionage and intelligence studies should not be forgotten.

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*While not all of these works were featured in the paper, they were consulted to provide background or contextual information on various topics like interwar Britain, Ireland and the U.S.S.R, Soviet trends in espionage, and the functioning of MI5.