

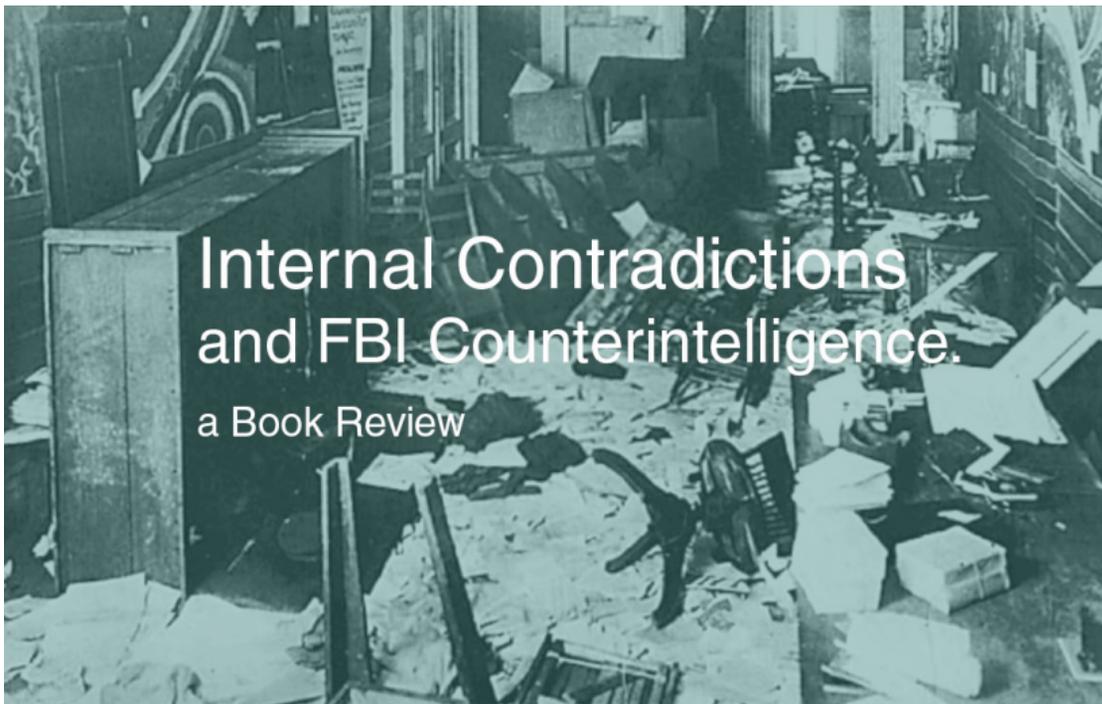
Internal Contradictions and FBI Counterintelligence, a Book Review

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS

Book Review of:

A Threat of the First Magnitude, FBI
Counterintelligence & infiltration From the
Communist Party to the Revolutionary Union
1962-74



In this follow up to *Heavy Radicals, the FBI's Secret War on America's Maoists*, authors **Aaron J Leonard** and **Connor A Gallagher** drop a treasure trove of documents and research showing just how concerned the US government was, and I would argue still is with combating organized communists in the political, ideological and legal sense. Countless books have been written about the Red Scare and a lot has been written about the Counterintelligence-Programs (Cointelpro) run against particularly the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, less is available on the period of the New Communist Movement and surrounding organizations. In that sense, the authors are providing a highly useful book which like their previous book should be studied closely by anyone interested in revolutionary organizing in the US. While *Heavy Radicals* almost serves as an unofficial and accidental history of the Revolutionary Union/RCP-USA this book has broadened its scope a bit and delves a lot deeper into the question of counterintelligence offering some insight on why it is so valuable to the state in their quiet war against communists. Its main shortcoming is that it still focus mainly on the Revolutionary Union (RU) by elaborating and confirming a few things the authors speculated on in the first book. This leaves the reader understandably wanting more from the book in regard to

an overall and wider range of information regarding the infiltration of the other non-RU organizations.

The most useful understanding the book provides is that counterintelligence is not so much a tactical consideration for the prosecution of individuals within revolutionary movements and organizations—it is a strategic consideration. What I mean to stress here is that when the Fed's infiltrate your communist movement or organization they can do so for a variety of strategic and tactical interests. The purpose of counterintelligence is the strategic defeat of an organization by arming the bourgeois state with the most intimate knowledge on its internal contradictions (if only most revolutionary organizations in the US were this effective at analysis we might be in better shape). As Mao stresses, it is, after all, the internal contradictions which are principle as the determining factor, and often these internal contradictions have become activated by external factors. This is something the FBI recognizes in both their strategic approach and the tactical approach. What we can only speculate is that what has been uncovered by the Authors of this book is but the tip of a very large and very shadowy iceberg.

This book is particularly timely and relevant in the context of a new-and-reinvigorated round of Cointelpro, as it details the past existence of several seemingly-communist organizations which were populated only with FBI agents whose purpose it was to shake things up, discredit individuals and spread rumor etc. In short, we understand these operatives to be setting the external conditions which could activate internal contradictions. This offers a horrifying interpretation for those who are active in the age of social media, where to claim being a communist organization requires little more than a Facebook account, or a series of limited and short comments with no proof offered. What used to require months or preparation, printing of newspapers and establishing real-world connections to get legitimacy is now just a click of a button and bam! There are dozens of internet-sub-culture “communist” fans out there who will regurgitate whatever the so-called-revolutionary organization is saying, especially when it aligns with

their prejudices. Practice is demoted as criteria and personal preference reigns on sites like Twitter and Facebook. Reality is no longer interrogated by a critical Marxist analysis, anything goes and any fantasy is real enough —this is a boon to the FBI and a bane to actually existing communist organizations.

What the book offers us here as well is concrete proof of certain methods and objectives the Bureau was using—race-based proto-identity politics to split up organizations and make other organizations harm themselves in public and private rebuttal. Calculating the collateral damage here is impossible it's literally infinite as several of the political lines created by or relied upon by the Feds are still appealing today to certain sections of the left. For instance, the book details an informant by the name of Don Wright, who vigorously promoted a sort of narrow nationalist identity politics within the Revolutionary Union and the attempts to integrate other organizations with it in the interest of building their Party. What is interesting is that Wright preached that mainly black people but also brown people could not be led by people outside of their race (regardless of the democratic choices a Party might make), that more or less, the black sections of the Party would need to have their own separate democratic centralism above that of the multi-national Central Committee. This identity in command approach is still popular among people who come from college campuses in the US and have not broken with the postmodernism, post-structuralism, or post-colonialism type of ideology that has more or less hegemonic standing there. And of course, when Don Wright was challenged on this he insisted that no one could come to understand the black condition (ironically the Marxist theory of knowledge does not rely exclusively on the empirical lived experience of individuals) and was hence racist. When other black revolutionaries would confront him, of course, these comrades were framed as tricked in some way by whites. While Don Wright was exposed in other books and articles as a wrecker, the newer proof that he was an FBI informant will only shock those who refused to pay attention in the first place.

Don Wright had perhaps one of the most negative impacts of any federal informant within the RU, as it was his maneuvering and lambasting that prevented most of the surviving oppressed nations organizations from achieving unity with the closest thing to a revolutionary communist organization the US had seen since the degeneration of the Communist Party–USA. The RU did not make things better for themselves, as typical with leaders like the revisionist Bob Avakian, the public response on the part of the RU overcorrected and almost liquidated the national question in both form and essence—widening the gulf that Don Wright and his FBI handlers were banking on. No one here was prosecuted in a federal case, something more valuable to the enemy happened—the revolutionary organizations which they feared uniting did not unite. The history from this point is not very inspiring—the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP–USA) formed anyway on its own with pretty much just the people already under its command as the RU and with no discernable or demonstrable quantitative increase or qualitative shift, began calling itself a “Party”. After this, it splits and shrinks for decades doing some good and a lot worse.

So what do accounts like the one provided here offer aside from insight into how the enemy conducts its counterrevolutionary and criminal activity? It offers us inspiration to carry on organizing. This might seem a bit off-color to many readers, especially those who have not yet accumulated years of hard organizing struggles. The fact remains with faith in the masses of people, one surely becomes a revolutionary optimist—here our optimism is materialist and proletarian, in short, our optimism is realistic. We can again call up two principles of Mao 1) the masses alone make history while we communists have a lot to learn from them 2) all reactionaries including the FBI and their informants posing as communists right now, are paper tigers.

This viewpoint is not simply the musings of a few detached people; it's rooted in all the history here too. In the final analysis, everything the Federal agencies and their collaborators did to destroy the RCP–USA was not enough to destroy them even if it was damaging. In fact, the organization saw growth during the periods of the most intense struggles

and repressions. No, the existence of the state and their infiltrators and informants and agent provocateurs etc. are not enough to destroy a communist organization which practices democratic centralism, what destroys the communist organization is an internal contradiction—revisionism. Revisionism itself, both in its quiet dormant and long-standing form in the RU/RCP as well as its loud and bombastic form (the New Synthesis of Communism by Bob Avakian) are what destroyed the Revolutionary Communist Party-USA. By their own hand, they destroyed themselves doing far more harm than the US government ever could have hoped to. They ended up being better servants than the countless paid agents and paid informants who were working against them 24/7 for decades. What is more, and immeasurably beneficial to the US imperialists is the fact that the RCP-USA has considerably blemished Maoism in this country, they have made the name something foul sounding and distorted its content so thoroughly. They have robbed the younger generation of veterans from the NCM and even committed major attacks on the International Communist Movement. These are issues which the Maoists of today will deal with and correct so we must not dwell on it here.

While the Marxist among us know that state repression and infiltration are inevitable—”to be attacked by the enemy is a good thing”, there are of course those with some bourgeois ideology who will consider infiltration, criminal charges, and counterintelligence to be proof that it is a losing battle. That the paper tigers were real tigers all along. That if the most advanced formations in the country have been harmed in any way by informants it means they were doing something terribly wrong. Marxists cannot agree with the positions of cynics like these. This book offers us up some insight on this matter as well in the case of Roman Malinovsky—A Tsarist police agent who infiltrated the top ranks of the Bolshevik Party. After taking power the Bolsheviks captured Malinovsky and had his police handlers testify against him at his trial, the happy ending is that Malinovsky as well as his handlers were promptly shot. The fact that the Bolshevik Party, one of the most advanced and clandestine organizations the world has ever seen did not detect this man until after they seized

power is not at all demoralizing. On the contrary, it is a morale boost—this can happen to anyone and so what is most important is doing everything you can to make your revolutionary work successful, so that the Malinovsky's of the world can stand trial before the people and face the wrath of the people's justice.

This book provokes many ideas about organizing security internally, regulating communications and promoting better protocol, we simply do not have the time to dive into all those thoughts here. Suffice it to say that this book (as scary as it is) provokes a degree of optimism, of pride that the USA hates their own internal communists and fears us so damn much. This book allows for a self-critical view of certain lines regarding identity which favor a disunity that is in the objective interests of the Feds. It challenges us to do even better when confronting and correcting these errors and to never relent or lose hope, that is, **if you read it with a Marxist viewpoint.**

Article by Kavga

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