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## OTHER TITLES

### History

**DOUBLE LIVES:** Spies and Writers in the Secret Soviet War of Ideas Against the West. By Stephen Koch. Free Press. 338 pp. \$24.95

The demise of Soviet communism has inspired more than a few indignant exposés of those Westerners who fell under its spell. Add to this growing list of often bilious works Koch's *Double Lives*. Koch, chairman of the Writing Division of the School of Arts at Columbia University, seeks to lay bare the workings and reach of the Soviet Union's early propaganda apparatus in the West. Using the life of Willi Münzenberg, the first master of Stalinist spin control, Koch tells a tangled tale of fellow travelers, unwitting literati, and master spies that enmeshes everyone from Madame Sun Yat-sen to Ernest Hemingway.

Called by Koch "one of the unseen powers of 20th-century Europe," Münzenberg was already a canny underground organizer in Germany when he met Leon Trotsky in 1914. Trotsky led him to Lenin, who entrusted Münzenberg with helping to found the Communist International, or Comintern. Münzenberg's first real foray into international agitprop, however, did not take place until the Soviet famine of 1921, when Lenin ordered him to launch an appeal for aid from the "international proletariat." That effort in turn provided the foundation for what would become known as "the Münzenberg Trust," a media combine that spanned the globe. In Japan, for example, the trust directly or indirectly held sway over 19 magazines and newspapers.

Münzenberg's career as a propagandist provides a jumbled structure for Koch's work, but the real focus—or, rather, target—of *Double Lives* is the "adversary culture" that yielded Münzenberg a "rich secret harvest" from "the Left Bank of André Malraux," the "Bohemia of Greenwich Village," and "the rooms of Trinity College, Cambridge." Koch's recounting of those associated with what Münzenberg liked to call his "Innocents' Clubs"—book and film societies, conferences, and committees designed to push Soviet causes—reads like a who's who of the chattering class in the 1930s and '40s: John Dos Passos, André Gide, Ernest Hemingway, H. G. Wells, Dorothy Parker, and Bertolt Brecht, to name a few.

Münzenberg's organization sought supporters and converts by tapping the disaffection of the intellectual elite over issues such as racism in America, philistinism and middle-class repression in England, fascism in Germany, and capitalism everywhere. Koch provides ample details of the elaborate fronts Münzenberg set up in Paris, London, New York, and Hollywood to capitalize on the anti-establishment sentiment generated by such events as the trial of Niccolò Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and the Spanish Civil War. He also notes that such Münzenberg creations as the League Against War and Fascism provided a well-stocked pool of would-be recruits for Soviet intelligence agents, yielding among other catches the notorious British double agent Kim Philby.

Yet in Koch's darkly simplistic view, sympathy with the lofty ideals professed by Soviet propaganda could have been the result only of manipulation or collaboration. He reduces many of the finest contemporary minds in the West to victims or accomplices of an "elaborate secret service network . . . set up to keep this large number of celebrity sympathizers appearing in the right places and reading the right lines."

Koch's paranoia might be more plausible were it backed by more than the flimsiest of evidence. Prominently pegged by Koch as a fellow traveler, for example, is John Dos Passos; but Koch himself notes that Dos Passos reacted to his free five-star tour of the Soviet Union by telling Hemingway that leaving the communist state "was like being let out of jail." All too often, Koch's charges about the secret Communist Party membership of various intellectuals rest on "may have beens" or "might have beens." Positing a conversation between British homosexual spies Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess on the utility of homosexuality for espionage rings, Koch says, "I have no evidence to prove it, but some such conversation may well have taken place, and if so, it must have been an interesting one." Careful scholarship in the Kremlin and elsewhere may one day yield the truth about which Western intellectuals actually led "double lives." No one doubts there were fellow travelers swayed by Münzenberg and his minions. Indeed, Koch's own penchant for sensationalism, half-truths, and trumped-up irrelevancies suggests that, in another time, he "might well have been" one of them.