

*The Secret War Between the Wars*

*MI5 in the 1920s and 1930s*

Kevin Quinlan

Woodbridge (Suffolk): The Boydell Press, 2014, £30, h/b

This began as the author's PhD thesis, based on the MI5 files of the interwar period, and it details some of their successes against the British left who were getting money from Moscow in the decade following the Soviet revolution; their handling of the very significant Tyler Kent/Right Club events which might have had a serious impact on WW2, delaying American entry; and the careful debriefing of Soviet intelligence defector Krivitsky, the first of its kind. Versions of these events, based on the same files, are in Christopher Andrew's *Defence of the Realm* and had been written about widely before the files were opened. What Quinlan does is give lots of detail of MI5's working methods not in the extant versions; and does so with simple, clear writing.

The Quinlan thesis is that MI5 were successful against their various domestic left, domestic fascist and Soviet opponents because they were better at it; they had better *tradecraft* – a word which appears every few pages in the text. In effect they were better at being spies than the amateurs they were facing (and I would include the Soviet state agencies for much of the period in that description) – and, of course, they had the powers of the state, notably the ability to intercept letters.

It is a stupid title: there was no war. There is only one death indirectly linked to the 'war' in this tale, that of the Soviet defector, Krivitsky, who committed suicide (or maybe didn't) after being debriefed by MI5. The subtitle should have been the title but I expect the publisher thought it sounded dull. In fact this isn't a dull book at all, despite most of the contents being more or less familiar, in outline at least, to a casual student of MI5 like me.

It should also be noted that the publisher, Boydell Press, produces books that are a pleasure to use: good paper, typesetting and binding.

*Robin Ramsay*