

The Spy Who Would be Tzar
The Mystery of Michal Goleniewski and the Far-Right Underground

Kevin Coogan

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Author Coogan died fairly recently at 67.¹ About 20 years ago I met him when he visited the UK, I published one of his essays² and a review of his previous book.³ As the various tributes on the Net attest, Coogan was a very interesting person and a wonderful researcher.

After I had finished this book I noticed that there was a 'cast of characters' for each chapter at the end of it. That would have been more useful at the front, because this is very complicated material. The first half of this book covers the well-trodden path of mole hunts, double (and triple) agents, James Angleton's paranoia and the Cold War. There's already a considerable pile of books on this area, some of them by Western intelligence officers. However, Coogan has also hunted down memoirs, document collections and academic comment from the Soviet, Polish and French sides of the intelligence 'game'. He then proceeds to try and untangle a collection of the most intricate thickets in post WW2 intelligence history. Does he succeed? I think so; at any rate he succeeds in making intelligible areas of which I previously had little understanding. Are his interpretations correct? I simply do not know enough to evaluate much of this book's contents. On first reading I was simply staggered by the amount of work Coogan has done and his extraordinary patience with some of the most intractable material imaginable. Because spies tell lies, all of them; deception is one of the key strategies in the intelligence 'game'; and thus trying to work who was telling the truth is very difficult indeed – even 50 years later.

¹ Obituaries at <<https://louisproyect.org/2020/03/17/homage-to-kevin-coogan/>> and <<https://tinyurl.com/22twc66e>> or <<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/nytimes/name/kevin-coogan-obituary?pid=195708582>>.

² <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster70/lob70-oswald-and-japan.pdf>>

³ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/online/issue39/lob39-14.htm>>

Michal Goleniewski was a senior figure in the Polish intelligence service in the 1950s who leaked lots of material to the West.⁴ He thought he was leaking to the FBI, because he didn't trust the CIA which he believed to have been penetrated by the Soviets. But it was the CIA which was receiving his documents and it was the Agency which embraced him when he had to defect to the West ahead of exposure as a double agent. Settled in New York, Goleniewski was debriefed by all and sundry to near universal acclaim as the most important source on Soviet bloc intelligence the NATO countries ever had. The sole sceptic was James Angleton, whose paranoia was fed by another defector, Anatoly Golitsyn.⁵ And such was Angleton's bureaucratic clout in the Agency, Goleniewski was gradually eased out and eventually shunned by the CIA. At which point he announced he was the son of the murdered Tzar of Russia and became of interest not to intelligence agencies but to groups of people working with or for anti-Soviet, Russian monarchist groups in the United States. This is the 'far-right underground' of the book's subtitle.

But before we get to these curious events in the USA, using Goleniewski's account of them as his starting point, Coogan takes us through some of the controversies of the Soviet bloc-NATO spy contest in the post-war years. For example: George Blake, Heinz Felfe, the putative post-war survival of 'Gestapo' Muller, an apparent clandestine Red-Brown post-war network called Hacke, and James Angleton's curious fixation on the Soviet defector Anatoly Golitsyn. Apart from the Angleton-Golitsyn material, much of the rest of this was just vaguely familiar to me from reading about these controversies many years ago when spies seemed important. None of this is easy or straightforward. Each chapter could be expanded into a book-length study of the events (and many such extant studies are quoted by Coogan). This is the first half of the book.

Having been abandoned by the CIA and gone public, Goleniewski was picked up by less reputable sections of the American media, for whom he provided 'sexy' copy as the claimant to the throne of Russia, and then by a strange collection of the American far-right, Russian monarchists, a con-man and a scattering of rather elderly American spooks who may have been using these networks. All of these believed – or thought they could use – Goleniewski's claim to be the surviving son of Tzar Nicholas of Russia. Most of them were part of the international anti-communist movement and many of

⁴ This is the second recent book on Goleniewski. The first, by Tim Tate, was reviewed by me at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster81/lob81-spy-out-in-the-cold.pdf>>.

⁵ It is tempting to think that Golitsyn must have been sent to mess with Angleton's mind. But all reports agree that he brought little useful material and talked such nonsense, it seems unlikely to me that the Soviets would have sent someone quite so useless.

them were anti-semites, who believed that bolshevism was a Jewish conspiracy. (It is easy to forget that this was quite widely believed on the European and American right in the inter-war years.) It is this material which I suspect Coogan was most interested in, chiming with his previous research on the American far-right.

This is fascinating but inconclusive: for example, what's not to like about a con-man in Shickshinny creating his own Knights of Malta and declaring himself Imperial Grand Protector? But why would a group of retired American generals join it and form its Military Affairs Committee? And what, if anything, did that committee do? Were they merely seeking to exploit Goleniewski's claim to be heir to the throne of Russia in the struggle with Soviet communism? Apparently, but not certainly, so. Coogan is here working a largely unploughed field, and presents us with another vast gallery of new characters and organisations. Essentially, the second half of the book is an attempt to delineate these rarely discussed far-right networks and Goleniewski's links to them is merely the peg on which to hang the research. (He isn't referred to at all in one of the chapters). So essentially we have two books: a biography of Goleniewski and an analysis of certain American far-right organisations and networks hitherto largely ignored.

After he was abandoned by the CIA, Goleniewski made an increasingly weird set of claims, starting with that old favourite on the far-right: that Henry Kissinger was a Soviet agent. He went on to claim that the American journalist/writer Guy Richards was really Reinhard Heydrich (who is otherwise universally believed to have been killed during WW2) and that Jack the Ripper was the Duke Clarence, who went to Germany where he became . . . Adolf Hitler. Whether or not Goleniewski actually meant any of this is unclear.

Coogan writes that Goleniewski 'single-handedly destroyed Polish intelligence, exposed Soviet control over West Germany's spy service and saved Britain's MI6 spy agency from certain catastrophe.' (p. 5) And perhaps Goleniewski was the last defector of any importance. But with this much hindsight it is clear none of this intelligence agency conflict mattered much to the wider world. It is routinely reported that James Angleton more or less paralysed CIA counter-intelligence for two decades, in the belief that there must be Soviet 'moles' in the CIA. But it made no difference to the Cold War. The important intelligence was about weapons and by the mid-1960s the U-2 flights, and then satellites, provided such intelligence. Human intelligence became less and less significant. The American economy – and its military science – continued to outperform their Soviet counterparts and when the U.S.

began another arms race in the early 1980s, the regime in Moscow couldn't compete and collapsed.