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**Contracting for Counterintelligence: the KGB and
Soviet Informers of the 1960s and 1970s**

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Abstract

The informer network was a part of the human capital of the communist police state, which had the property of dissolving the freestanding social capital of ordinary citizens. How was it built, and what was the agency of the informers in the process? A few documents from the archives of the Soviet security police allow us to see good practices as the KGB saw them. They show some of the routes by which informers came to the attention of the KGB, their varied motivations, and their social and psychological strengths and weaknesses. The pivot of the process was a contract for counter-intelligence services. The contract itself was partly written, partly verbal or implied, and highly incomplete. Before the contract, searching and due diligence were required to identify potential recruits. After the contract, to turn a recruit into a productive informer involved a further period of training and monitoring, often extending to renegotiation and further investments by both sides in the capabilities of the informer and the relationship of trust with the handler. Trust and deception were two sides of the informer's coin.

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Agent of the organs of state security of the USSR—a person who has voluntarily (sometimes under pressure) agreed to carry out the secret instructions of the organs of the KGB in the interests of the Soviet state, and who has accepted the obligation to keep secret the fact of their collaboration and the character of the assignments to be completed (Nikitchenko et al. 1972: 9).

Every undercover helper of the organs of the KGB has their own long and complicated path to collaboration that needs to be understood (Agent “Ruta,” writing in 1975).

Informers and human capital

Mass surveillance was one of the instruments that communist regimes employed to prevent individual and collective action from below against authority. Its successful use was a factor in the longevity of communist single-party states relative to other varieties of modern authoritarianism.¹

Mass surveillance involved the gathering of both human and signals intelligence. Signals intelligence was obtained by intercepting mail and phone calls and other forms of eavesdropping (such as in hotels). Human intelligence came from informers. Its informer network was one of the most important assets of the Soviet Union’s KGB, as of the security police of other communist states.²

All states have enemies, including liberal democracies, and the security police have recruited informers in every country.³ A distinguishing feature of communist states was the use of informers to watch not just a small number of people who were suspected of active hostility to communist rule but also much larger numbers of “potential”

¹ Relative longevity: Dimitrov (2013: 5).

² On the agent network of the East German Stasi see Miller (1999: 35-40), Dennis (2003: 90-106), Schmeidel (2008: 24-51), and Bruce (2010: 80-105); of the Romanian Securitate, Verdery (2014: chapter 3); of China’s Ministry of Public Security before the Cultural Revolution, Schoenhals (2013).

³ But not at all times, an exception being China from 1967 to 1973, when the employment of informers was condemned as against the mass line of the Cultural Revolution (Schoenhals 2013: 1-9).

and even “unconscious” enemies who were inclined to unauthorized deviation from political and social norms or voiced unauthorized criticisms of the Soviet political or social order, potentially under the influence of the instructions even just the ideas and values of the foreign adversary. Associated with this was an extraordinarily broad definition of hostile intelligence activity, which the Soviet rulers matched by practicing counter-intelligence on a mass scale.⁴

The KGB *agentura*, or “agent network,” was human capital of a special kind, designed to empower the state over society. It did so in two ways. First, operating under cover, informers provided the state with early warning of the small-scale expressions and actions that might be precursors to more significant disruption of the political order. Thus, the state could be nearly always ahead of the citizen in pre-empting or promptly suppressing such tendencies.

The informer network also affected the subordination of society to the state in another way. This started from the widespread awareness of its existence which was, more or less, an “open secret.”⁵ An open secret is still a secret, and the existence of the informer network was rigidly censored. The security police closely guarded all the details of its operation, including the individual identities of the informers. Despite this, informal awareness of the system was widespread.⁶ To illustrate, the encyclopedia of 5,852 Soviet anecdotes compiled by Mel’nicenko (2014) lists 39 jokes under the index heading “*seksot i donoschik*” (secret colleague and informer).

As for the general effect of this open secret on society, because undercover informers were known to make friends with no other purpose than to betray them, and no one knew who the informers were, the result

⁴ Kuromiya and Peplonski (2014) trace the common origins of “total espionage” and “total counter-espionage” in the security thinking of Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century. As they describe, for Stalin in the 1930s the ultimate instrument of “total counter-espionage” was the mass killing of suspects. I extend this analysis to our period, the 1960s, as follows: the KGB continued to practice “total counter-espionage,” but its instrument had changed from “kill all suspects” to “watch all suspects.”

⁵ For many illustrations from the 1930s, see Figes (2008: 251-258), and also Hosking (2013: 14-17).

⁶ How widespread and through what channels? These questions seem to be unanswered. In China in 1957, a security officer attributed widespread informal awareness of the interception of mail to indiscreet operative workers (Schoenhals 2013: 133).

was to corrode trust in strangers. Mel'nichenko's anecdote no. 1,636 gets it exactly:

Parked at the embassy is an American automobile of an expensive make and the latest model. Two pedestrians walk up from opposite directions and stop involuntarily. One of them exclaims: "An amazing foreign car!" Then he panics and tries to correct his gaffe: "An amazing Soviet car. I think it's Soviet. Yes, yes, it must be. Of course!" "What, you can't tell an American automobile from a Soviet one at first glance?" "At first glance I can't tell a *seksot* from a decent person."

The lowering of trust in society is not just a hypothesis. Lichter, Löffler, and Siegloch (2018) have investigated the present-day correlates of historical variation in the density of Stasi (security police) informers across county boundaries in the German Democratic Republic. They find that greater penetration of society by informers under communist rule is causally linked to lower levels of interpersonal and institutional trust today, as well as to the worse economic outcomes that the broader literature (surveyed by Alesina and Giuliano 2015) predicts would follow from reduced social capital.

The atmosphere of widespread suspicion was evidently of benefit to the security of the regime. A person who was out of sympathy with Soviet rule, but feared to share those inner thoughts with someone who might turn out to be an informer, was also less likely to share those thoughts with others who might have been inclined to join them in unauthorized collective action against the regime. The effect must have been to reduce the likelihood of serious challenges to the Soviet political order.

Was a low-trust society the intended outcome of KGB surveillance? This seems unlikely. The effectiveness of KGB operations relied on the capacity of the agents to win and retain trust in others while persuading them that they were not in fact under surveillance.⁷ The fear of informers, and the mistrust of strangers associated with it, raised the costs of the

⁷ In previous writing about Soviet society under KGB surveillance (Harrison 2016: 147) I used the idea of the panopticon, imagined by Jeremy Bentham (1791: 3) and conceptualized by Michel Foucault (1995: 195-228). In the panopticon, it was possible for any subject to be under the continual observation of a central power. At any time, observation might "on" or "off," but the subject could not know and had to behave as if under observation in order to avoid the risk of punishment. While this idea has a clear application to the way in which many Soviet citizens behaved in fact, it does not reflect the intentions of KGB surveillance expressed in official documents. The KGB used informers because there existed unofficial networks of trust in Soviet society that were difficult to observe by other means, and winning trust was central to the work of the informers. This is not how the panopticon was supposed to work.

informer network and lowered its effectiveness. The targets of surveillance sometimes rejected approaches from informers, based on no more than suspicion. In the anticipation of scrutiny, every informer had to be trained to overcome suspicion and win trust. Inadvertent exposure was easy and the fear of it was sometimes a barrier to the recruitment of informers who might otherwise have been productive.

In this paper I will describe in more detail the process of recruitment and development of the informer, using a unique dataset of 21 personal narratives found in the archive of the KGB of Soviet Lithuania.⁸ These stories are rare and therefore valuable. Why are they rare? Under communism, the informers' lips were sealed by secrecy. After communism, they remained sealed by social discrimination or the fear of it.⁹ The historian of the Baltic region might hope to find their stories in the archived personal files of the informers, but most such documents were destroyed or taken to Moscow when the KGB left the region, including several tens of thousands of files from Lithuania alone (Skucas 2004: 419).¹⁰

What was the original purpose of the reports we have? The condition of the agent network was a continual preoccupation of the KGB leaders. The training of agent handlers, therefore, must also have had significant priority. In the early 1960s there existed a "group of the chairman of the KGB of the Council of Ministers of the USSR for study and dissemination of the experience of operative workers and of information about the adversary." Similar groups evidently existed in the Republican KGBs, such as that of Soviet Lithuania. Like any large organization, in other words, the KGB was keen to identify good practices and to disseminate improvements through conferences, away-days, and training opportunities. The earliest batch of reports in our sample is accompanied

⁸ See the Lietuvos SSR Valstybės Saugumo Komitetas (KGB) Selected Records collection of the Hoover Archive, described at <http://www.hoover.org/library-and-archives/collections/east-europe/featured-collections/lietuvos-ssr> (accessed 14 May 2014). The originals of these records are to be found in the Lithuanian Special Archives (Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas) in Vilnius, described at <http://www.archyvai.lt/en/archives/specialarchives.html> (accessed 14 May 2014).

⁹ "What do we know about the relation of officers to their informers? Relatively little, for those two categories of people seldom write memoirs" (Verdery 2014: chapter 3).

¹⁰ The Latvian KGB archive, in contrast, has recently published 4,141 personal files of KGB informers (Latvian Public Broadcasting 2018).

by a memo signed by the head of the Soviet Lithuania KGB, responding to a request for information from the Moscow group.¹¹ More reports of a similar nature appear elsewhere in the archive, although without accompanying correspondence. Evidently, all our stories were reported with the aim of uncovering and exemplifying good practices.

The sample is small and highly selected. It includes only successes. The typical KGB informer relationship often ended in failure. Elsewhere in the files, anecdotal evidence of unproductive agents and incompetent handlers abounds. When Moscow demanded that the agent network should be “small in numbers and high in quality,” it was easy to let unproductive agents go, but much more difficult to raise the performance of the rest.¹² Therefore, the stories we have do not much help us to understand the quality of operation of the informer network on average or in general. What they show us is good practice as the KGB saw it at the time. They are rich in detail, illustrate wide variation, and allow important common features to emerge that can guide further research.

Finally, given that this paper relies on reports that claimed to describe good practices, it should be asked whether they were varnished or fictionalized for the sake of personal reputation or to cover up defective work. This is unlikely. Those with most at stake were the handling officers on the front line of counter-intelligence work. All the agent reports were

¹¹ Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 24-25, (14 Mar. 1961) to Nachal'nik gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Soiuza SSR po izucheniiu i obobshcheniiu opyta operraboty i svedeniio protivnike. To Beskrovnyi, T. N. from Predsedatel' Komiteta Gosbezopasnosti pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR, polkovnik A. Randakiavichus.

¹² Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 48-65 (Spravka o sostoianii agenturno-operativnoi raboty v apparate UKGB pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR v Trakaiskom raione (Feb. 1961) from Referent, maior Gomyranov); the words quoted in the text are on page 50. Also K-1/10/300, 65-81 (Spravka o sostoianii agenturno-operativnoi raboty Akmianskogo apparata KGB na 5 fevralia 1961 goda (21 Feb. 1961) from St. referent gruppy po obobshcheniiu i izucheniiu operraboty pri predsedatele KGB pri SM LSSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev); 82-95 (Spravka o sostoianii agenturno-operativnoi raboty v apparate Upolnomochennogo KGB pri SM LSSR v gorode Birzhae (Mar. 1961) from Referent gruppy pri Komitete Gosbezopasnosti pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR, maior Gomyranov); 97-108 (Spravka o sostoianii agenturno-operativnoi raboty Tauragskogo raiapparata KGB na 20 marta 1961 goda (Mar. 1961) from Operrabotniki 2go upravleniia KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Lit. SSR, maior Snakin); 111-164 (Spravka o sostoianii raboty v Kaunasskom apparate KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR (25 April 1961) from Nachal'nik 2 upravleniia KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR, polkovnik Matulaitis).

composed and signed off by senior officers who stood well back from the front line. These officers were of similar rank to the officers who wrote and signed off the other reports, just mentioned, that exposed and criticized the poor average state of the agent network in various localities at that time. Two of the authors of those critical reports, Lt.-Col. Gomyranov and Maj. Tumantsev, also contributed ten of our 21 agent stories between them. If they did not cover up poor work in one context, it is not obvious why they should have invented good work in another. Elsewhere I have written that the role of the KGB, if not to “speak truth to power,” was at least to convey facts (Harrison 2016: 233). If the KGB could not speak facts to itself in this context and at this level, it is hard to understand how the Soviet Union lasted as long as it did.

Who was the KGB informer?

Because their existence was an open secret, informers were talked about in Russian society under a variety of names. The literal translation of informant was *osvedomitel'*. Slang terms expressed the disapproval of unofficial society for those who side with authority: *donoschik* (tell-tale or grass) or *stukach* (stool pigeon, literally a cellmate who relays information by knocking on the pipes). More ironic was *seksot* (an abbreviation of *sekretnyi sotrudnik*, or secret colleague).

Formal responsibility for the KGB's domestic informers belonged to the officers of its second (counterintelligence) administration. In internal KGB documentation the term used for the class of informer was “undercover helper” (*neglasnyi pomoshchnik*). Within that class were two main sub-categories, the “agent” (*agent*) and the “trusted person” (*doverennoe litso*). An agent was a civilian whose recruitment was formalized by a signed agreement and the selection of a codename. A trusted person had not signed anything and would be identified in KGB paperwork by their initials.

An important difference between the trusted person and the agent was the presumption of political reliability: someone who was politically unreliable could not be a trusted person. An agent, by contrast, might or might not be politically reliable; there was no presumption either way. Because of this, the motivations of agents could be expected to show greater variety than those of trusted persons; for example, an agent might be recruited by consent or under duress, whereas a trusted person was always a willing recruit.

How many were there, and where were they to be found? According to the 1959 census, Soviet Lithuania was a country of 2.7 million residents, of whom four-fifths belonged to the titular ethnic group (others were mainly Russians and Poles) (TsSU 1960: 18-20). In 1961, the republican KGB of 1181 officers and staff deployed 2,904 agents and 2,531 trusted

persons, or roughly 2 per thousand of the population (Anušauskas 2008: 71). Although the density of informers in the local population would double in the course of the 1960s, informers remained a scarce resource. They were heavily focused, therefore, on the groups regarded as most susceptible to the adversary's efforts to bring about ideological disruption: young people, educated people, and people working in education, culture, science, and industry (Harrison and Zaksauskienė 2016: 142-143).

What is described in our reports? The subjects are all agents, nearly all of the early 1960s (of the 21 narratives, 20 were written between 1961 and 1964, with one from 1975). Nearly all the reports were written in the third person and signed off by a senior officer. While the detail varies, they generally described the person's background and the circumstances in which the person came to the attention of the KGB. (But four of the last five reports, all from the Kaunas KGB office, have a missing first page that probably gave significant personal data.) They went on to explain the manner of recruitment and, in most cases, what happened next: how the new informer adapted to the task, what problems arose, and by what means the informer was made useful. Thus, while the informer's voice is not heard directly, each document made its own attempt to understand the informer's perspective to some extent.

The twenty-first story, dating from 1975, has a different form. It is written in the first person, but a ghost-writer has clearly been to work, so it seems doubtful that we hear the uncensored voice of the subject. "Published in *Sbornik* no. 2 for 1976" is written by hand on the first page; the *Sbornik* (Collection) will have been an internal limited-circulation KGB journal. Two thirds of the 18-page typescript are devoted to the informer's inner path from active resistance to collaboration with Soviet rule. Hard biographical data are missing; circumstantial detail is limited. But the underlying motivation is evidently the same: the KGB wanted to explain to itself how the opportunity arose to recruit an agent "from a hostile environment" and to describe how the opportunity was exploited. That is why I include it here.

Who is described in our reports? Table 1 reports basic demographics. There are few surprises. Nearly all were male, urbanized, college-educated, and in white-collar employment (including one college student). Three quarters were ethnic Lithuanians, a proportion close to that in the general population, although somewhat greater than the share

of ethnic Lithuanians among KGB officers of the second (counterintelligence) administration at the time.¹³

Table 1. Twenty-one KGB informers: demographic statistics

(A)	Per cent	N =
Male, per cent	95%	21
Urban residence, where known, per cent	93%	14
Higher education, per cent, where known	82%	11
White-collar, per cent, where known*	85%	13
Ethnic Lithuanian, per cent**	76%	21
Compromised by past action or association, per cent	67%	21
Party membership, per cent***	9%	21

(B)	Years	N =
Median birth year, if known	1931	11
Median year recruited	1961	21
Median age on recruitment, years, if known	28	11
Median service, years	1	21

Source: Appendix A.

Note. Because reports did not follow a common format, not all reports included the same information for each subject. Thus, the sample size varies across indicators. I give the sample size as 21 when every report gave this information or allowed it to be inferred (gender and ethnicity); or when this information would have been regarded as so significant that absence of it from a report could be construed as evidence of absence (party status; compromised by past action or association).

Key. * Includes one college student. ** Others were Russians, a Jew, and a likely Pole. *** One, a former party member, had been expelled; another was a Komsomol member in good standing.

Two thirds of our sample lived under some shadow arising from their past conduct or associations. At best this meant family connections with Lithuania's prewar elite, or a record of non-communist political activity before the war; at worst it meant wartime collaboration with the German army of occupation, or armed insurrection against Soviet rule at the war's end. In all such cases it was their records that made the subjects useful as informants. Correspondingly, only two of the set had any record of communist party affiliation. Perhaps party members were more likely to be recruited as trusted persons rather than agents, as was the case in East Germany (Miller 1999: 22).

¹³ See the data appendix to Harrison and Zaksauskienė (2016), Tables A-1 and A-2, available at <https://warwick.ac.uk/markharrison/data/counter-intelligence> (accessed 9 December 2016).

The median birth year of our agents, if known, was 1931, and their median age was on recruitment was 28. Their median period of service, one year, was highly skewed toward the present. In more detail, four agents were essentially new recruits at the time of the report, while ten had served for more than one year, with a likely maximum of 10 years.

Profiling the productive informer

What did the KGB look for in an undercover helper? Some valued traits could be guessed from first principles. As Verdery (2014: chapter 3) notes, “sociability and social connections” were obviously desirable. An informer who lacked these could not be a useful source of information. Security officials of China’s communist party in the 1930s and 1940s looked for “discretion, nerve, and self-motivation” (Schoenhals 2013: 110). An informer who lacked discretion and nerve would not be able to maintain a cover, and one who lacked self-motivation would not want to.

For the KGB the indications are more precise. During the 1970s the KGB set out to upgrade its data handling capacities, and this included designing a lot of forms for officers to fill in with entries that could become fields in mechanical databases of one kind or another.¹⁴ In due course there was one form to register informers who were Soviet citizens, another for foreign informers, and a third for registering changes and events in the course of the calendar year. The greater part of these forms was devoted to recording the kind of factual detail that you would expect to find in anyone’s work record. Notable here are those questions that tried to capture the informer’s capacity for social relationships with others, the presence of other propensities that the KGB defined as “negative,” and the quality of the informer’s cooperation with the KGB.

The KGB form confirms that sociability was highly valued, along with capacities for observation and recall. A section headed “characterization” asks a series of yes/no questions: “has exceptional memory”; “has exceptional observation”; “has the capacity to influence others”; “has exceptional capacity to make and develop acquaintance”; “has personal charm”; “has success with women”; “has success with men”; and, inevitably, “other distinctive qualities”. Later in the form, much attention is paid to categorizing the people, and especially the foreigners, in the informer’s social circle.

The informer’s possible “negative propensities” are given detailed attention. Bad attributes and habits start from drug addiction,

¹⁴ On the KGB project for an electronic database of agent reports on the behaviour of Soviet citizens travelling abroad, see Harrison (2016: 000-000).

homosexuality, and lesbianism, go on to gambling and illicit trading, include in passing the status of “re-emigrant,” “repatriate,” and “immigrant,” and move on to connections to foreign spy agencies and nationalist, religious, and other anti-Soviet groups, before turning to the existence of any criminal record, especially of crimes against the state. Still under the heading of “negative propensities,” the form enquires about the informer’s experience of foreign travel, and asks for more particular information based on a detailed breakdown of the possible indiscretions a Soviet citizen might have committed while travelling; these ranged from private conversations and commercial and sexual transactions with foreign citizens to losing documents and papers, disclosing secrets, excessive drinking, and making comparisons odious to the Soviet Union.

While all these things were termed negatives, there is no suggestion that any of them would make the subject less desirable as an undercover collaborator of the security police. To the contrary, as we saw already, connections to the political underworld could be an advantage.

The KGB form demanded close attention to the quality of the informer’s cooperation, which it classified in two aspects. The willingness with which the subject accepted the obligations of an informer on recruitment was evaluated separately from the willingness of their subsequent performance. Ex ante, the subject’s recruitment could be based on “patriotic” motives (by implication, shared values or common preferences) or on “compromising evidence” (the subject’s incentives were aligned forcefully, by threats or blackmail, and without that force the subject would have been unwilling). Ex post, the subject’s compliance with instructions could then turn out to be wholehearted or unreserved (in Russian, *okhotno*), or not (that is, having said yes initially, whether or not by consent, the subject then limited further cooperation because of second thoughts or some inner doubt that was previously hidden).

In the reports that we have, we find all possible combinations. At the first stage, recruitment might be *consensual* or *forced* (under the pressure of an explicit threat). These are terms that we will try to stick to, for the avoidance of confusion, although further explanation will be required, for consent implies freedom to refuse, something that should not be assumed. At the second stage, in either case, compliance might then turn out to be *full* or *limited*. Common limits on compliance that we will encounter included not showing up to appointments, persistent delays in the

submission of reports, and reporting orally while declining to report in writing.¹⁵

The contract: existence, consent, and incompleteness

The recruitment of the informer was marked by a ritual: the subject wrote and signed a binding agreement of cooperation with the security police. Hand-writing, rather than a typed or printed form, emphasized the personal nature of commitment.

The removal of most agents' personal files from the archive means that we do not know the exact words used in the recruitment of any of the subjects of our reports. From general indications, it appears that the agent would have promised to collaborate with the KGB, or to maintain conspirativeness about their collaboration. The agent's codename was incorporated in the wording or as a signature. From the last months of Soviet rule in Lithuania, for example, here is agent "Gintaras" (Amber):¹⁶

I [name] promise to keep secret [my] cooperation with the security organs. I will sign further documents "Gintaras."

1989.03.01 [signed] Gintaras

Beyond this, there was no fixed template. The language could be Russian or Lithuanian. The agreement might set out the general focus of the informer's activities (e.g. former nationalists, anti-Soviet groups, foreign students or sailors) or the manner and/or frequency of reporting – or it might not.¹⁷ Compensation or rewards were not mentioned. The duration of the agreement was not limited.

¹⁵ Our reports place considerable weight upon the agent's willingness to report in writing. The alternative was that the agent reported verbally to the handling officer, who wrote up the report. In East Germany, Miller (1999: 15) argues, the Stasi discouraged verbal reporting because of the discretion it gave to the handler to filter the detail given by the informer.

¹⁶ Personal communication from Inga Zaksauskienė, 1 February 2019.

¹⁷ For comparison, from the files of the East German Stasi (cited by Bruce 2010: 90, 95; the Stasi was the Ministry for State Security or MfS):

I [name] dedicate myself voluntarily to work with the Ministry for State Security. I will dedicate my entire strength toward the security of the GDR. I am aware that I am not permitted to discuss my work here with any other third person, nor with other state instruments like the People's Police or Justice. I will inform the MfS of all occurrences among young people.

From here, three issues arise. If the definition of a contract is that two sides make commitments to each other, was this a contract? If a contract is defined by mutual consent, was it given freely? If a contract sets terms for a transaction, what are we to make of the extreme vagueness of the terms used?

First, was there a contract? The written commitment was entirely on the side of the agent; the secret police made no written promise and offered no consideration in exchange. Nonetheless, the elements of an implied contract were evidently present, both in particular and in general. Reporting on agent "Gobis," Major Ostapenko of the Šiauliai KGB office addressed the general issue as follows:

Correctly arranged mutual relations with the agent are of no little significance. Mutual relations and work should be organized so that the agent continually feels interest in the work and our trust, care, and attentiveness towards him.¹⁸

Our stories show that, in return for the agent's written promise to cooperate, the handler would sometimes make specific verbal promises to protect and help the informer, or to withdraw a threat to punish the observer, which amounted to the same thing; in other words, here was a verbal contract. And sometimes, both sides *behaved as if* loyal fulfilment of duties on the part of the agent would be rewarded by the handler's

I [name and date of birth] declare that I am willing to voluntarily work for the Ministry for State Security. I will not mention my association to any other person, including my own relations. I will provide my reports in writing and sign them with the name "Sinus."

From China in 1952, a still wordier "voluntary offer of meritorious service to atone for crimes committed," indicating the recruitment of an agent with a compromised past (cited by Schoenhals 2013: 161):

I volunteer to faithfully safeguard the long-term interests of the people's motherland and voluntarily accept a work assignment to resolutely fight all destructive elements who sabotage national economic construction. I shall strive to perform meritorious service to atone for crimes committed and resolve to transform myself into a genuine servant of the people. In my work I will categorically obey the leadership of the organization, scrupulously honor the laws of the people's government, and abide by work discipline. Should I fail to exert myself or violate discipline etc., I am prepared to submit to the severest punishment meted out by the people's government.

¹⁸ Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 213-218, Obzornaia spravka na agenta "Gobis", sostoiavshchego v agenturnoi seti apparata v g. Shiauliai (26 Sept. 1960) from St. op/up. UKGB pri SM LSSR v g. Shiauliai, maior Ostapenko.

protection, so this was an implied contract. In all cases, including when the agent's service was supplied freely and loyally without reservation, there was the clear promise of official (but secret) affirmation of personal status – an incentive that ought to be recognized as highly powered in a secretive, low-trust society obsessed with personal record and rank.

Second, was there freedom of contract? The KGB itself acknowledged that recruitment was sometimes coerced. Coercion would take the form of an explicit threat to impose costs on a candidate who failed to comply. Other cases were regarded as consensual.

I will use this classification below. But what did consent mean and should it be taken at face value? Consent implied that the candidate was free to refuse the contract with no more adverse consequences than a wasted day. However, just as a contract can be implicit, so can a threat. In those cases where the agent was recorded as consenting to recruitment, to what extent was their consent framed by some implicit threat? If the subject expected retribution to follow a refusal, and was frightened to refuse, *even when no threat was voiced*, then the line that divided true consent from coercion might not be observable.

From anecdotal evidence, candidates for recruitment did sometimes refuse.¹⁹ Indeed, no specific penalty was prescribed for a refusal. The subject did not know this, however. It would have been clear to anyone that, if recruitment might seem to offer some personal advantage, then refusal implied the loss of that advantage, especially if it concerned a privilege such as foreign travel or a responsible position involving contact with foreigners or responsibility for secret information (that is, almost any management post). More substantially, many citizens had something in their past that might provide leverage if recruitment was refused. This was particularly the case in Lithuania, which had only recently emerged from fifteen years of military occupation and an armed insurgency that had touched many if not most families. The subject with a compromised record might logically anticipate that to refuse recruitment would invite the KGB to open the Pandora's Box of the past. Based on backward induction (or, thinking like an economist), the candidate might then prefer to forestall the threat by accepting recruitment without resistance. That this was a real possibility is suggested by our own evidence to be considered below, as well as by anecdotes from other settings.²⁰

¹⁹ From East Germany Schmeidel (2008: 36); Dennis (2003: 104-106); Miller (1997: 48-49). From Romania Verdery (2014: chapter 3). From the Soviet Union the author has received personal accounts in conversation.

²⁰ Other settings: a Stasi officer "kept several cards up his sleeve to be played depending how the meeting unfolded. Most candidates agreed to

Freedom of contract should be understood in its political and social setting. My use of the KGB's classification of most informer recruitments as consensual should not be taken to mean that that Soviet society was based on consent or that the citizen lived without fear or that an approach from the KGB did not carry an implicit threat. In this context, consent means only that the subject accepted recruitment without an explicit threat of the form: "If you do not cooperate, you will be punished in some other context."

At the same time, some stories told in this text or in Appendix B do tell of candidates that accept recruitment with a show of enthusiasm. This includes cases where the KGB had no specific leverage, only its general its authority and reputation (which were rather weighty, of course).

Third, the informer's contract was highly incomplete. In economics a contract is called incomplete (e.g. Hart 1995: 73-92) when a party agrees to fulfil an assignment in return for a consideration, and the quality of performance is crucial to its fulfilment and cannot be fully specified in writing. In this case, the agreement obligated the agent to carry out tasks that were unspecified to an extent that could not be demarcated over a period that was left undefined.

When a contract is incomplete, certain things follow. The contract itself becomes one moment in a process that necessarily begins long before and continues long after. Before the contract, there is a search for the best partner and there is due diligence. There are also implications for after the contract. Despite all the efforts made before the contract, only after it is signed does each side discover the true extent of the other's commitment and come to appreciate the further investments that might be required to uphold the spirit in which the contract was signed. Everyday examples that readers may be familiar with include contracts for employment, teaching and learning, publishing, and marriage.

And the twist in the tale: the fact that an incomplete contract signed in bad faith offers significant risks for both sides to incur further costs *after* the contract is signed is exactly the thing that raises the bar for entering into the contract in the first place. It establishes the importance of searching thoroughly and of exercising due diligence *before* signing. It sets the premium on loyalty, and encourages caution, so that partners with a

become informants on the initial request. If they wavered, however, [he] would remind them in blunt terms of some infraction, however minor, from their past. Very rarely did candidates then have the courage to refuse." Another officer kept up his sleeve that the candidate's wife had been caught with anti-communist leaflets; she would be prosecuted if the candidate refused to cooperate. The candidate "freely agreed to work for the Stasi" so the threat was never voiced. See Bruce (2010: 87).

poor record may be signed up only when the stakes are commensurately high.

We see all these stages in the recruitment and management of the KGB informer. The identification of suitable candidates could be opportunistic but was more often strategic – the KGB first identified a need and then searched for a person who could fill it. Once a suitable candidate was identified, there was generally a stage of further investigation of their profile, which could be prolonged, before the approach would be made.

The formalization of the agent's status opened a new stage. Two aspects seem to have had special importance. Trust was essential to the relationship between informer and handling officer. Confidence building took time and effort on both sides. It was important for the agent to feel trusted and valued. The handler had to find a balance, so that the agent was not trusted too much, and was not rewarded for performance that was sub-par.

But it was not enough just to get the balance of trust right. Even when trust was not an issue, the raw qualities of the informer might not be fully matched to the task at hand. In that case, both sides would need to invest time and effort into improving the fit.

To suggest that the commitment was two-sided does not mean the two sides were equal. The informer's trust in the handler had to be without conditions. The handler had the advantage of being able to "trust, but verify" by keeping the informer under surveillance. On the negative side, the KGB had to meet the costs of searching for recruits and evaluating them before recruitment; once these costs were sunk, the KGB was strongly incentivized to persist with informers who fell short, and to continue to invest in them despite the possibility of eventual failure. We will see how this persistence could bear fruit.

The long and complicated path to collaboration

Six stories serve to illustrate the agent's path to collaboration. Everything is presented as reported by the KGB, abridged and paraphrased, with some reading between the lines. The six are selected for the range and interest of circumstantial detail. Other stories are noted in Appendix B.

Neris and Nevskii: Remaking the persona

In Klaipėda, the northernmost ice-free port on the Soviet coastline, the KGB kept watch on foreign ships and their crews. Among their resources were two informers, both young people whose collaboration was both unforced and fully compliant (in the senses discussed above). In each case, however, there were personal barriers to success, which were overcome by application of the handling officer's psychological insight.

“Nevskii,” a Russian male from Vologda province, graduated in foreign languages from Leningrad University in 1957. At that time he was aged 26. Fluent in English and Swedish, he was assigned a job with the Soviet shipping company “Inflot,” working in the port of Klaipėda as a dispatcher. His position, his language skills, and the scope these gave him for socializing with foreigners brought him to the attention of the Klaipėda KGB.

The handling officer noted that the young man had strengths and weaknesses. On one hand he was sociable and hard working. On the other hand, he came across to others as arrogant and conceited and he talked too much. The KGB approached him, therefore, knowing that this could be a long-term project.

A Komsomol member, “Nevskii” had no inhibitions when asked to become an informer. Thus, his collaboration was unforced and wholehearted. But, as expected, he was unproductive at first. The reason was that his overbearing attitude put off those who would otherwise have been happy to get to know him. He could not gain the confidence of the sailors he mixed with.

It was the handling officer’s task to change this situation. While training “Nevskii” in the skills and methods of counter-intelligence, the officer also had to show him that the barrier to his becoming a useful source was his own attitude. In the process, “Nevskii” was successfully re-educated in proper behaviour. The outcome was successful: he was now able to win the confidence of the foreign sailors and gain access to useful intelligence. By 1961 the reporting officer was able to recommend “Nevskii” for use in “active measures.”

At around the same time, the Klaipėda KGB also recruited a young woman, the only one in our sample. “Neris,” a music student of German ethnicity, and fluent in German, lived with her mother. She was selected to mix with the foreign crews in the Klaipėda docks “based on her further employment” (at the same time, in other words, she got a job with the port authority).

The picture of “Neris” that is painted in the document is attractive: she is described as of “sympathetic appearance” and endowed with “sociability and sophistication.” Her recruitment is unforced and she complies wholeheartedly with instructions. After recruitment, her handler not only trains her in the skills and techniques of counter-intelligence but also teaches her “to recognize the ways of the foreign sailors of our friends and enemies.” She learns how to open and guide conversations, how to respond to foreigners, how to recognize and correct her own mistakes, and how to use initiative.

Despite all this, “Neris” gets poor results. Her interactions with sailors are usually limited to everyday matters, and rarely extend to politics. The

reason, the handler realizes, that the men she meets see her only as a woman. They bring her gifts, promise to help her, and try to date her. While she is not thought to have indulged in “amoral wrongdoing,” it’s clear that her contacts are only after one thing.

The handler changes direction. He takes “Neris” on a long journey of re-education. From now on they discuss morality, the family, comradeship, and friendship. The handler also encourages her to reflect openly on her personal conduct and especially what she might be getting wrong in the company of sailors.

The new “Neris” changes her approach. She presents herself in a new way, as a serious person who is businesslike, has strict moral principles, and looks forward to family life and children. She cuts her links with the sailors who flirted with her. She associates increasingly with officers, who now see her in a new light. Some of them start to cultivate her acquaintance, showing curiosity about her home life and her situation. One asks her about the location of industrial facilities. Another is inquisitive about visiting warships. Thus her re-education has enabled “Neris” to play a useful role in counter-intelligence.

To summarize, both “Neris” and “Nevskii” consented to collaboration with the KGB but their consent was not enough. To be a productive informer one also had to have a persona (or outward self) that would attract the kind of people that the KGB wished to keep under scrutiny. “Neris” had a persona that was attractive, but to the wrong sort. “Nevskii” had a persona that was to some degree repellent. Thus, for both, recruitment was the start of a process that remade their outward selves over a period of time. “Neris” became a more serious person and “Nevskii” became a better listener. As a result, both became more attractive to the targets of KGB surveillance.

Ruta: The loneliness of a life under cover

In 1957 the twenty-year-old male who would eventually become “Ruta” was sentenced to five years of forced labour for his part in organized resistance to Soviet rule in Lithuania. (The part he played is not described.) He served his time thoughtfully, choosing the company of like-minded prisoners, while trying to educate himself in political theories and practices. His “long and complicated path to collaboration” with the KGB began from the realization that any organized resistance was doomed to failure. Thinking through what that implied, the young man came gradually to the conclusion that he had picked the wrong side. While he had been fighting pointlessly for a society that no longer existed and few really wanted to restore, the Soviet Union was building the future. For the time being, he kept his conversion to himself.

By the time he left the labour camp, the young man was ready to come out as a reformed character. At first, he thought of making a grand public gesture, renouncing his former comrades and their goals and committing himself to communism. On reflection, he concluded, this would change few minds. Instead, he turned to the KGB to offer his services in the undercover struggle against the Lithuanian nationalist resistance.

“Ruta” was that rare creature, a walk-in (volunteer). He expected the KGB to greet him with suspicion.²¹ Instead, they welcomed him with open arms. From the KGB standpoint the young man was an ideal recruit, being deeply embedded in the “hostile environment” of anti-Soviet nationalism from before and during his time in the labour camp. “Ruta” writes that his first handler (“Vitas Domo”) showed him only goodwill and sincerity, and this granted “Ruta” a rare period of optimism and peace of mind.

The honeymoon did not last. “Ruta” was soon passed onto another handler (“Julius Antano”). The new handler was not the problem; “Ruta” describes him as “calm, unhurried, an intelligent person, an experienced Chekist.” But “Ruta” began to let Julius Antano down, missing meetings and failing assignments. This marked the onset of a personal crisis, the reasons for which “Ruta” kept to himself. The trigger for this crisis (he now explains) was that in society he now found himself completely isolated. In his own mind, he had become proud of the Soviet Union’s achievements and wanted to help overcome its residual defects, which were exactly the issues that nationalists exploited to promote discontent. As a loyal citizen he hungered for the respect and trust of others who felt like him. But those other loyal citizens continued to avoid and despise him as the unreformed nationalist dissenter that he continued to appear to be. His only friends were the old comrades of the resistance whom he had come to inwardly reject.²²

The people “Ruta” hated most were the former resisters who had avoided prison and were now making their careers and had even joined the party, to which they professed loyalty out of self-interest rather than

²¹ “Like most secret services,” notes Schmeidel (2008: 37), “the Stasi had a pathological fear of walk-ins.”

²² Thus Ruta’s breakdown oddly resembled the crises experienced by the idealistic young people of thirty years previously, described by Hellbeck (2006: 106-112). They dreamed of solidarity and of serving the community. Involuntarily doubting the nature of their society and the wisdom of its leaders, they found themselves isolated and their dreams poisoned, as they confided in their diaries. More than one felt the urge to confide in the authorities: “The only thing that I would like to have . . . is trust of the NKVD,” wrote Julia Piatnitskaya. I thank Claire Shaw for pointing me in this direction.

inner belief. As a former state criminal, by contrast, “Ruta” could not make a career; he could get only low-status employment at a “miserly” wage. He turned in on himself and fell into a depression. He began to drink. Eventually he was hospitalized with pulmonary tuberculosis. “When Julius Antano visited me in the sanatorium,” “Ruta” writes,

he showed himself to be so close to me, just like a father. I began more and more to feel a kind of inner love for the Chekists and I began to follow them and imitate them. More and more often I repeated to myself the words of F. E. Dzerzhinskii: “A Chekist can only be a person with a cool head, a warm heart, and clean hands.” It was more or less an exercise in self-hypnosis. Today I think that the key to prevailing over that old pessimism, that morbid nightmare, was my old acquaintance with Julius Antano. I am grateful to him for my whole life.

Over several years “Ruta” emerged from his depression. Helped by his KGB connections he changed his residence, finished college, and gained employment in accordance with his profession (not specified, but involving conferences, lectures, and some branch of scholarship). How did the KGB help him, specifically? This was “hard to say. Maybe it was that I always felt goodwill and sincerity from their side, and trust in me, or maybe it was that I trusted them. Most likely, both at once.” Most important, “Ruta” was no longer lonely: “There are many good people around me. They trust me – which is most important.”

In the last pages of his memoir, “Ruta” recounts that he has successfully completed many important assignments to watch former nationalist resisters now released back into society. Sometimes he is invited to write about the evolving “forms, methods, and tactics” of nationalist groups. He concludes with advice for handlers on how to assign surveillance tasks without arousing suspicion and the importance of allowing agents to exercise a degree of initiative. “Ruta,” it seems, has become a KGB super-grass, entrusted not only with routine tasks but also with advice and analysis up to some level.

To summarize, the story of “Ruta” reveals the psychological stress of the undercover helper whose inner thoughts are known only to the KGB. Trust was the key that unlocked the informer’s ability to perform his role. At first the door was locked on both sides. The KGB turned the key from one side by showing trust in “Ruta.” But this was not enough: it did not save “Ruta” from despair. For that, “Ruta” had to turn the key from the other side by learning to trust the KGB with his darkest inner thoughts.

Korabel'nik and Komandulis: Family values

One of the channels of Baltic migration in the interwar period led to South America. Among these were families from Lithuania. They had left their homeland to escape persecution, because they were Jews or socialists. Separated from the old country by a generation and an ocean, they still thought of it as home. It was the 1950s; the war was over, and Stalin was dead. From the other side of the ocean, the emigrants looked back at the old country now under Soviet rule and made a fateful choice: they decided to return.

In returning home, they made a terrible mistake. They brought their teenage children. Arriving in the old country, the young generation took a close look and realized immediately what they wanted more than anything: to leave as quickly as possible. But this was the one thing that the Soviet authorities could not permit under any circumstances.

On first refusal, the young people did not give up. They banded together and shared and nurtured what the KGB called their "emigrationist inclinations." They made contacts with the diplomats representing the countries from which they had come. They travelled to Moscow and tried to obtain access to the embassies. They wrote petitions, demanding the right to leave. They wrote articles for publication abroad, protesting their situation. These things were worse than individual misdemeanours, for they were coordinated and took on the character of conspiracy. They drew the attention of the KGB, which began to watch them and open their letters.

Up to a point, the KGB's attention was solicitous. These young people were ripe for exploitation by foreign powers intent on disrupting the Soviet political and social order. They were heading straight for a collision with authority, from which they could not emerge unscathed. Could a damaging confrontation be averted? Could their course be corrected in time? The KGB looked for ways to bring its influence to bear.

One idea was to infiltrate an "undercover helper" into the group. The outsider was rebuffed. The group remained solid and its course remained unchanged.

The KGB approached the problem from another angle. They looked again at the group and singled out two of its members as weaker links. The common denominator was the parents: the KGB classed both fathers as politically reliable because of their personal records of engagement with communist politics in their former lives in Latin America. And who but a parent would share more sincerely the KGB's interest in stopping these young men from destroying themselves over a childish dream?

The documentation tells the two stories separately. Martin (not his real name), from a Jewish family, was identified as being more suggestible

than others (“it was established that his anti-Soviet judgements were the result of an incorrect understanding of Soviet actuality”) and the KGB began preparations to call him in for a warning (“preventive conversation”).

Before talking directly to Martin, the KGB applied pressure indirectly. The pressure came from two angles. One angle was Martin’s father, whom surveillance had identified as a potential ally. In preparation for addressing Martin directly, the KGB decided to recruit his father as an informer. The father proved a willing collaborator, talking freely to his handler about Martin’s activities. The handling officer set about training the father how to talk more persuasively to his son – in particular, using examples drawn from life to prove the superiority of the Soviet system to his son.

Another angle for KGB pressure was found at Martin’s workplace, a local newspaper. It turned out that the young man’s direct superior was also a KGB agent. Through this agent, Martin’s managers were given details of his anti-Soviet activities and were asked to use their influence on him to bring him back into line.

Finally, the timing was favourable. A few days before the KGB interviewed him, Martin had been given an apartment in a new building.

The interview went as well as could be hoped. Martin proved to be receptive to the KGB message. He was open about his connections and past behaviour, including contacts with foreigners and attempts to send documents abroad. He put the blame on his own lack of knowledge and thoughtlessness. Why had he changed his mind? Because of his father’s influence, he said, and the influence of his colleagues at work, and because he now better understood how working people lived in the Soviet Union. In short, the KGB approach had worked.

Moreover, Martin appeared more and more to be a suitable candidate for recruitment himself. He spoke Spanish, Russian, Lithuanian, and Hebrew. He had a large network of friends and excellent opportunities to be of value to KGB counter-intelligence. When the subject was raised, Martin consented to recruitment, choosing the codename “Korabel’nik” (shipwright). (This was in 1960, when Martin was 22.)

Not only was Martin willing in principle; he immediately began to give information about other young men of South American origin who were seeking a way out of the country. One of these had served in the armed forces of his country of birth and was allegedly supplying information via the country’s Moscow embassy. Another was currently serving in the Soviet Army in the western borderland of Kaliningrad province; he turned out to be already under surveillance by military counter-intelligence. Later, “Korabel’nik” visited him in Kaliningrad; his mission was monitored

by a KGB officer who reported back that the new informer had behaved properly while on the assignment.

During his meetings the KGB handler continued the re-education of “Korabel’nik” that his father had begun. The two talked over the Soviet Union’s internal affairs and international relations as well as the KGB’s assignments for the young man. The KGB’s conclusion was that they had made a successful investment: the young man, it was reported, “can be used for the investigation of persons suspected of participation in the agent networks of American and Israeli intelligence.”

The other weaker link was Nicolas (again, not his real name, which we don’t know), the only son of a father who again had a history of close links with one of the South American communist parties. Approached by a KGB informer outside the family, the father was open about the family predicament, blamed his son’s behaviour on the influence of his friends and their lack of understanding of “Soviet actuality,” and expressed deep fears for Nicolas’s future, which seemed set on a criminal course.

The KGB again set out to train the father in how to manage his child. On the handler’s instruction, the informer counselled the father to explain to Nicolas various examples of the virtues and advantages of the Soviet system. The informer also evidently made acquaintance with Nicolas and got him to share some documents (perhaps these were writings of some kind that showed the Soviet Union in a good light) with his friends.

At this point Nicolas too became a potential candidate for recruitment as a KGB informer. Over two months, the KGB evaluated him. At this time, Nicolas received an instruction to report to the local military unit for a medical examination – a disturbing occurrence, one must suppose, for a young man who was doubtful about living in the Soviet Union, let alone accepting compulsory military service. Now the KGB handler took a direct hand, meeting Nicolas face to face at the military unit, at first maintaining his cover, then openly. Nicolas responded well, talked freely about his friends, and afterwards made no attempt to disclose the KGB approach to others. He became a willing and productive informer on the group, choosing the codename “Komandulis” (commander), and working with “Korabel’nik.”

In this story an accident of family ties had made two young people into active resisters to one of the core principles of Soviet rule – the closed border. To resolve the situation the KGB successfully exploited the same family ties. The fathers were willing to help if it would keep their children out of trouble – and who could blame them when the KGB was holding a gun to the heads of their sons? But first the handling officers had to teach the fathers to talk to their sons, and also to become more persuasive advocates of communist rule. The fathers became informers on the sons. This was productive not only in terms of information passed; it also

helped to build the agent network. In turn, the sons also became undercover helpers, informing on their friends.

What happened to the other young people in the group of would be re-emigrants? Frustratingly, we have no idea.

Neman: The desire to atone

Recruited in December 1959, “Neman” worked for the KGB in order to find a path back to respectability and a career. Born in 1925, he was just a teenager when war broke out. Lithuania fell under German occupation, and the young man was deported to Germany as a forced labourer. There, he collaborated with the authorities in making anti-Soviet propaganda. Returning to Soviet Lithuania he entered university, graduating in 1951. He also joined the state radio. But his prospects were clouded by his record of wartime collaboration with the enemy. At some point he was dismissed for “political reasons,” and he was reduced for a while to working as a secondary school teacher. Eventually he was reinstated but he felt that he remained under suspicion. The cloud did not lift.

In 1957 the World Festival of Youth and Students (28 July to 11 August) brought an unaccustomed flood of foreign tourists to Moscow and created many opportunities for KGB surveillance. As a journalist “Neman” was in a position to attend, and this put him touch with many foreigners including Western journalists. The KGB now identified him as a likely prospect and looked at him closely. On a business trip he found himself sharing a room with a “party worker,” actually an undercover KGB officer, who struck up a friendship with him.

Neman was thought to have many talents: he was able to work on his own, without external supervision, was good with languages, and could win the confidence of strangers. He was just the sort of person whom the KGB could use with tourists at home and abroad. But why would he? For “Neman” the key to recruitment was that he felt his career was blocked by his war record, about which he was quite open. In December 1959, when the KGB offered him the opportunity to collaborate, he saw the offer as a means of redemption, which he now grasped with both hands.

Thereafter “Neman” became a prolific informer. In Vilnius he was brought into contact with two Western Europeans, a male diplomat and a female society journalist (or a “spy”?) with various connections to Eastern Europe, to Lithuanian emigrants, and to the Vatican hierarchy. She invited him to visit Warsaw and Rome and supplied him with forbidden books – Boris Pasternak’s *Dr Zhivago*, Milovan Djilas’s *The New Class*, and Lithuanian nationalist writings. This was surely how the KGB expected spies to cultivate a Soviet citizen in the situation of “Neman.” His relationship with the journalist became warm and confidential.

At this point the KGB tried “Neman” out on a foreign trip: he travelled with a tourist group to China. This was before the Soviet-Chinese split, although relations were already deteriorating. No doubt he had to report on the conduct of his fellow tourists, and more than likely he was himself under surveillance, but the report does not comment on this. Meanwhile, the journalist invited “Neman” to visit her in Rome or in Warsaw. At the next stage, the KGB planned that “Neman” would visit Warsaw.

His personal qualities made Neman an ideal recruit. He entered adult society, vulnerable to discrimination because of his bad war record. In another person, that bad war record could have been the lever to force him into the service of the KGB. Neman did not need to be forced. He wanted to cancel out the past, saw collaboration with the KGB as means to that end, consented freely to it, and became an enthusiastic agent.

Selection, re-education, and rewards

The full range of reports that form our sample show wide variation in how the recruitment process worked. Table 2 reports the measurable aspects of recruitment and performance of our 21 agents. Taking the reports at face value, nearly all were recruited by consent. Only two were recruited under an explicit threat. For “Beržas” (1), the wrongdoing was long past and was considered to involve misdemeanours rather than felonies. For “Rimkus” the wrongdoing was more immediate and more serious; it was thought, however, that the candidate was already experiencing regret.

Table 2. Twenty-one KGB informers: recruitment and performance

	Per cent	N =
Recruited by consent, per cent	90%	21
Initial compliance was full, per cent, where known	61%	18
Initial compliance was monitored, per cent	38%	21
Service was rewarded, per cent	29%	21

Source and notes see Appendix A. The sample size varies across indicators. I give the sample size as 21 when it would be unsafe to assume that absence of evidence was evidence either way, and it would be more cautious to underestimate than to overestimate.

Several factors might account for the low frequency of coercion in our data. The case of “Rimkus” is suggestive of a common pattern. The KGB often seized the moment to pick up candidates with a record of nationalist activity who had begun to experience second thoughts or regret for their

past involvement.²³ People in this situation tended to accept recruitment without resistance, or even enthusiastically (in the cases of “Neman” and “Ruta”).

Related to this, the KGB subjected all our candidates to careful scrutiny before selecting them for recruitment. There was a covert stage of preliminary investigation, often followed by prolonged discussion with the candidate: the report on “Petrauskas” notes, for example, that it took as many as twelve separate conversations with an officer before the KGB was convinced of the sincerity of his commitment. By implication, many or most of those who would not have been recruited without heavy coercion, and who could hardly have been trusted with sensitive assignments, were not (or should not have been) selected.

Selection is the simplest explanation of the low incidence of coercive recruitment: the KGB preferred recruits whose incentives to cooperate were already aligned or could be aligned with little pressure.²⁴ This was most likely to be the case for those who had resisted Soviet rule in the past and had now lost the courage of their former convictions. As suggested earlier, people in this situation might quickly be persuaded that resistance was pointless and that to make a show of resistance could leave them worse off.

Further illustration is provided by two informers that, although mentioned in our reports, are not technically in the data. These are the fathers of “Korabel’nik” and “Komandulis,” who were recruited to inform on their sons and their sons’ friends. Evidence from East Germany suggests that informing on the family circle was sometimes a stumbling block for the most willing recruits (Miller 1999: 42). We are not told

²³ See Schoenhals (2013: 141-142) for a Chinese example of seizing the right moment to recruit an agent, cited in the original source as exemplifying good practice.

²⁴ In the 1960s, in East Germany at roughly the same time as most of our stories, Stasi researchers estimated that only 7.7 per cent of “unofficial collaborators” in Karl-Marx-Stadt were recruited under duress. Miller (1999: 41, 47; also Dennis 2003: 98) suggests that this was policy: Stasi guidelines of a few years later recommended that recruitment should be based on “the candidates’ positive political stance, on their personal needs, and interests, on the desire to atone for misdemeanours,” or a combination. “Atonement” might be a cynical euphemism for blackmail, but the desire to atone for misdemeanours implies what we see to have been typical in our Soviet case, a compromised past, followed by regret. Schmeidel (2008: 38) attributes the low rate of recruitment by threats to career concerns: the typical Stasi officer advanced by recruiting informants, and was damaged by failures, so preferred the willing to the unwilling.

about the spirit in which these two accepted their assignments. But, setting their personal political loyalties to one side, considering them only as parents, what choice did they have when the KGB asked them to cooperate? Without some kind of intervention, their children would end up in a labour camp. The KGB was the only outside agency that offered to help. Under those circumstances, what parent would say no?

Despite the high proportion that consented to recruitment by the KGB, the informer's initial performance was often found to be problematic. Fixing this required the KGB to make post-contract investments in the capabilities of their agents. Two words were used frequently in this connection: *privitie* and *vospitanie*. Both could be translated as education or training, but they were applied differently. *Privitie* had the narrower meaning of training in the agent's tradecraft. *Vospitanie* was used to convey a broader sense of the moral and political re-education of the agent's character and motivation in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and fidelity to the KGB.

All recruits required training (*privitie*) in the tradecraft or inculcation of the habits of working undercover: how to approach a person of interest without arousing suspicion, what information to report, and how to report it without risking exposure. *Privitie* did not have to be hard going: for example, "Genys" and "Gobis" were encouraged to read spy fiction and discuss it with their handlers.²⁵

Given the necessary tradecraft, many agents still did not perform in the spirit of their agreement with the KGB. The residual obstacle was often, but not always, motivation. "Neris" and "Nevskii" received the necessary *privitie*, and were well motivated, but also required *vospitanie*, the moral and ideological reform that would make them into useful informers.

Failure to perform was often voluntary, however. In 40 per cent of the reports available, newly recruited agents shirked their duties in ways that reflected badly on their motivation. Shirking took forms that are instantly recognizable in a college setting, where every student has chosen freely to join the course, and many still contrive to miss classes, fail to respond to messages, and submit assigned work late or not at all.

Moreover, the quality of the agent's compliance was unrelated to the circumstances of the agent's recruitment. Agents who consented to recruitment were as likely to shirk as those pressed into service.

²⁵ For Chinese informers, the exploits of Sherlock Holmes were recommended reading until the Cultural Revolution (Schoenmals 2013: 179).

We see that KGB handlers did not take the quality of compliance for granted. In another 40 per cent of reports, mention is made of the monitoring of new informers' performance by direct observation involving an undercover officer or another informer, or by some form of eavesdropping. This may be the extent of it, or the practice of verification might have been considered so normal that it was not mentioned in every report.²⁶ (Against this, the shirking of "Stanislav" was exposed perhaps by accident. While the handler trusted the agent too much, the agent overlooked a colleague's wrongdoing, perhaps corruptly, and was found out only when the colleague became the subject of enquiry.)

When non-compliance became apparent, intervention was required. Voluntary non-compliance was first and foremost a breach of the trust relationship between agent and handler. The remedy was to rebuild trust. The first step was to establish on which side the deficiency lay. Sometimes the fault was on the side of the KGB. One handler demotivated "Stanislav" by trusting him too much. Another did the same to "Karklas" by distrusting him without sufficient cause. More often, however, the barrier lay on the side of the agent, who was inhibited from full cooperation by some hidden moral or political reservation.

In such cases of this nature, the KGB had two instruments at its disposal: re-education and rewards. Re-education came first; it aimed to reform the agent's moral and ideological attitudes and so overcome the inhibiting scruples. If the agent's performance then improved, the breakthrough could be usefully complemented and consolidated by tangible rewards that signalled gratitude and acknowledgement.

The process of thought reform typically involved the agent in many hours of detailed and no doubt repetitive discussion with the handler about the role of the Soviet Union and communist party in history and world affairs, the achievements and advantages of the Soviet system, and the rights and obligations of the citizen. Reading such words does little to convey the atmosphere of such discussions. It is an open question whether the balance lay with persuasion or intimidation. No doubt there were elements of both: an important aspect was surely to convince the

²⁶ A report on the condition of the agent network managed by the KGB Trakai office implies that verification was normal, beginning a stream of critical remarks: "Following recruitment of an agent no evidence of verification is added to the personal file . . ." (Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 48-65, Spravka o sostoianii agenturno-operativnoi raboty v apparate UKGB pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskoi SSR v Trakaiskom raione (Feb. 1961) from Referent, maior Gomyranov). Miller (1999: 15) suggests that the East German Stasi aimed to confirm the accuracy of all agent reports by systematic triangulation.

agent that the upholding of religious scruples or nationalist convictions would lead inevitably to loss of status and exclusion from society.

Successful re-education was often reinforced by material rewards. These were cash payments or gifts of goods or services (in one case, spa holidays) in short supply. The context was that in principle the services of the informer were unpaid; rewards were intended to be relatively small, and were to be given out only for exceptional service. These principles were not always observed: just as the KGB was aware that some agents were unsuited to their duties or shirked them, it was reported from time to time that some handlers misused bonus payments to reward routine performance or even non-performance.²⁷ In the records that we have to hand, in contrast, we see that payments and privileges were sometimes productive. Rewards were distributed in a calculated way, not in the petty spirit of incentive payments for results, but to affirm the agent's status and service and to strengthen the affective tie between agent and handler. In turn, this improved the agent's morale and increased motivation and effort.

Conclusions

First, the recruitment and management of KGB informers was a serious business. Our data show that, for the KGB, good practice started from prolonged scrutiny of candidates for recruitment and proceeded to recruitment only after careful evaluation of their character and motivation. Recruitment was followed not only by triangulation of their initial performance using other informers and undercover officers in many cases, but also by further investments in the training and re-education which could extend to the moral and ideological thought reform of the informer.

Second, we can understand the process as organized around the agreement between the agent and the KGB. The agreement, while formally one-sided, was the written part of a two-sided contract with some clauses that were verbal or implied, but nonetheless real. The contract as a whole obligated the informer to provide services in return for the protection and care of the KGB. The freedom with which the agent entered into the contract varied. Threats were often present, but were typically implicit; the extremes, with enthusiasm at one end and outright coercion at the other, were exceptional. By implication, the sharp

²⁷ Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 87-94, Spravka o tselesoobraznosti i pravil'nosti raskhodovaniia denezhnykh sredstv po st. 9 (osoby raskhody) v organakh KGB Litovskoi SSR (23 June 1962) from Nachalnik gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Babintsev.

distinctions that are sometimes made between those agents who collaborated willingly or under pressure were rarely clearcut in reality.

Third, the contract for agent services was incomplete in the sense that economists use the term. The incompleteness of the contract is the aspect that gave rise to the lengthy processes of pre-contract investigation and negotiation and the post-contract renegotiations and further investments that we see in those cases that the KGB identified as good practice.

Fourth, trust-based relationships are found everywhere in our documentation. The balance of trust was not equal. For the KGB, things worked out best when the agent's trust was unconditional. The agent was expected to trust the handler with every intimate detail of their past lives ("Neman"), their colleagues ("Stanislav"), their families (the fathers of "Korabel'nik" and "Komandulis"), their most selfish urges ("Gobis"), their deepest fears ("Ruta"), and the very shape of their personalities ("Neris" and "Nevskii").

While the typical agent aspired to be trusted, KGB handlers were advised to "trust, but verify." Trust was frequently a powerful motivator ("Neman"); too little of it could ruin an agent ("Gobis"). But too much trust also put the agent at risk ("Stanislav"); no agent was so trusted that their work would not be checked.

Trust and deception were two sides of the informer's coin. Before recruitment, the KGB investigated and sometimes interviewed the candidate deceptively, from under cover; in the process they worked out an approach calculated to gain the recruit's initial confidence. After recruitment, the agent learned the techniques of concealment and deception that would best serve their primary goal: to keep or win the trust of the targets to whom they were assigned, and whom they would go on to betray.

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Appendix A. Twenty-one informers of the Soviet Lithuania KGB: characteristics and service

Report year	Codename	Gender	Residence	Education: higher or not	Work status: white-collar or not	Ethnicity	Compromised by acts or associates	Party status	Year born	Year recruited	Age recruited, years	Service, years	Recruitment was by consent or not	Initial compliance was full or not	Compliance was monitored	Service was rewarded
1964	Algis	M	Kaunas	No	No	Lithuanian	Yes			1963		1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1961	Beržas (1)*	M	Unnamed town		Yes	Lithuanian	Yes			1957		4	No	No	Yes	Yes
1964	Beržas (2)*	M	Kaunas			Lithuanian	Yes			1964		0	Yes	No		
1962	Genys	M		No		Lithuanian	Yes		1933	1958***	27		No	Yes		
1960	Gobis	M	Šiauliai			Jewish	Yes	Expelled	1916	1951	35	9	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
1961	Karklas	M	Kuršėnai	Yes	Yes	Lithuanian	Yes		1905	1961	56	0	Yes		Yes	
1962	Komandulis	M				Lithuanian			1937	1961	24	1	Yes	Yes		
1961	Korabel'nik	M			Yes	Jewish	Yes		1938	1960	22	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	
1962	Maksim	M	Vilnius	Yes	Yes	Lithuanian	Yes		1911	1961	50	1	Yes	Yes		
1962	Mindaugas	M	Kaunas	Yes	Yes	Lithuanian				1956		6	Yes	No		Yes
1961	Mir	M		Yes	Yes	Lithuanian	Yes			1956		5	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
1961	Neman	M	Vilnius	Yes	Yes	Lithuanian	Yes		1925	1959	34	2	Yes	Yes		
1962	Neris	F	Klaipėda	Yes	Yes	German				1958		4	Yes	Yes		
1962	Nevskii	M	Klaipėda	Yes	Yes	Russian		Komsomol	1931	1957	26	5	Yes	Yes		
1964	Petrauskas	M	Kaunas			Lithuanian	Yes			1963		1	Yes	Yes		
1962	Rimkus	M	Klaipėda rural district	Yes	Yes	Lithuanian	Yes		1908	1961		1	Yes	Yes		
1975	Ruta	M				Lithuanian	Yes		1937	1965***	28	10	Yes	No		Yes
1964	Sadovskii	M	Kaunas			Lithuanian				1964		0	Yes	Yes	Yes	
1961	Stanislav	M				Polish*				1958		3	Yes	No	Yes	
1961	Surikov	M			No	Lithuanian	Yes			1961		0	Yes			
1962	Valdas	M	Vilnius	Yes	Yes**	Lithuanian			1939	1961	22	1	Yes		Yes	

Notes: Blank cells indicate no information. * Agents chose their own codenames, and two could choose one name, in this case “Beržas.”

** College student. *** Approximate, based on internal evidence.

Sources:

Algis: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/323, 24-27, Spravka po lichnomu delu na agenta “Al’gas” (27 Aug. 1964) from Operupolnomochennyi 2 otd. apparata UKGB pri SM LSSR v gor. Kaunase, kapitan Sidorov.

Beržas (1): Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 34-35, Spravka na agenta “Biarzhas” (Mar. 1961) from Referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Lit. SSR, maior Gomyranov.

Beržas (2): Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/323, 34-36, [Spravka o verbovke agenta “Biarzhas”] (Aug. 1964) from St. operupolnomochennyi 2 otd-ia. apparata UKGB pri SM Lit. SSR v gor. Kaunase, kapitan Balkus.

Genys: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 22-24, Spravka na agenta “Genis” (26 Jan. 1962) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

Gobis: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 213-218, Obzornaia spravka na agenta “Gobis”, sostoiavshchego v agenturnoi seti apparata v g. Shiauliai (26 Sept. 1960) from St. op/up. UKGB pri SM LSSR v g. Shiauliai, maior Ostapenko.

Karklas: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 302-304, Spravka [agent “Karklas”] (no date but 1961) from St. operupolnomochennyi KGB pri SM LSSR v gorode Shiauliai, kapitan Sarpalius.

Komandulis: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 28-29, Spravka na agenta “Komandulisa” (22 Jan. 1962) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

Korabel’nik: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 30-33, Spravka [agent “Korabel’nik”] (11 Mar. 1961) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

Maksim: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 19-21, Spravka o verbovke agenta “Maksim” (no date but 1962) from Nachalnik gruppy KGB pri SM Lit SSSR po izucheniiu i obobshcheniiu opyta operrabotnikov, podpolkovnik Babintsev.

Mindaugas: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 42-43, Spravka na agenta “Mindaugas” (23 Jan. 1962) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

Mir: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 38-40, Spravka [agent “Mir”] (10 Mar. 1961) from Referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Lit. SSR, maior Gomyranov.

Neman: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 26-29, Spravka [agent “Neman”] (Mar. 1961) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

- Neris: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 17-18ob, Spravka na agenta "Neris" (22 Jan. 1962) from Nachalnik gruppy KGB pri SM Lit SSSR po izucheniiu i obobshcheniiu opyta operrabotnikov, podpolkovnik Babintsev.
- Nevskii: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 34-35, Spravka [agent "Nevskii"] (no date but 1962) from Nachalnik gruppy KGB pri SM Lit SSSR po izucheniiu i obobshcheniiu opyta operrabotnikov, podpolkovnik Babintsev.
- Petrauskas: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/323, 28-30, Spravka o verbovke agenta "Petrauskas" (Aug. 1964) from St. operupolnomochennyi 2 otd-ia. apparata UKGB pri SM Lit. SSR v gor. Kaunase, kapitan Raudis.
- Rimkus: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 39-41, Spravka [agent "Rimkus"] (23 Jan. 1962) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.
- Ruta: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/440, 15-32, Zametki agenta "Ruta," zaverbovannogo iz vrazhdebnoi sredy (30 Sept. 1975).
- Sadovskii: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/323, 31-33, [Spravka o verbovke agenta "Sadovskii" (26 Aug. 1964) from St. operupolnomochennyi 3 otd-ia. apparata UKGB pri SM Lit. SSR v gor. Kaunase, maior Troinin.
- Stanislav: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/300, 36-37, Spravka na agenta "Stanislav" (no date) from Referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri Sovete Ministrov Lit. SSR, maior Gomyranov.
- Surikov: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 25-27, Spravka na agenta "Surikov" (Jan. 1961) from Nachalnik gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Babintsev.
- Valdas: Hoover/LYA, K-1/10/311, 36-38, Spravka na agenta "Val'das" (no date but 1962) from St. referent gruppy pri predsedatele KGB pri SM Litovskoi SSR, podpolkovnik Tumantsev.

Appendix B. Twenty-one KGB informers

Here those reports not previously described in the text are paraphrased. As in the text, everything is presented as reported by the KGB, but in places the reader will note some reading between the lines. Such commentary is either in brackets or in the present tense. Sources are listed in Appendix A.

Algis

A male factory employee, “Algis” was based in Kaunas. In the war he had fought in the German Army, for which afterwards he received a 10-year sentence. After that, he returned to Lithuania, settled back down, and abandoned his former beliefs. Seeing him as a person who could provide information on former nationalist prisoners, their evolving beliefs, and whether or not they were continuing to engage in anti-Soviet activity, the KGB approached him in 1963, and he consented to recruitment as an informer. He proved a reliable informant, his reports being confirmed by other trusted sources.

One aspect of the handling of “Algis” was to engage him in periodic discussions of domestic and foreign affairs. His handler also encouraged him to read and talk about spy novels from the point of view of learning undercover tradecraft. Another was to support him through personal difficulties. The wife of “Algis” had been out of work over a long period. The handler helped “Algis” and eventually (“having the opportunity while maintaining conspirativeness”) found the wife a suitable position. This reinforced the agent’s commitment.

Beržas (1)

Two agents in our sample chose the codename “Beržas.” This one was an unwilling recruit. A rector of the Catholic Church, he was recruited in July 1957 on the basis of compromising evidence. The evidence concerned past wrongdoing that the report described as “trivial” (*neznachitel’nyi*). The priest had tolerated anti-Soviet talk amongst his congregation in the early years of Soviet rule. There was also evidence of theft of state property: he had conspired with a fellow clergyman to divert kolkhoz timber for a private home. Thus, “Beržas” was forced into collaboration but the degree of compulsion required was not great.

At first “Beržas” seemed to be willing to give information on other priests involved in anti-Soviet activities. Thereafter he dragged his heels, delaying tasks and declining to submit written reports. The handler thought the inner resistance arose from deeply held religious beliefs, which he tried to undermine by giving “Beržas” regular lectures on Soviet

religious policies, the damage being done by the hostile elements of the clergy, and the superiority of science over religion.

Whether or not this weakened the priest's inner beliefs, it improved his productivity as an informer. The improvement was reinforced when the handler followed up with a valuable birthday present, so that the informer felt more appreciated (or perhaps more compromised). The KGB concluded that "Beržas" was becoming less religious and recommended his promotion in the church hierarchy.

Beržas (2)

Another "Beržas" is described as a good employee; he was also studying at night school. Some detail has been lost from the report, but it is clear he had a chequered history because the Kaunas KGB noted that he now regretted "his mistakes in the past" and no longer tolerated anti-Soviet behaviour. Despite this, he remained well connected with persons of interest such as wanted state criminals. For these reasons he was recruited in 1962.

Although "Beržas" was recruited on a consensual basis, his initial performance gave "the sense that in his collaboration with the organs of state security he was under a burden, although when meeting he showed up on time and did not reject the assignments he was given." There followed a painstaking process of political re-education. After that, "Beržas" began to show more interest and initiative, and at the time of the report was fulfilling all his assignments. At a recent meeting, "Biaržas" told the officer:

He was pleased to have got to know him and that he had come to work undercover with the organs of state security. Only now did he fully understand his mistakes in the past, for which he was ready to atone by carrying out any assignments of the organs of state security and he would not spare any efforts for this.

Genys

A male of poor-peasant family origin, "Genys" was born in 1933. He dropped out of high school before completion. In 1951, aged 18, he was sentenced for attempting to betray the motherland. Most likely he served five years, which was the standard term. In 1956, it was thought, he was still involved in organized resistance, including writing and distributing anti-Soviet verses.

As a person, "Genys" was characterized as energetic, well-mannered, sociable and able to gain the confidence of others.

At some point in the late 1950s (for the purposes of Appendix A, I assume 1958), on detecting signs that he might be moderating his former views, the KGB recruited "Genys," not by consent, but by threats based on

the new evidence against him. In discussion at this time, he confessed that he had not fully broken with his comrades of the nationalist movement and had resumed contact with them following his release. He begged the officer not to take him back to court and instead to help him straighten himself out. In return he would help the KGB. The report says that on this basis he freely accepted recruitment (*okhotno dal soglasie*) but in the context I classify it as coerced.

“Genys” then sang like a canary, giving copious detail about his contacts with a range of anti-Soviet resisters and their activities. As part of the process, along with a number of others, “Genys” was given an official warning (*byl profilaktirovan i “Genis”*) As an agent, he went on to help identify and expose a range of hostile groups and activities.

Gobis

A Jewish male born in 1916, “Gobis” was a resident of Šiauliai, a provincial town of importance beyond its size as a staging post for Soviet missile troops. A college graduate, “Gobis” was fluent in four languages. During the Soviet-German war he served in the Red Army; at some point he joined the party. The war ended, however, with several of his family members living abroad (the report does not say where they went but we infer that they went to Israel.) The future agent continued to correspond with them. For this reason he was expelled from the party in 1950 (that is, during the late-Stalinist campaign against “rootless cosmopolitans”).

“Gobis” was recruited as an informer for the MGB, forerunner of the KGB, in July 1951, under circumstances that are not reported. He is described as a rounded person, calm, responsive, sociable, and businesslike. Until 1957, while an agent, he remained under investigation and surveillance as a Jew who kept up correspondence with relatives in Israel, one of whom was active in Israeli politics. According to the report he was mistrusted and mismanaged. Twice he submitted requests to be released from his obligations. Meanwhile, surveillance did not show him to be disloyal; when he complained to others, it was only about everyday matters (*po bytovym voprosam*, a phrase often used for consumer shortages).

The World Festival of Youth and Students of 1957, held in Moscow from 28 July to 11 August, created an opportunity to put “Gobis” to better use. He was contacted in advance by an Israeli visitor, who sought to meet him at the festival – which the KGB encouraged. From there, “Gobis” became involved in a web of dealings with Israeli diplomats and as a potential intermediary for a Jewish aviation engineer in Kishinev who apparently looked for a way to pass state secrets to the Israeli embassy. There were telephone procedures and codewords. The KGB facilitated the travel of “Gobis” between Vilnius, Moscow, and Kishinev. At the time of

the report, nothing had come of the aviation secrets, but a good deal had become known to the KGB about other citizens who maintained unauthorized contact with Israeli embassy staff.

The sensitivity of the mission is marked by a note to the effect that “For operational reasons the agent’s codename, the names of his contacts, passwords, and meeting places have been changed.”

During his meetings with the various people involved, “Gobis” was himself kept under surveillance by street watchers and eavesdroppers. The KGB learned that he was generally truthful when reporting on operational matters. But he did hold something back, and the pattern of this was similar to that of his past conduct. In the company of his foreign contacts, he complained continually to them about his poor standard of living, and went so far as to ask for favours. Could they help him obtain a passenger car? Would they bring him imported goods? The agent risked compromising himself in this way despite the fact that, in the KGB’s judgement, he “lived well materially.” Worse still, “Gobis” completely omitted this aspect of his dealings when reporting to his handler, who found out only because the additional layer of surveillance.

In due course the handler raised these matters with “Gobis”: his selective reporting of his own behaviour, and the lack of basis for his complaints against Soviet life. This was done without confrontation, “carefully and sensitively.”

In this post-Stalin era, the KGB learned to value “Gobis” as a senior agent and rounded personality. They acknowledged his service by sending him to be pampered in water spas. At every meeting, his handler took time to chat to him about the state of the world and the state of Soviet society, listen to him holding forth on highbrow literature and spy novels, which the handler used to improve his tradecraft; and, not least, explain to him how grateful he should be for the advance of Soviet living standards.

Karklas

A Lithuanian male born into a middle-peasant family in 1905, “Karklas” entered Telšiai teaching seminary in 1927, graduated from Kaunas University faculty of humanities in 1933, and worked as a secondary school teacher in Šiauliai. Fluent in Russian, German, and Polish, he was also a minor poet and playwright. In 1940 under Soviet rule, he was briefly a schools inspector of the Ministry of Education, but his brother, an active nationalist, was deported to the remote Soviet interior.

In wartime, married and with a child, who died shortly, the future agent remained in Lithuania under German occupation, at first in Vilnius, then in Kuršėnai. After the war, being eventually released from resettlement, his brother joined him there. He continued to write, and

joined the Union of Lithuanian Writers, showing no sign of political non-conformity. The KGB identified him as a person of interest because of his many connections from before the war with nationalists in Lithuania and abroad in the emigrant communities. He fitted the job requirements, being healthy, sociable, able to converse and make new contacts. He was approached in 1961 and consented to recruitment. At the time of the report the KGB was still evaluating his truthfulness and training him in the skills of the agent.

Komandulis and Korabel'nik

See the text.

Mir

Employed as a choral singer, "Mir" was a graduate of Vilnius State University faculty of languages, fluent in French and German. The KGB identified him as a potential asset because, the son of an official of the prewar Ministry of Agriculture, he had personal links to the emigrant communities of Lithuanians in North America and West Germany.

Approached in 1956, "Mir" put up no resistance to his recruitment. After the event, however, he turned out to have deep reservations based on his anti-Soviet views. These were overcome through the agent's arduous re-education (*kropotlivaia vospitatel'naia rabota*) involving discussions with not only his handler but also the responsible KGB department and division heads concerning the relative merits of the Soviet system, the victory in the Soviet-German war, the constitutional rights of Soviet citizens, and the achievements of Soviet science. Through this process, "Mir" acknowledged his mistakes and became a productive informer.

Subsequently, surveillance of the informer showed that he was now working honestly for the KGB. He provided evidence of misconduct of citizens engaging in suspicious activity at home or while travelling abroad. He also infiltrated and helped to break up a group of people who were introducing college students to nationalist ideas and banned literature.

The same surveillance also disclosed that "Mir," a low-paid artist with a young family, was living in relative poverty. While his family had supported him previously, he had married against his parents' wishes and the support had dried up. The KGB helped him financially and also found him a position with higher pay and status, working for Vilnius TV.

In the re-education of Mir, we see (again) that persuasion appeared to work, but the line between persuasion and intimidation is hard to make out. "Mir" may have chosen the path of wholehearted collaboration based on new-found convictions; alternatively, he may have decided that

ideological submission accompanied by loyal cooperation was the only way to bring his re-education to a conclusion.

Neman, Neris, and Nevskii

See the text.

Maksim

A Lithuanian male of “kulak” family origin, “Maksim” was born in 1911. A college-educated journalist, he continued his trade in wartime Vilnius under Germany occupation. He was arrested after the war and was sentenced to 15 years, being released in 1960. The KGB recruited him in 1961 in order to make use of his many contacts with former nationalists.

“Maksim” readily agreed to cooperate. At the same time, which was not long after his release from the labour camp, he was applying for a residence permit (*propiska*) to live once more in Vilnius. The recruiting officer raised this with “Maksim,” not as an inducement, but in order to question the sincerity of his commitment to Soviet rule: wasn’t he just going along with the KGB in the hope that they would facilitate his return to Vilnius? “Maksim” protested that his conversion to the side of Soviet rule was genuine. After recruitment, he proved himself to be a whole-hearted and productive collaborator.

Mindaugas

A male college-educated actor “Mindaugas” was based in Kaunas. In his artistic environment there were many people of interest to the KGB for their nationalist tendencies.²⁸ The KGB approached the actor in 1956, who consented to recruitment. At first his collaboration showed all the signs of unvoiced reservation: he was slow to report, put off assignments with continual excuses, and refused to commit himself to writing. The handler took “Mindaugas” in hand through a series of discussions that covered the agent’s links with persons of interest at home and in emigration and the attempts of foreign intelligence agencies to make use of these people for hostile purposes. Through these discussions, the agent began to show more interest in the tasks assigned to him.

“Mindaugas” went through a difficult time for other reasons: his mother died, and as a low-paid actor he also encountered financial difficulties. The handler provided a sympathetic ear, offering condolences on his bereavement and also financial support. This had a big effect on the agent’s motivation and commitment. He became more actively engaged

²⁸ Recall that, across the range of workplaces of all kinds listed by Harrison and Zaksauskienė (2016: 143), most heavily infiltrated by KGB informers was Lithuania’s Art Institute.

with his assignments, show initiative, and began to submit his own written reports.

At a rendezvous, “Mindaugas” openly acknowledged that under the officer’s influence he had reconsidered everything deeply, had overcome his former hesitations, and was now collaborating with the security organs in good faith.

Petrauskas

A male Lithuanian and a nationalist, “Petrauskas” was sentenced in 1948 to 25 years under Article 58(8) of the penal code; this article covered “terrorism,” or violence against Soviet state and party officials. He served 15 years in labour camps. During his term, the report notes, he continued his record of violence, joining in assaults on prisoners suspected of collaborating with the camp authorities. After release, however, he emerged as a reformed character, full of regret for his past violations. He came around to a politically correct evaluation of the Soviet system and its postwar economic achievements.

The Kaunas KGB identified “Petrauskas” as someone who had many useful connections to former nationalists, insurgents, and German collaborators. In approaching him, the KGB did not take his conversion at face value; his recruitment was preceded by no fewer than twelve undercover meetings that probed his attitude to his past mistakes. Only after this was his sincerity accepted. He was recruited in 1963 on a consensual basis.

Rimkus

A male Lithuanian born in 1908, “Rimkus” is the only farm worker in our sample. In prewar Lithuania, he was a seminary student, then a Christian Democratic journalist and nationalist. Arrested in 1945, he was sentenced to 5 years. After that, he found work as an agronomist in the Klaipėda rural district. Based on surveillance reports, the agronomist attracted KGB attention for two reasons. One, he had information about the misappropriation of collective farm property, was angry about this, and talked about taking the information to the KGB. (The misappropriation was surely a police matter. It seems doubtful that the KGB would have been interested if it did not involve foreigners or anti-Soviet activity.) Two, he appeared to be disillusioned with the nationalist cause and his former nationalist comrades – two of whom he knew to be living locally on forged identification papers.

The KGB approached the agronomist under cover. When questioned, he readily shared his information about the property crimes. At first he was silent on the subject of the former nationalists, but eventually he shared this information too. So, he passed the test. At this point the KGB

approached him openly with a view to recruitment. The future agent had a momentary panic: the way he put it was that he feared one day, “in the event of a complication of the international situation,” his former associates would uncover his role.²⁹ He was given the necessary assurances: the KGB’s job was to ensure no one would ever know. (The KGB kept this promise by destroying his personal file or removing it to Moscow in 1991. Today we can read about Rimkus in the files, but we still have no idea of his true identity.)

On that basis Rimkus consented to recruitment. Following recruitment, he was now helping to investigate nationalists and their activities both at home and abroad.

Ruta

See the text.

Sadovskii

A male resident of Kaunas, “Sadovskii” consented to recruitment in 1964. The purpose of his recruitment was to enable the surveillance of nationalist activity, to which he was somehow connected (therefore, despite his linguistically Russian codename, he is unlikely to have been ethnically Russian). The only other detail given is that the information “Sadovskii” supplied had been independently verified.

Stanislav

A male railway employee, “Stanislav” worked the mainline connecting Vilnius to Kuznica in Poland. (Variants of the name Stanislav are found across Eastern Europe, including Poland. Based on that, and on his cross-border employment, I tentatively ascribe Polish ethnicity to this person for the purposes of Appendix A.) His work gave him access to foreigners and to international shipments of goods and letters. He was recruited by

²⁹ “Rimkus” resembled the Chinese agents in Liaoning province, neighbouring Korea, recruited during the Korean War, as described by Schoenhals (2013: 121). One of them “insisted he be told by his handlers what they had in store for him if and when ‘the situation becomes critical’”:

Some agents could not bring themselves to believe that the [People’s Republic of China] stood any chance of emerging victorious from a military confrontation with the United States. In conversation with their handlers they raised questions such as “How many aircraft do you have?” “Do you have any B-29 bombers?” “When the situation becomes really tense, will I be able to go with you?”

consent (“on an ideological basis”) in 1958. His handler saw him as capable, educated, well-motivated, and so fully compliant. So far, so good.

Another railway worker was found to be smuggling across the border. Because he worked closely with “Stanislav”, who should have known, questions were raised about the agent’s conduct: he had withheld information about his colleague’s criminal activities from the KGB. Further questions were raised about the quality of his supervision: his handler had trusted him too much.

The KGB brought “Stanislav” under tighter discipline. The handler re-educated him in the importance of truth-telling and the legal consequences of failing to report offences, particularly when they involved foreigners and foreign goods. Trusting “Stanislav” less made him a better agent. He went on to uncover various other cross-border crimes, some of them organized, and he was able to win the confidence of people engaged in yet other state crimes and secure evidence of their activities.

Surikov

A male factory employee, “Surikov” had been sentenced for nationalist anti-Soviet activity in 1951. Since then he had become a loyal citizen. He now took part in social and cultural life, and maintained a wide circle of friends. Importantly, these included a number of former nationalists. “Surikov” was recruited by consent in 1961 to help the KGB keep tabs on his friends.

Valdas

A male born in Lithuania in 1939, “Valdas” was now a second-year student of the Vilnius State University faculty of history and languages. Also in his class were several students inclined to nationalism. The young man was friendly with them without sharing their views. On first encounter with the KGB, he gave full descriptions of all of them. On recruitment, he claimed to be a big fan of the KGB and its history. He was excited to join. At the time of the report, his evidence was being checked against other sources.