

August 30, 1963

Meeting of the Political Bureau of the Romanian Workers Party (Excerpts)

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Summary:

The Romanian Politburo discusses Soviet networks operating covertly on their territory and Khrushchev's reaction when confronted over this issue. The Politburo intends to shut down those networks and reclaim the Romanian agents working in them.

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30 August 1963

(Excerpts)

[...]

Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu: Now we turn to the problem of the agent networks. On the basis of the discussions which were held in the Political Bureau and in the Secretariat, regarding what we in fact raised also before the Soviet delegation led by Comrade Khrushchev [on 23-24 June 1963], we looked into the problem of how Soviet intelligence agent networks were and are still organized and how these networks develop their activity. I have talked with a number of persons [involved in this] from whom it emerges that they also continue now to recruit agent networks for the Soviet espionage service. They have continued to recruit Romanian citizens for the Soviet networks for use both in the country and abroad.

A group of party and interior ministry comrades have spoken with a series of people about whom we have data that they worked in the agent network, especially those who were part of the Tudor Vladimirescu Division, and it emerged from those discussions that the greater part acknowledged that they were indeed recruited and had worked in the Soviet agent networks. Some said that they stopped in 1949-1950, others said that they continued to do so up until now. Certainly, it was not easy for these people to tell us these things; nevertheless, they came and gave us this information.

For example, Munteanu from Suceava was recruited and sent to Cernauti (Chernovitz) from where he returned with a radio transmission apparatus. The same for Ganet, the former council president in Galati. Of those who were here before - Pîntilie[1], Nicolau [2], Gavrilovich[3] continued the same activity after 23 August. Their confidential contact was Pîntilie, who had ties with the others as well. There was an entire network at the Central Committee, and later there was a network that was organized in the localities where Soviet troops were deployed that was preserved and continued [after the troops departed in 1958].

It likewise emerged that the so-called "advisers" carried out the work of organizing intelligence activities the entire time they were here. We spoke with these subordinate persons. We did not discuss this with Pîntilie, although we could speak with him as well. Some declare that they were introduced into various [clandestine] work by Pîntilie. Yesterday morning, a certain Chirita presented himself and said that he fears repercussions from the others. There is information that Pîntilie, Posteuca[4], and Babenco[5] are meeting even now, while Pîntilie had a discussion with a citizen and said: "the difficult days have begun for us." In any case, it is obvious that the Soviets had and still have intelligence networks here.

Cde. Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej: At the reception on 23 August I saw Pîntilie and asked him [addressing him by his nick-name]: "Hey, how are you doing Pantiusa? He said nothing, but his expression suggested that if he had a pistol he would have shot me. He shook my hand, he mumbled something, and then he left quickly.

Cde. Ceausescu: Even those who say that they only worked up until 1949-1953, all of them declare that even when they interrupted their activity they were told to preserve their contacts with Pîntilie. It seems, in fact, that this was a step in making them "illegals".

We have explained to these people that they must respond before the party; that by doing so they will remain party members in good standing and on this basis people came and told us. We let them know that we will not accept any type of continuation of these agent networks. We propose to speak also with those who had leadership roles.

Cde. Gheorghiu Dej: In my opinion we should not discuss with them now.

Cde. Ceausescu: Although the same story, that the leader of the group was Ana Pauker[6], comes from all of them, not even that can be taken as unquestionably true.

Cde. Gheorghiu Dej: The Political Bureau should decide to end all traces, any attempts to organize such activities, which call into question the very relationship between our countries, between our parties, and throws a shadow over and a stain upon those relations. Before we destroyed the bourgeois-landholding regime, before the socialist state was formed, before we obtained full victory over socialism, we could say that this had constituted assistance for us. But after the abolition of the monarchy, when our party has taken power, when now we share power with no one, when we have established popular power and have created our representative institutions, the combative institutions of the party and the state, such agent networks serve no purpose.

The presence of espionage organizations [operating covertly in Romania], let alone agent networks, was not justified even when the classes had not yet been liquidated. What purpose could party and delegates then have, the various delegations along various lines for exchanging experience in order to know what the other was doing, reciprocally informing ourselves? To maintain intelligence organizations covertly, just as you do on the territory of some enemy countries, that creates the risk of calling into question the relations between these countries, between these parties.

Khrushchev was asked how it could be that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with its rich experience, needed to organize agent networks in the interior of a socialist country, and even inside a fraternal party? Why abandon the normal relations that must exist between fraternal parties? Does trust not exist between these parties? It places a question mark next to the relations between parties.

Anything they want to know, we will show them. But to maintain intelligence agent networks in the interior of the party, in a socialist state, is something you only do when you have no trust, when you consider that you have a position of supremacy, you consider the other as a subordinate in whom you have no trust and you organize intelligence agent networks. It is incomprehensible to do this in a socialist state, where there is a party militating for the same cause. As comrade Ceausescu said, they interrupted their activity, but why were they told to present themselves to whom they were told? They continued and still continue to maintain contact with these people for whom they did services.

Let's say that once these divergences appeared they believed that we were not sincere and they organized this agent network [in response], only they pursued this line of recruiting continually, long before, they installed listening devices. In the Soviet Union our people do not have the same possibility to move about freely as the representatives of the Soviet Union have among us. Theirs can go to any enterprise, while ours cannot go more than 40 km from Moscow without approval.

We know from the account of comrade Khrushchev about the serious state of affairs that took place during the Stalin period. After that thousands and thousands had

something to cry about exactly due to that police system. Now, after we know the details of these things, why do they do the same thing? You know how our telephones were listened to in order to learn our most intimate thoughts.

Their advisers, the so-called specialists to which we appealed to show us how to work, were occupied with this. I remember how quietly the chief of those advisers spoke to me saying: "wouldn't it be better to go somewhere else [where conversation was not being covertly monitored]?" You remember Sutov who said that he had instructions to get to know the members of the Central Committee. He asked me for the dossiers of the members of the Central Committee and then told me: Comrade Dej, you are very busy, give instructions to comrade Ana to do this thing and then I told Ana to take care of the problem, something which she was very glad to do.

These practices at least had some justification when we collaborated with the bourgeois parties, when there existed a powerful reaction, when we had not installed people's power yet, then we could consider this as assistance. Although certainly not [when conducted] within the party. After that you know how intelligence work in the party was accomplished. I don't know who said that Holban was the one who listened. [7]

After the 22nd [Soviet Communist Party] Congress [denouncing Stalinism], after what we know, the problem was increasingly raised [as to whether] it is right, it is principled to have intelligence agent networks on the territory of a friendly country, one where the Romanian Workers Party developed an intense activity for friendship with the USSR, a party that considered as one of its great political successes that we succeeded to win the sympathy of our people for the peoples of the Soviet Union? Was that the result of agent networks, or the result of political work, of agitation and propaganda developed by our party?

We criticized the cult of personality, the methods of cultivating personalities and we revealed in all their depths what the period of the cult of personality meant. We came to the conclusion that the influence of the cult of personality was propagated in other countries as well, although not as [Iosif] Chisinevski[8] and Miron Constantinescu[9] tried to describe it. Instead of drawing the appropriate conclusions from this situation, [the Soviets] continued [their covert operations on our territory] - and why did they? Because the principle of equality existed only in words; in fact we were not equal, we did not have an agent network on the territory of the Soviet Union, we could not visit more than 40 km from Moscow.

We raised the issue of not running agent networks in any socialist country and that, if you can believe it, inspired Khrushchev to label us "bastards" even before declaring the [Soviet] differences with us. You should have no illusions about the fact that we are listened to in every socialist country, wherever we go. When I pointed this out to Khrushchev, he tried to justify the existence of these agent networks, because people were concerned by what was happening in relations between Romania and the Soviet Union.

Generally speaking, the people in the agent network are honorable. However there are also the dishonorable among them, people who pursue personal aims. Then I told him:

"If you want to consider them as the spokesmen of Romanian-Soviet friendship, then you are making a great mistake. Why do you not believe in the party, why have you no trust in the party? We have no secrets from you, just as you have no secrets from us."

In my opinion, the sincere, open, unambiguous and clear method is the best method.

I must tell you that, at the beginning, I had doubts about raising this problem, but in the end I saw that it was very well to do so. In the end, he said: certainly, that is the way it should be.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: He said it so: I agree and I don't agree.

Cde. Gheorghiu Dej: This agent network did not accomplish anything noteworthy. We told him that we know about its existence, we have materials on the way things are developing. The Political Bureau and the Central Committee must put a stop to these practices in our relations with the other socialist countries in the most decisive manner, what is normal with a capitalist country is not with a socialist country. We should improve the relationship, we should have an exchange of pertinent opinions, we should mutually inform ourselves, [and] we should help each other, however, without this agent network.

I believe I proceeded well in the way I put the question to Khrushchev. And now we should tell these people:

"We have raised this question with Khrushchev as well. You believed that you were doing your duty, at that time the issue was raised in that way, however, after the people's power was installed you should have considered yourself released from the engagements that you had taken."

Blackmail was also used in the case of some comrades. We should bring the discussions we had with comrade Khrushchev to the attention of these people and tell them what principles must be at the foundation of our relations, that it is not correct for this agent network to exist, explaining in broad terms, they should tell us the opinions they hold, in what constituted their relations. Let's tell them: You are members of the party, see what attitude we took even before comrade Khrushchev.

This must be discussed with these people in a humane way, we should open their hearts, appeal to their sentiments of devotion to the party, to the people, showing that they no longer serve the cause of the party by continuing to fulfill the previous engagements which they have undertaken. You should consider yourself completely released [from those obligations] and, if they still appeal to you, come and we will instruct you how to proceed, in order to put an end to these attempts. Then, when someone presents himself [regarding previous obligations], you should say: let me think about it, let's meet after a while, and then bring it directly to the attention of the Central Committee.

There was one here, condemned even during the time of the bourgeois-landholding regime. He came to relatives and made contact with someone and that someone made him think, he came and he told us, and we found out everything that was discussed. You should see what sort of curses that a common criminal made against Dej. You can let them swear at me, there are so many that have done so already.

I think that the Political Bureau should decisively approve this orientation which is the continuation of our position in the discussions with comrade Khrushchev. Let's talk with all of those that we know, the others will come by themselves to inform us, we should clarify to them that they should be devoted to our party and not to some [foreign] organ or another that threatens to shoot them. That we can also do:

"We speak nicely and quietly to you, but if we catch you, may God help you. If you hold to fulfilling obligations to them, we will also fulfill our duty before the party, towards anyone who commits an illegality."

This should be continued along party lines. The comrades from the interior ministry can give us a helping hand to the degree to which they can do this thing. They should not exercise pressure, but they should speak with them humanely, because these persons are placed in a delicate situation. The person must have faith that if you say so, then nothing will happen to them. If, after we have discussed with him, he does something else, then that is his responsibility. Absolutely no one should draw consequences from [their prior operations] because we consider that under certain circumstances, when all the forces fought against reaction, it was necessary, although certainly not in the middle of the party as was done in the time of [KGB chief Lavrentiev] Beria.

People should know where to address themselves in an organized way, in such a manner that nothing will remain that bears down on their soul. If you have done something by virtue of the fact that you were recruited, you should tell us what they asked of you, with whom you had contact, so that we should also know. We should not tell them more than I said to Khrushchev. It must be explained in broad terms so that people will feel an easing of their burden. Pîntilie said it so: "Hard times are coming for us." He, in his bandit manner, to put it one way, understood this.

Cde. Ceausescu: We should draw the attention of those who were sent for studies in the USSR to these things.

Cde. Petre Borila: Maybe it would be fitting to discuss this also with members of the Central Committee. Perhaps not holding a meeting on this, but informing them in some manner.

Cde. Gheorghiu Dej: They should be informed.

Cde. Ceausescu: We should also inform them about the working sessions of the CMEA.

Cde. Gheorghiu Dej: We must halt this state of affairs with all decisiveness.

[1] Gheorghe Pîntilie was the Romanian cover name of NKVD/MVD officer Pantelei Bondarenko, head of Romanian security police (DGSP) in 1948 and apparent leader of the clandestine Soviet agent networks thereafter..

[2] Sergiu Nicolau was the cover name of former OGPU officer Sergei Nikonov, first head of Romanian foreign intelligence (then SSI) from 1948 until 1951 and then Romanian military intelligence chief from 1954 until 1960.

[3] Mikhail Gavrilovich was a MGB/KGB officer posted as head of Gheorghiu Dej's cabinet in 1948.

[4] Vasile Posteuca (Postanski) was a Soviet intelligence officer who ran the brutal Black Sea Canal labor camp during the last years of Stalin in 1951-1953.

[5] Soviet intelligence officer Simion Babenco later worked with Posteuca in the RWP's administration.

[6] Ana Pauker, a Cominternist and Soviet citizen, was the Romanian foreign minister until 1951 but reputed to be the real leader of the Romanian communists – the relatively young Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej being a front to calm national sensibilities. While she certainly maintained her own direct contact with the Kremlin and was a Soviet agent herself, it is more likely that the networks were headed by someone else. The interior minister at that time, for example, Teohari Georgescu, had received training from the NKVD in the USSR.

[7] Colonel Holban, who ran the surveillance on Gheorghiu Dej, was actually Soviet officer Boris Bruchman.

[8] Iosif Chisinevski was a Cominternist and Soviet agent who led the attempt by Moscow to remove Gheorghiu Dej following the 22nd Congress.

[9] Miron Constantinescu was a former illegal communist who sided with Chisinevski (and Moscow) in the failed attempt to oust Gheorghiu Dej in 1956.