

by Louis Allen

'What do you mean, "George"? Was it his first name or his surname? George can be both, in English.' 'No, not George, Sorge, ZO-RU-GE.' answered the Japanese colonel. 'But you must know about him already, it was in the Japanese newspapers at the time.' I concealed as best I could the fact that I was not *au fait* with the Japanese press of 1942 – the time was December, 1945 – and let the colonel ramble on to other topics; I was more interested in what he could tell me about the Japanese in Burma than about Japan itself, and so missed hearing a detailed first-hand account of one of the most extraordinary spy stories of this – or any other – century.

The story is now history, novel and film. The documents in the case were used for political purposes by General Willoughby, McArthur's intelligence chief, during the McCarthyist panic in America. And the role of Sorge's Japanese associate Ozaki Hotsumi (psychologically a more interesting one than that of Sorge himself) has been studied in some detail by Chalmers Johnson in *An Instance of Treason* (Stanford, 1964). There are three hefty volumes of Sorge documents available in Japanese, together with other accounts in all sorts of languages including even Serbo-Croat. This mass of material has been assembled and interpreted by two British historians with peculiarly apt qualifications for the task¹: F. W. Deakin, who was himself a British agent in wartime Yugoslavia, and Richard Storry, already well known as the historian of Japanese military secret societies, who has interviewed in Japan many of those who had direct connections with Sorge or were involved in the proceedings which followed his arrest.

The result, perhaps inevitably, shifts the emphasis from the thriller aspect and places it on Sorge's ideological development: the authors have ferreted out with great care and patience his past as a German communist from the days of the Kiel mutiny onwards when Sorge was one of many German communists who attempted to create a Soviet in the heart of industrial Europe.

Sorge was not inconspicuous. He had a flamboyant personality, which makes his success as a spy all the more astounding, and he had a deep knowledge of Japan and China which went beyond the daily details of economics and politics to an understanding of the

¹*The Case of Richard Sorge* by F. W. Deakin and G. R. Storry. Chatto & Windus, 1966. pp. 373. 35s.

national character and history which made the politics tick. It was this, every bit as much as his connection with (and influence on) the Konoye cabinet through his friend Ozaki, who was Konoye's adviser, which made Sorge such an acute source of intelligence on the Japanese scene. But most spy stories depend on a famous *coup* rather than on a continuous flow of carefully acquired political and industrial intelligence. In Sorge's case the most important *coup* in eight years' unbroken transmission of analyses of Japanese politics, was an assurance to Moscow that Japan intended to move south, that there was no risk, in 1941, of an invasion of Siberia to help the Germans approaching the Russian capital. The Russian Far Eastern armies could therefore be milked to reinforce those who were falling back under the onslaught of Guderian and Rundstedt. And it is possible these reinforcements tipped the balance between victory and defeat.

It's hard to think that Sorge's information on the likelihood of a German attack on Russia in mid-1941 was, on the other hand, of crucial importance. This information was already available from several sources. In fact the British organisation S.O.E. (to which one of the authors of the book under review belonged) was able to give an approximate date for the offensive as a result of their operations in the Balkans. And the Soviets themselves had a priceless source of information in the person of Rudolf Roessler who, using the code name 'Lucy', sent them from Switzerland detailed reports emanating directly from generals inside the German High Command itself. In fact at one time it was estimated that only ten hours elapsed between a decision being made at the OKW headquarters and its reception in full in Moscow. Roessler's story has not yet been fully uncovered, and will more than match Sorge's when it is. Interestingly enough, though, Sorge's unwitting source for the information that the Germans had decided on war against the Soviet Union was Colonel Ritter von Niedermayer, then on a special mission to Tokyo from the German War Ministry. This is, I think, the same Niedermayer who, during the First World War, collaborated with Wassmuss and Enver Pasha to start a Pan-Islamic *Jihad* against Britain in the Near East, a kind of Lawrence in reverse (there is a picture of him disguised as a Persian in Christopher Sykes' book on Wassmuss). And there were other threads. The authors refer to the Noulens Affair, the arrest of a Comintern Far Eastern Bureau official, in Shanghai in 1931, which led, through the discovery of documents, to the arrest of an Annamite agent in Hong Kong. This agent, oddly enough, was not handed over by the British police to the French Sûreté in Saigon, and he later emerged in his own country as Ho Chi Minh – with consequences which are still with us. The authors give his name in clandestinity as Nguen Ai Quac which is presumably a misprint and should read Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ai Quoc being the Annamese for 'patriot'), a pseudonym of the 'John

Patriot' variety. And, to show finally what a small world the world of espionage can sometimes be, one of the Russians involved in Sorge's case, Zaitsev (second secretary at the Tokyo Embassy), turned up later in the Petrov case in Australia in the 1950's as second secretary in the Canberra Embassy . . .

I think the point should be made that the fact that Sorge's cover was journalism – he acted as Japan correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* – is very significant, because his type of espionage was, basically, an extended form of journalism, a deepened, secret reporting of political states of mind. The problem is sophisticated, in his case, by the suspicion that he may not merely have received information from the Konoye cabinet through Ozaki, but may, through the same channel, have exerted the influence of his ideas upon it. But it is assuming too much to think that such pressure could have had a decisive effect on switching a contemplated Japanese offensive from Siberia to the *nanshin*, or southward thrust into the Philippines and South-East Asia. *Nanshin* had been a familiar feature of Japanese right-wing foreign policy for decades. More important than any hints Ozaki may have dropped in the ears of Konoye was the sheer weight of the case for the *nanshin* itself: a report to the General Staff HQ by the Japanese War Office showed that a war against the Soviet Union would peter out after a year as fuel supplies would then be exhausted. Whereas, given the ability of the Japanese navy to maintain transport shipping, coupled with the fact that the British and American threat was considered to be increasing, the southward thrust made much better sense anyway.

The authors have sifted the evidence for this kind of political issue, as well as the biographical facts of the spies in the case, very judiciously indeed. The case made out by the Japanese lawyers in 1942 is carefully checked with the facts as revealed by both Communist and non-Communist documents and personal sources: nothing is taken for granted. And the book does not stop at Sorge's execution. All the ramifications in Europe, and the impact of the revelation of the case on Japanese and American politics in the immediate post-war period, are fully investigated. The narrative pace is perhaps decelerated as a result – but the authors' accuracy is difficult to fault. One final point: the authors refer (p. 234) to the Japanese operational plan for attacking the Soviet Union by a 'code name "Kan-Toku-En"'. It seems more correct to refer to this not as a code name at all but as a simple and not particularly secret abbreviation of the type often used in Japanese, for the phrase KAN (TO)-TOKU(BETSU)-EN(SHU) (i.e. 'Kwantung Army Special Manoeuvres').