

DOCUMENT

How the 'Reds' Got Their Man: The Communist Party Unmasks an RCMP Spy

Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey

Introduction

"Leopold was a hero to most ..."

ON 11 AUGUST 1931, a special force of police officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Ontario Provincial Police, and the Toronto Police raided the offices of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and the homes of its leaders. The officers seized party documents, correspondence, and publications, and later arrested party leaders Tim Buck, Malcolm Bruce, Tom McEwen, and six others under Section 98 of the Criminal Code for being members of an "illegal" organization. Two months later in Toronto, they were put on trial. While the Crown's case included the mounds of material gathered by the authorities during their summer raids, its ace in the hole was the testimony of Sergeant John Leopold of the RCMP, aka Jack Esselwein, erstwhile member of the CPC and professional labour spy. For the nine accused, the appearance of Esselwein as Leopold was perhaps not a complete surprise; it was only three years before that his picture appeared in *The Worker* under the caption "Stool Exposed!" shortly after then Party Secretary "Moscow" Jack MacDonald had blown his cover.¹ But it was the first time that any of them had seen their former comrade in full RCMP regalia.²

¹*The Worker*, 26 May 1928.

²William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds., *Yours in the Struggle, Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto 1977), 172.

Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey, "How the 'Reds' Got Their Man: The Communist Party Unmasks an RCMP Spy," *Labour/Le Travail*, 40 (Fall 1997), 253-67.

Like many party members, Buck, McEwen, and MacDonald had first met "Esselwein" in the wake of the 1919 labour revolt when left-wing organizations in Canada and the United States were taking their first tentative steps toward creating a communist party.³ At that time, and for years after, Esselwein worked hard for the "cause": he attended branch meetings, headed up local campaigns, and helped organize both workers and farmers. To many, he was both a comrade and a friend. Years later, McEwen recalled a time in the 1920s when he travelled from Saskatoon to Regina just to help "straighten out" Esselwein who, according to the local party branch, had been on "one long glorious [drinking] binge."⁴ Not surprisingly, then, the resentment and betrayal felt by CPCers, especially by those who now faced "comrade Jack" in the courtroom, ran deep and was often ferocious. "It has often made me feel sick at the stomach to think that ... such a force should find it necessary to pick such depraved riff-raff — even with a pair of long-handled tongs — and clothe that species of human garbage with the symbol and authority of law," one comrade remarked angrily. "It is difficult to understand or justify — but only if one forgets the nature of modern class society."⁵

Leopold's testimony lasted two days, and consisted mostly of his interpretations of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and various other CP writers and theoreticians, both domestic and foreign. The leitmotif of his story was simple. The accused were the shock troops of "revolutionary socialism," the minions of Moscow who, it appeared to him, were bent on waging a ruthless campaign of class warfare in order to achieve their ultimate objective: the overthrow of capitalism.⁶ This was the "expert" opinion of someone who spent almost ten years deep in the communist "underground." As such, it was the basis for the Crown's case and, as it turned out, the court's guilty verdict. Seven of the accused were sentenced to five years at hard labour in Kingston Penitentiary; one received a two year sentence to be followed by deportation; and one was not convicted.

The story of the Communist show trials is well known to many students of working-class history: the shameful miscarriage of "justice"; the imprisonment of the so-called subversives; the petition drive that secured their early release; and, in later years, the successful campaign waged during the Popular Front period to abolish Section 98 of the Criminal Code. Taken together, these events reveal the fragile nature of workers' democratic rights and freedoms during the Depression and, on a wider canvas, the immense capacity of the state to silence its most vociferous critics — labour and the left. But as both the shadowy presence of

³William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto 1968), 44, 47; Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto 1974), 119-22.

⁴McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red*, 120.

⁵McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red*, 122.

⁶Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 119-20; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montréal 1981), 271-2.

Leopold on the witness stand and the document reproduced below suggest, there are other dimensions to this story that are not understood fully: the world of the labour spy and, by extension, the nature and extent of state surveillance during this period.

Born in 1890 in Bohemia, Leopold came to Canada in 1912 and worked as a farmer in Alberta until 1918 when he enlisted in the RCMP. He was hired largely on the basis of his ethnicity and language skills; on his application form he professed to be fluent in German and Czech and able to use Polish and Croatian "imperfectly." Such abilities, coupled with what RCMP staff doctors judged "good intelligence" and a "sanguine temperament," made him ideal for work amongst foreign-born agitators.⁷ After completing his basic training, Leopold soon gained the confidence of local radicals in Saskatchewan and moved through the ranks of the Socialist Party of Canada and other left-wing organizations. By the early 1920s, it was clear to his RCMP handler, Gilbert Salt, that the new Bohemian-born spy was very effective. "He has shown himself capable of neutralizing the efforts of the leaders of the OBU on many occasions," Salt wrote to A.B. Allard, the commanding officer in Regina. "He has discouraged organization work by many tricks."⁸ Allard was certainly impressed with Leopold's record and recommended to RCMP Commissioner A.B. Perry that he permit Leopold to "pursue his role to the full extent." The Commissioner agreed. "The opportunity offered of gaining access to Communist plans must not be allowed to escape us," he replied. Leopold "should throw himself into the movement and his aim should be to obtain an appointment as organizer."⁹ This was exactly what he did, quickly immersing himself in both the labour and left-wing movement in Regina.

In December 1921, Leopold became the district secretary of the Workers Party of Canada, and at the same time functioned as an important local figure in the secret underground Communist organization known in red circles as the "Z" party. There he gained the confidence of party members, including Jack MacDonald, and participated in key debates about the establishment of "open legal parties" and affiliation with the Third International.¹⁰ After the CPC decision to undermine the OBU, he became secretary of the Regina local of the International Brotherhood of Painters (and a year later its vice-president), and in 1925 was elected president of the Regina Trades and Labour Council. It was a meteoric rise through the ranks of organized labour, one that, ironically, was facilitated by the political acumen and

⁷NAC, CSIS records, RG 146, Personal File — John Leopold, file #0333, "Leopold — Medical Record, Medical Examination, 8 August 1921."

⁸Gregory S. Kealey, "Spymasters, Spies, and their Subjects: The RCMP and Canadian State Repression, 1914-1939," paper delivered at Presidents' Lecture Series, University of Saskatchewan, 24 March 1997, 18-25.

⁹Kealey, "Spymasters, Spies, and their Subjects," 18-25.

¹⁰Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 44-7.

organizational talents of the very people he was seeking to "sabotage" at "every opportunity."¹¹

The next year, RCMP Commissioner Starnes requested that Leopold move to Winnipeg because things in Regina appeared to be quieting down. A year later in 1926, after a mild reprimand from his supervisors for being "disposed to work alone and without sufficient consultation with his superiors," Leopold was again on the move, this time to Toronto.¹² There he worked closely with the CPC leadership, often taking trips to Montreal, Sudbury, Fort William, and other places for organizational work; he also participated in local demonstrations, including one for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti where he, along with party brass, were arrested and subsequently fined. As well, he served as convention chair for Division 4 of the Railway Running Trades and, later, worked on William Kolisnyk's successful Communist Aldermanic campaign in Winnipeg. But it was during this period of seemingly effortless movement amongst the CPC that some party members became suspicious of their diminutive comrade for the first time.

In November 1927 Party Secretary Jack MacDonald informed Leopold that the CPC had received information from two ex-Mounties that identified him as a government agent. Leopold vehemently denied the charges and, as a result, the storm quickly blew over. But the suspicions of the CPC were clearly aroused, and Leopold's actions would now be carefully monitored. In the article below, originally published in 1931 during the trials of the communist nine, MacDonald tells the curious tale of "Otto," a friend of "comrade" Esselwein's who "sold out" the "police investigator." According to MacDonald, Otto was staying at the suspected comrade's apartment. When Esselwein left the city for a convention, Otto, while snooping around the apartment, found evidence of his true identity, and turned it over to the Central Executive Committee of the CPC on, or about, 13 May 1928. The jig was finally up.

Leopold was not entirely oblivious to the suspicion that surrounded him while in Toronto. Writing to his commanding officer just days after being expelled from the party, he reported that the "first intimation ... that there was something unusual in the air" was on 16 May when, at a lecture given at Alhambra Hall, Maurice Spector, Tim Buck, and Jack MacDonald "refused" to speak with him. This, according to Leopold, stood in stark contrast to the treatment he had received just the week before (evidently before Otto spilled the beans to the CEC) when he spent a relaxing weekend at MacDonald's home with Buck and his wife in a "very friendly" atmosphere.¹³ "Prior to ... May 16th, there was nothing noticeable as far as the behaviour of the leading members of the party were concerned which would

¹¹NAC, CSIS records, RG 146, Personal File — John Leopold, file #0333, volume 2, Leopold to "DCI," 16 July 1940.

¹²Kealey, "Spymasters, Spies, and their Subjects," 22.

¹³NAC, CSIS records, RG 146, Personal File — John Leopold, file #0333, Supplement "A," Leopold to A.B. Allard, 24 May 1928.

have indicated that all was not well," he concluded. While Leopold had no idea who was behind all of this — "some unknown person submitted evidence giving rise to exposure" — he was clear on a couple of things: now that his identity was known it was "futile" to continue working in Toronto and, more importantly, his life was in danger if he did.¹⁴ By June 1928, Sergeant Leopold was working in the Yukon, about as far away from his erstwhile comrades as he could get. Two years later he was recalled to Ottawa in preparation for the trial against the CPC.

Written in a dramatic, almost *melodramatic* prose, "Leopold Was Betrayed By Man He Befriended" provides an intriguing account of a spy's last days in the Communist party. For the most part, MacDonald's recollections of the events are entirely accurate. Even Leopold thought so. With few "exceptions and exaggerations," he wrote to the RCMP Commissioner after its publication in the *Toronto Daily Star*, the story is "correct." While the real name of Otto remains a mystery (it was deleted from all documents obtained from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service) according to Leopold, he was an "old time resident" and friend from Regina who often worked on his car and did other odd jobs. After selling his property in Regina and moving to Austria (his country of birth) with his family, he returned to Canada in 1928 in hopes of securing a patent for a new invention — "a process for the manufacture of chocolate wafers." With little money and in need of finding a place to sleep while in Toronto, he looked up Esselwein who gladly agreed to put him up. It was not long after that Leopold took that fateful trip to Winnipeg, and Otto, having convinced his friend that he could be trusted to stay on in Toronto by himself for an additional two days, "rifled [his] trunk and betrayed [him] to Jack MacDonald."¹⁵

In addition to providing the narrative of how Leopold's cover was blown, the article is also important because it reveals the extent of surveillance that was taking place in Canada at that time. Leopold was but one component of a massive security and intelligence apparatus that had been under construction since the Great War when C.H. Cahan, at the behest of Prime Minister Borden, created the Division of Public Safety within the Department of Justice.¹⁶ Since that time it had grown in size and scope: by the Depression the RCMP was responsible for a large network of informers and provocateurs (the precise number of "human sources" remains unknown) that had compiled files on "every leader, member, and sympathizer in

¹⁴NAC, CSIS records, RG 146, Personal File — John Leopold, file #0333, Supplement "A," Leopold to A.B. Allard, 24 May 1928.

¹⁵NAC, CSIS records, RG 146, Personal File — John Leopold, file #0333, volume 1, Leopold to "The Commissioner," 15 November 1931.

¹⁶Gregory S. Kealey, "The Surveillance State: The Origins of Domestic Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in Canada, 1914-1920," *Intelligence and National Security*, 7 (1992), 179-210.

the Communist movement."¹⁷ These "Personal History" files which commenced in 1919 would eventually run to some 800,000 dossiers with a name index of 1.3 million by 1977. The point, though, is not just that the state now had access to the lives of Canada's so-called undesirables. As the case of the Communist nine suggests, when that information was put to use it often had vicious and long-lasting implications — the crippling of a movement and erasure of opposition.

Furthermore, MacDonald's story also suggests that ethnicity and gender, in addition to class, are important categories of analysis, even in the realm of state security. Sergeant Leopold was a Bohemian-born farmer, characteristics that were important to the RCMP because they made surveillance of Canada's foreign-born population — the Force's primary target — much easier. And as an analysis of the first list of "Chief Agitators in Canada" compiled by the Public Safety Branch of the Department of Justice reveals, people like Leopold were put to "good" use: on *that* list the names of non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants appeared twice as often as any other identifiable group. Significantly, though, Leopold's ethnic and class background was *completely at odds with that of his RCMP controllers who represented an Anglophone, Central-Canadian-born, military elite*. Any attempt to analyse the nature of state repression in the inter-war period, then, must grapple with this duality: not only was the ethnic identity of the immigrant workers and reds important but so too were the national and socio-economic roots of the red-coats, both spymasters and spies.

Furthermore, the world of the labour spy was a decidedly masculine place, one that was infused, at least in part, by the manliness associated with the political and associational life of the CPC and the militarism of the RCMP. MacDonald's story speaks to this reality: the close friendship between comrades; the ways in which the party and the "cause" were political and social commitments; and how Leopold's betrayal was understood in terms of class and gender — he was both a traitor and a lesser man. But Leopold's experiences were not confined to the CPC as such; indeed, he occupied an ambiguous realm bounded by the party *and* the Force. It goes without saying that the RCMP and CPC operated in different ways and for different reasons, but they both valued discipline, brotherhood, and bravery — albeit directed to different political ends. How such similarly gendered contexts colluded and collided to shape the actions, politics, and experiences of this "stool pigeon" remains to be understood fully. But it is clear that masculinity mattered to being a good "comrade" and a good "cop."¹⁸

¹⁷Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 66. See also Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *The R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins*, 8 vols. (St. John's 1989-1997), esp., *The Early Years, 1919-1929*.

¹⁸For more discussion of these themes see Steve Hewitt, "'Old Myths die Hard': The Transformation of the Mounted Police in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914-1939," PhD thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1997.

Historical analysis of state repression in Canada is in its infancy. But as "Leopold Was Betrayed By Man He Befriended" and this brief discussion suggests it promises to be a rich area of study — both historiographically *and* politically. Indeed, by exposing the origins, development, and impact of state repression such inquiry explodes what one historian has called, the "liberal myth of the liberal state."¹⁹ In doing so, it holds out the possibility of calling the RCMP's (and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service's) current practices into question; and, also, of enabling Canadians to be more vigilant in defence of their own hard-won democratic rights and freedoms.

Leopold Was Betrayed By Man He Befriended. Fellow Native of Bohemia "Sold Out" Mounted Police Investigator

—
INSIDE STORY TOLD
—

By Frederick Griffin²⁰

Here is the other side of the picture, the story of how the Communists unmasked Comrade Jack Esselwein as Sergeant John Leopold, secret agent of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The end of Esselwein came in Toronto in 1928. For more than eight years, seven of them as member of the Communist Party in Regina, Winnipeg and Toronto, Sergeant Leopold had been Esselwein the Red, Bohemian-born house painter whose radical pose won him access to the councils and affections, not only of the Communist party, but of other left wing movements.

Then came his exposure and exit from the radical scene — until he turned up last week in his scarlet tunic of the Mounted to take the stand for two days in court as chief witness against the eight Communist leaders who were found guilty yesterday and sentenced to-day.

¹⁹See the introduction to Radforth and Greer, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto 1992), 3-16.

²⁰Frederick Griffen, "Leopold Was Betrayed by Man he Befriended," *Toronto Daily Star*, 13 November 1931.

In an interview Sergeant Leopold told me he did not know to this day how his under cover identity as Esselwein had been found out.

It was still a complete mystery, he insisted.

It need be no longer for Jack Macdonald of Toronto, former Communist secretary, has told me how it came about. I asked Jack if he knew, "Sure," he said, "I ought to, for I was largely responsible for ending Esselwein's role."

He agreed to tell the story. "There is no reason why I should not," he said. And he did, most objectively, without excitement or emotion, without bitterness. I remarked on his restraint. He shrugged. "After all," he said, "Esselwein was not the only man we found out. There were others, but none, I admit, who was quite as successful as he. For years we had no suspicion. We liked and trusted him."

You may think there is no romance in Toronto, but it seems to me this yarn proves that *queer, twisted turmoils do go on under the city's surface, that there may be strange little half-worlds of intrigue and contest that few of us suspect.*

A Shock to Communists

You may imagine the feelings of the Communists in 1928 when the word went round that Jack Esselwein, with whom a Moscow agent had actually slept, was a Mounted policeman in disguise — all those years. But Jack Macdonald in his canny Scots way would not dwell on that, although he admitted that Communists were human.

Here then, only told largely in the third person, is the story Jack Macdonald told me of the discovery of Sergeant Leopold and of his expulsion as Esselwein by the Communist party.

It was in 1927, shortly after the Arcos rail in London (Macdonald thought, *though he could not be sure*), just after a number of Toronto names discovered among the records seized had been published in the newspaper, that Jack Esselwein came to Toronto.

He had only been here a day when Macdonald and Tim Buck, at present on trial, ran into him on the street. They were a little surprised at seeing him. They had known him for years. They knew him in Regina as secretary of the Communist branch there. They had met him frequently. They knew he had moved to Winnipeg in 1926. Why had he come to Toronto? He was registered, he told them, at the Prince George hotel. He invited them to his room. They went, without suspicion.

His explanation was simple, according to Macdonald.

The story he told them, Macdonald said, was that the doctor had ordered him east for his health.

"We always knew him," said Macdonald, "as a man with enough money to live so we thought little of it when he talked of doctor's orders. Indeed, he said he was considering a trip to his old country, Bohemia, in Austria. On the other hand, he was not sure that he would not buy a car instead. We came away from him without a reservation in our minds."

"You really had not a suspicion?" I asked.

"None," said Macdonald. "He joined a group here and kept up his role of comrade. I'm not positive how long it was, but I think he was in Toronto just about a year when he was expelled from the party."

Was Betrayed

Esselwein left the Prince George shortly and took a room in an apartment house near the Allan Gardens.

He was in Toronto about six months ago when the first suspicions arose. Peculiarly, they did not have their origin in Canada, but in California. It was the long reach of casual chance that first made the party in Toronto suspect Esselwein, though his betrayal was already forewritten, it would appear, anyway.

For Esselwein was eventually betrayed.

As Macdonald related it: A member of the party, formerly of Regina, who had been a close comrade of Esselwein there — Malcolm Bruce, in fact, one of the nine men now on trial — had gone to California to live. There, shortly, he met another ex-Regina resident who said: "You know Jack Esselwein? Yes, well, what do you know about him? I'm told he was formerly in the Mounted Police."

"Oh, that's absurd!" Malcolm Bruce exclaimed. "Jack Esselwein a Mountie! Why, he's been in the party for years, longer than I have. He joined before I did, in fact. He and I have been friends. He painted my house. Where did you hear that story? I can't believe it."

The information he was told, had come through the man's daughter. She was keeping company, it appeared, with a young fellow who had once served in the Mounties.

"I'd like to meet him," said Bruce.

That was arranged. Bruce was easily introduced to the girl's sweetheart. "Sure," said the latter, when asked. "I've seen Jack Esselwein around police headquarters in Regina. I'm certain he's in the employ of the Mounted, though I don't know in what capacity."

Malcolm Bruce came away unconvinced but troubled. He wrote to Toronto giving the facts, not saying that he believed them but suggesting tentatively the need of a check-up.

He added something like this, according to Macdonald, who spoke from memory: "Jack has been like a brother to me for years. I have never had the least cause to suspect his sincerity and devotion. But an investigation should be made, either to clear Esselwein of suspicion, or to clear the party of Esselwein."

Coming of the Betrayer

No overt action was taken against Esselwein. Bruce had asked that the information he had forwarded be confined to a few trusted members of the party lest suspicions

that were unjust be aroused generally against a comrade. So only a few of the local leaders knew. They lay low — and watched.

“And it was difficult to watch a comrade,” said Macdonald. “What was there to watch, anyway? Esselwein lived a simple life. He had his home near the Allan Gardens. He got around quietly. Occasionally he did a little house painting. In fact, he painted my own kitchen” — and Macdonald smiled. “The overalls he used were hanging up until recently.”

“Did he charge for a job like that?”

“Oh, no, that was voluntary, a labor of love for a comrade.” And Macdonald smiled a little sardonically.

“It was pure accident that made me wise to him,” he went on, “for we learned nothing, watching.

“About this time a man came to visit Esselwein. He was a fellow-countryman, an Austrian — I know they talked of Vienna. No, he was not a Communist but we got to know him as Esselwein’s friend. We met him when he came first; then, it appeared that Jack kept him away from us.”

“What was this man’s name?”

“It ended in wein or stein, or something. But what does his name matter? Call him Otto. It will do as well as anything else.”

“This Otto lived with Esselwein?”

“Yes, Jack took him into his apartment. They slept together, so far as I know. At least Jack kept him. He kept him pretty close, too, and did not encourage any of the rest of us to visit him. I think I was only twice in his apartment — until the night I went there to find him out. But I’ll come to that presently.

“As a matter of fact, we were inclined to be much more suspicious of Otto than of Jack. We could not figure him, or why Esselwein kept him around. He was supposed to be an inventor. He used to talk of patents. He had a device for shaving hair, and another for making biscuit wafers which he expected to sell. We were told he offered it to a local biscuit firm who thought well of it. In fact, Jack talked of the possibility of Otto making a few thousand dollars.”

Suspicious Lingered

Thus things went along until the spring of 1928. Nothing appeared to confirm the suspicions of Esselwein. Nothing could be proven. Esselwein continued as a comrade, dropping in at headquarters, attending meetings. Once Macdonald asked him point blank, “How do you live, Jack? You don’t work much.” He answered, Macdonald said, that he owned a farm in the west which was rented. “I saw the deed later,” said Macdonald a little grimly, as I thought. But that appeared later. “He also,” said Macdonald, “claimed to play the stock market.”

Early in 1928 there was a convention of railroad unions in Winnipeg. It was a straight union convention, but Communists attended. Tim Buck went out from

Toronto. So did Comrade Esselwein. At least, according to Macdonald, he left for Port Arthur, but turned up in Winnipeg.

It was while he was in Winnipeg that his end as Esselwein, his conclusion as a Communist, came in Toronto.

Esselwein left one evening for Port Arthur and a number of the comrades, including Macdonald, went down to the station to see him off. Jack was not himself, according to Macdonald. He seemed worried and disturbed. But he got on the train waving good-by to the Communists. They wished him good luck.

As they emerged from the station, they met this Austrian friend Otto, who came up to them running. "Is Jack gone?" he asked excitedly.

"What's the matter with Jack?" countered Macdonald. "What's wrong with both of you? You seem upset too."

"Yes," said Otto uncertainly, "Yes, but it is nothing."

Macdonald did not press the question. But he wondered. He was still wondering when Otto slipped furtively into his office [the] next day. Macdonald was alone. "I'd like to talk to you," said Otto. "It's important. But we can't talk here."

"All right," said Macdonald promptly, "we'll go up to the apartment. He meant Esselwein's apartment. He knew Otto had been living with him.

"Not there," said Otto. "Why not?" said Macdonald. "We'll be quiet there." Otto demurred a moment longer; then gave in. They went up to the apartment.

"Secret For Soviet!"

They sat down. There was a little talk. Then Otto blurted, "I have a secret worth thousands of dollars to the Soviet government."

Macdonald at once thought of his alleged patents. "What is it?" he asked. "An invention? Because I can't do anything about it."

"No, not an invention," said Otto, "information. But it is worth a lot of money."

"But tell me what this secret is," said Macdonald.

Otto side-stepped. "Is there any way," he asked, "I could get to Russia? They will pay there," he added significantly, "for what I know."

"But what do you know?" persisted Macdonald.

Otto would not tell. He became more and more mysterious. He kept hinting at money. Macdonald cannily countered. They fenced thus half an hour. Otto talked wildly about Russia. Macdonald sat opposite him, tight lipped, hard, Scotch as a granite crag, his eyes glittering like steel under their black browed screen. Finally he decided to make an end with a direct thrust.

"Listen," he said, "you can't sell me a thing. I know."

"You know!"

"Sure! I know your secret. Jack Esselwein is a government agent."

"Ach! How you—," and Otto jumped up startled.

"I've known for a long time," said Macdonald from between his teeth, "But I can't get anything on him."

"Then I help you," said Otto. He walked over, knelt down and pulled up dramatically the edge of the carpet. He whipped out a sheet of paper and reached it to Macdonald. "Look at that!" he said.

Macdonald looked at what was apparently the copy of a report on certain radical, not Communist, activities in a certain place. It was merely an estimate of certain radical strength, not very enlightening. The paper had no address and the writing did not look like Esselwein's.

"Huh!" he said handing it back. "There's nothing to that."

Playing for Money

"It was plain," he explained to me, "that the fellow was ready to sell out Esselwein. He wanted money and was playing for it. He sought to lead me on."

Macdonald was apparently right.

Otto put the paper back under the carpet and got up. "Is this worth anything then?" he said. "His name is not Esselwein at all."

"Show me," said Macdonald. "A deuce of a lot of men have changed their names. That may not mean much."

"Listen," said Otto, "I come from the same place in Bohemia. I show you a letter from my sister asking me on behalf of his family to find John Leopold, whose address formerly was Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Regina. That's Esselwein. That's his name. That mean anything? That worth anything?"

Macdonald, his face frozen, his tongue quiet, shook his head. "I show you," said Otto eagerly. "I prove." He pulled out a letter. He gave it to Macdonald. It was in German. Macdonald could not read it. "Let me have this," he said. "I'll have it translated and give it back tomorrow."

Macdonald left the apartment and had the letter translated. Its contents were as represented by Otto. Apparently he had traced Leopold as Esselwein to Toronto. And Esselwein had taken him, his fellow-countryman, to live with him.

Now, in his absence, his friend was going to sell him out. For, remember, Esselwein (or Leopold) was in Winnipeg.

Macdonald arranged to meet Otto the following night in Esselwein's apartment. It was to be secret. No one was to know. But Macdonald took the precaution, he told me, of letting a couple of friends know where he was going, without giving any reason.

"I did not know what might happen," he said.

So that night, Macdonald, the Communist, black browed Scot, knocked on the door of the apartment and was admitted by Otto, the Austrian, who was living there in Esselwein's absence.

Proof Produced

Macdonald wasted no time, "This letter," he said, passing over the German missive, "is as you said, but it doesn't prove a thing. You show me that Jack Esselwein is Leopold of the Mounted Police."

Otto began to whine. "I'm not a naturalized Canadian," he said. "I have no protection. If Jack comes back and finds he's discovered, he'll blame me for telling. I'll have to get away. You'll have to help me to get out."

"All right," snapped Macdonald, "show us something worth while and we won't see you stuck. We'll help you to get out, but we must first have proof. What real proof have you that Esselwein is a member of the police?"

"It is here," said Otto, and he went straight to Esselwein's trunk. Opening it, he disclosed papers. He picked up a number. "Here," he said. "Read these. They're proof."

Macdonald read them, he told me, and he made notes of what he found. He has still got that list and he read it to me. There were reports on radical movements. There were also the following, according to Macdonald:

Income tax returns from 1921 to 1926 in the name of John Leopold, employed by the R.C.M.P., occupation, constable, giving his wages, etc.

A police letter referring to Number 30, and talking of his transfer from Regina.

The deed of a western farm, numbered 147760, of 159 acres, in the name of John Leopold.

Receipt for a draft on a Toronto bank for 3,000 crowns sent the previous Christmas to Mrs. M. Leopold in Bohemia.

A letter in Esselwein's handwriting signed John Leopold.

A mounted police belt.

A revolver.

A letter from a Regina man, not a Communist, whom Macdonald had met, to Mr. R.B. Bennett of Ottawa introducing his friend, Jack Esselwein, and saying that he was engaged in work of which any patriot should be proud.

"The whole evidence, all we could possibly want," said Macdonald, "was there complete."

Despised the Betrayer

"What were your feelings on finding this proof of Esselwein's real identity?" I asked.

"Feelings!" said Macdonald. "Oh, I don't know. It's a long time ago. Mixed, I guess. Feelings! What would your feelings be if you had thus found out a man who had been posing as a comrade for six or seven years, acting as chairman at meetings of the party, selling Communist literature, appealing to workers to join the movement, defending our position against opponents, acting towards all openly as a comrade ought — and then to find this? What would your feelings be? I know

that mine were, but what's the use of resurrecting them? I know I kept them to myself then. I held my face tight before this fellow who had sold out his pal, Esselwein. His fellow countryman! He had occupied his bed and eaten at his board, and here he was. I did not say much to him, I felt like telling him to go to blazes, but I did not say anything."

"What happened to Otto?"

"He lit out of Toronto the next day and we have not seen him since. Oh, by the way, I heard from him around Christmas time last. He had the gall to write and ask me if I could tell him where Jack Esselwein was now." And Macdonald smiled with irony.

"That night after the discovery — what did you do?"

"I went to bed. It was late when I left the apartment, after one o'clock. I took a night car home."

"With that secret in your mind! Did you not tell members of the party right away?"

"I wired Tim Buck to Winnipeg. I told no one else. Next day I called a special meeting of the political bureau of the executive of the Communist party for two or three days later. They met, and I laid before them the information I had discovered. A motion of expulsion was moved and passed. A letter was then mailed to Esselwein informing him that he had been expelled from the Communist party."

Little Excitement

"Was it as calm as you sound? Wasn't there any excitement when you made your statement about Esselwein?"

"Oh, a little, perhaps. There wasn't much fuss. It wasn't the first time we had found out agents, pikers, though, compared to Esselwein. He wasn't the first man expelled from the party. And, of course, some of the members had been suspicious of Esselwein previously. The proof did not catch them unawares."

Macdonald smiled with a ready touch of soft humor that showed itself two or three times beneath his chill appearance of contempt for the humanities. "A funny thing," he said, "but one of Esselwein's chores as a Communist was to come voluntarily and help us to wrap up bundles of the Worker, the paper. That was part of his work for the cause. In the number following his expulsion we printed his photograph with a caption saying that he had been expelled from the party as a result of information coming to light that he was in the employ of the government. I remember some of the members joking because he wasn't there helping to wrap up that number."

"Isn't it strange the Communists should be so restrained in their feelings?"

"No. Of course, they had their feelings. They're human. But their belief is in mass action. They're not so much concerned about any individual."

"What happened [to] Esselwein afterwards?"

"I don't know. We often wondered where he had gone. We thought probably to Ottawa to work out the records of his case. We did not see him again. I have not seen him from that day to this."

"You mean actually that you did not know he had been sent to a far north police post?"

"I did not know."

"Did he appeal against his ejection from the party?"

"He could have appealed, but he did not. He filibustered over the phone to a couple of individuals and indignantly denied the charges. They advised him to go to headquarters and demand justice. He never came. He simply went away. We did not hear of him again."



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