

## BOOK REVIEW

**Marat H. Mardanov, *Komintern v Baškirii. Deâtel'nost' special'nyh škol Kominterna v gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny (1941-1943 gg.)* [The Comintern in Bachkiria: The Activities of the Komintern Special Shools in the Years of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1943)], Sbornik dokumentov i materialov (Ufa: Ineš, 2018), 288 p.**

After the opening of the archives of the Comintern in the late twentieth century, many collections of documents and monographs were published on the interactions between the Comintern and its sections—the national communist parties all around the world. In this maze of publications, the following themes were studied: a) biographies of the Cominternians, b) the relations between the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the VKP (b), and the Communist national sections, and c) the purges within the Comintern.<sup>1</sup> The documents presented in this book by M. H. Mardanov are of a completely different nature. For the first time, a collection of documents on the Comintern is employed both to study one of its specific institutions and to analyse the interactions between the authorities of Bashkiria (a distant Autonomous Soviet republic) and those of the Comintern. In particular, the documents focus

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<sup>1</sup> G. M. Adibekov, E. N. Shahnazarova, and K. K. Širinâ, *Organizacionnaâ struktura Kominterna: 1919–1943*. (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997); M. Titarenko and M. Lëjtner, *VKP(b), Komintern i Kitaj: Dokumenty*, vol. 5, *1937–maj 1943* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007); G. M. Abidekov and H. Vada, *VKP(b), Komintern i Áponiâ, 1917–1941* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001); A. O. Čubar'ân, *Istoriâ Kommunističeskogo internacionala. 1919–1943: Dokumental'nye očerki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002); N. S. Lebedeva, M. M. Narinskij, K. M. Anderson, and A. O. Čubar'ân, *Komintern i Vtoraâ mirovââ vojna. V 2h tomah* (Moscow: «Pamâtniki istoričeskoj mysli», 1994); T. V. Volokitina, T. M. Islamov, G. P. Muraško, A. F. Noskova, and L.A. Rogovaâ, *Vostočnaâ Evropa v dokumentah rossijskih arhivov. 1944-1953. V 2-h tomah* (Moscow-Novosibirsk: Sibirskij hronograf, 1998); G. M. Adibekov, K. M. Anderson, and K. K. Širinâ, *Politbûro CK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern: 1919–1943. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004); L.S. Hejfec and V. L. Hejfec, *Latinskaâ Amerika v orbite Kominterna (Opyt biografičeskogo slovarâ)* (Moscow: ILA RAN, 2000); N. S. Lebedeva, K. Rentola, and T. Saarela, *Komintern i Finlândiâ. 1919–1943. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003); Â. S. Drabkin, L. G. Babičenko, and K. K. Širinâ, eds., *Komintern i ideâ mirovoj revolûcii. Dokumenty* (Moscow: Nauka, 1998); and Georgi Dimitrov, *Journal. 1933–1949*, Version intégrale introduite et annotée par Gaël Moullec (Paris: Belin, 2005).

on the special Kushnarenkovo School. Indeed, very little is known about the specific moment of the Great Patriotic War in which, due to the German advance of autumn 1941, the Comintern services were evacuated outside of Moscow and the legendary school was created.

The Kushnarenkovo school was one of a kind. Due to the fact that the country was at war, it couldn't be a simple replica of the International Lenin School closed in the midst of the Great Terror (1938). Conceived as a place to prepare the future leaders of communist parties, this new school responded to the need to be able to rely on trusted and action-prepared personnel to be sent into German-occupied countries. Accordingly, a complete ideological curriculum was developed in this school. Short and crisp, it also provided a solid clandestine, guerrilla, and demolition-oriented program. Opened on October 23, 1941, and directed by Vylko Chervenkov (Vladimirov), the school's main goal was to form political and military leaders, including future personnel for the French Communist Resistance.

In this context, the year of graduation of the students becomes of paramount importance. The first graduates were parachuted into occupied countries to conduct intelligence operations for the benefit of the Soviet Union's war effort and in support of local Communist Resistance. Many were killed in action. In order to counteract this, their successors on the school benches were deployed only after the end of the war and reached enviable positions and functions both in the new Eastern European communist republics and in the communist parties of the West European countries. Specifically, the archive documents on Markus Wolf, an alumnus of the Kushnarenkovo School and future head of the RDA Intelligence service, are of the utmost interest (doc. 62-67).

Beyond the history of individuals and institutions, the other indisputable and strong contribution of this collection is the presentation of the Kushnarenkovo political course syllabus. Each of the courses was specifically designed to respond to the needs of the students depending on their citizenship. Thus, courses were fine-tuned to the exact situation of each

country; for example the course for the French included teachings on de Gaulle and the Gaullist Resistance Movement.

The detail and precision of the military courses were even more impressive. Students were prepared to become part of the Resistance, taught the conduct to be followed for almost every moment in the life of a Resistance fighter, as well as the way to conduct armed action against the occupying forces. The clarity, method, and precision of these courses helps to understand the self-denial required for these students to engage in such highly risked clandestine action (doc. 48).

This collection is also an important source of information on the immense difficulties encountered during the evacuation from Moscow and the relocation of the institutions of the Comintern in the Ufa-Kuybyshev (Samara) area. In this respect, the factual descriptions of the daily difficulties faced by the students and organizers of the school are striking. Equally striking are the speeches made by the school's leaders on various occasions. Once we have passed over the obligatory phraseologies praising Stalin and Dimitrov, it is the speeches of combatants—conscious, decisive, and unshakeable—that we find in these documents (doc 5-6).

Finally, it should be noted that the documents in this volume describe the daily management of the school, from its creation to the various external facts which may affect it. In this respect, an important thread that runs through the whole collection is the relations between the local authorities of Bashkiria and that of the Comintern. Indeed, in this collection, Bashkiria is present at all times. During the war, this Autonomous Soviet Republic provided men, produced military and other supplies, hosted the institutions displaced from the European region of the Soviet Union, and created or reformed military formations. In these documents, the effort made by all Soviet citizens during the war is made clear.

All in all, this collection of documents is not only innovative, interesting, and well composed, it is a lesson of courage and self-sacrifice that appears at the very moment of the celebrations of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany.

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