

# Hemingway, the "*Dilettante Spy*"

by Earl P. Holt III

To his eternal credit, George Orwell once remarked that "***some ideas are so stupid that only intellectuals believe them.***" By the 1930s for example, it became apparent that those who sponsored the more prestigious literary prizes were often dilettantes who had adopted the "*fashionable*" ideology of Marxism. In response, certain celebrated American writers pursued a Marxist agenda to gain an advantage in receiving those awards.

**Ernest Hemingway was one of those authors. Within the last decade or so, it's been revealed that Hemingway was successfully recruited by the NKVD (predecessor to the KGB) in 1941, and given the code-name "*Agent Argo*." This conclusion is based on documents discovered in the *Soviet Archives* by pioneering academics John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr of Emory University, and their co-author Alexander Vassiliev, a former KGB officer. Their book *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* was published by Yale University Press in 2009.**

According to documents reproduced in *Spies*, it was Hemingway who approached Soviet Intelligence and "***repeatedly expressed his desire to help.***" His willingness to work for the NKVD would have been a carefully guarded secret among a tiny handful of NKVD officers at its highest levels, owing to the "*compartmentalization*" practiced by all successful intelligence agencies. **Thus, it is unlikely that his dalliance with the NKVD facilitated his receipt of literary awards, since no one who served on the Nobel or Pulitzer committees would have known of it.**

**Hemingway appeared to contribute little to the NKVD and was labeled merely a "*dilettante spy*" by the authors of *Spies*. However, his Marxist enthusiasms had been evident for many years and were reflected in his own words, works and associations. It may have been**

these that gave him something of an advantage in his receipt of the *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* in 1953 and the *Nobel Prize for Literature* in 1954.

As a journalist in 1925, Hemingway wrote a flattering article about the *Italian Communist Party* titled "***The Revolutionist***." In 1933, he supported Cuban communists in their efforts to overthrow the conservative military dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. In 1934, he funded a benefit for Luis Quintanilla, a communist revolutionary, and in 1935 he wrote an article for ***THE NEW MASSES***, a publication sponsored by the CPUSA.

Probably impressed by Stalinist discipline, Hemingway penned the worst effort of his career in 1938 with ***The Fifth Column***. It was a sophomoric story describing the activities of an American communist whose mission was to expose fascist spies to feed the Loyalist firing squads. This enthusiasm for the Soviet-backed "*Loyalist*" cause during the *Spanish Civil War* had earlier revealed his leftist world-view, exposing as it did his willingness to support even movements sponsored by Stalin.

**As a supposedly objective war correspondent frolicking around Spain during the *Spanish Civil War*, his entourage consisted of a veritable *Who's Who* of communist party members and Stalinist sympathizers. These included Soviet spy Michael Straight, Milton Wolff, Karol Swierezenski, Ilya Ehrenberg, Gustavo Duran, Luis Quintanilla, Nicolas Guillen and Gustav Regler. As Hemingway candidly volunteered in referring to his *Loyalist* comrades, "*We're all communists*."**

The protagonist in ***For Whom the Bell Tolls*** is Hemingway's alter-ego, Robert Jordan, whose role in the *Spanish Civil War* was to dynamite bridges and kill innocent civilians for the *Loyalist* cause. Jordan was able to rationalize his crimes against humanity in the book, just as

Hemingway rationalized his communist sympathies even in the face of Stalin's bloody and treacherous reign of terror in the Soviet Union. He was also forced to do a lot of rationalizing later, when the firing squads of his buddy, Fidel Castro, were exceptionally busy.

The paradox of celebrated American authors engaging in early clashes of Marxism's "*Culture War*" was neatly captured in a quote by Fordham University Professor Angela O'Donnell, who wrote: "***We are forced to face the troubling fact that the gods of art often use the least worthy among us to be their vessels...***"

That quote certainly sums up Ernest Hemingway and his work, *game, set and match!*