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Sakmyster, Thomas. *Red Conspirator: J. Peters and the American Communist Underground*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011. Pp. XIII, 245. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs.

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Thomas Sakmyster's prodigiously researched book lifts the curtain on the legal and illegal activities of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) by tracing the involvement of the Hungarian born communist, Sándor Goldberger, who was also known among his many aliases as Jozsef Péter (Pete, Joe Péter); later as J. Peters, Alexander Stevens, and Steve Miller.

Goldberger was born in Csap, Ruthenia, a remote Northeastern corner of Hungary. He started to study law, at the University of Kolozsvár, but his studies were interrupted by World War I. He served in the Austro-Hungarian army as an officer. Near the end of the war, instead of completing his legal studies, he joined the anti-war movement of his fellow students. As prisoners of war returning from Russian captivity were agitating in behalf of the new Bolshevik regime they recruited Goldberger who became a communist. He played an active organizational role during the short-lived Hungarian Council Republic. He escaped the wrath of the White Terror in Hungary because the base of his involvement, Ruthenia, became part of Czechoslovakia.

In 1924, Goldberger immigrated to the United States. According to Sakmyster, the reasons for the decision to become an émigré were not clear, but by then he was a dedicated doctrinaire Communist. Not speaking any English, he joined the Hungarian Federation of Workers' Party in New York. It did not take him long to advance and catch the attention of the leaders of the CPUSA. As Goldberger's ability to speak English improved, he was brought into the party hierarchy as an organizer and rapidly advanced to leadership positions. After the preliminary description, Sakmyster focuses on the activities of J. Peters (as he was known in the Party).

Most Americans are aware of the McCarthy era's House Un-American Activities Committee, HUAC ferreting out communists. However, while the sensational hearings/trials of the communists like Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers, made headlines, the behind the scenes insidious activities of J. Peters and the CPUSA did not get much attention until the late 1940s when finally he (by then he used the alias of Alexander Stevens) was forced leave the U.S., but even then, much of the "Red Conspirator's," (as the author refers to J. Peters) subversive activities remained murky. In this book Sakmyster painstakingly reveals the tangled web Peters and his communist cohorts were attempting to weave in order to overthrow American democracy and the capitalist system and replace it with the "Socialist Soviet Republic of the United States."

Having gained the CPUSA's leadership's confidence, Peters was selected to travel to Moscow as an organizational "practicant" at the Communist International, and to receive training in organizing an underground apparatus. At that time Peters traveled under the alias of Isidore Boorstein, staying in Moscow for six months. While participating in the training he was delegated to solve internal party problems. For example, when black students studying in Moscow complained about white discrimination, Peters insisted that both blacks and whites

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should refrain from chauvinism and adhere to party discipline. During his stay in Moscow living conditions were bleak, but when a Slovak American who had come to Russia to live in the “workers’ paradise,” became disenchanted by the miserable conditions and wrote home about them, his letter was intercepted, and Peters was given the task to deal with the problem. When the culprit was confronted by Peters, he challenged Peters whether or not his descriptions of the conditions were true. Peters’ responded: “Even if such things were true, as a Communist you have no right to write about them to the United States,” an incident which illustrates well Peters’ blind convictions in the Communist cause.

Upon returning to the U.S. Peters resumed his organizational activities. On the basis of the training that he had newly acquired in Russia he concentrated on setting up an illegal apparatus of the Party, which was to supply information to the representatives of the ever present Soviet intelligence agencies: Comintern, NKVD, and GRU. He also prepared a 127-page booklet under the title: “Communist Party: A Manual on Organization,” a booklet which according to Sakmyster became one of the most notorious publications of the Party because “it was the one document that most clearly revealed the diabolical, perverse and threatening nature of Communism.”

Apparently, the CPUSA did not manage to make serious inroads among the American workers, as Peters continuously complained about the fluctuating membership. He did succeed in setting up an illegal organization that was able to penetrate some government departments. That stole and photographed documents and gave them to Soviet agents. Although there was no evidence that any significantly damaging information was passed on to the Soviets, Nevertheless the most reprehensive fact was that the American communists were ready to betray their country by supplying confidential information to foreign agents. Another illegal operation that Peters succeeded in setting up was a passport forging group, so that due to the laxness of oversight by the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Soviet agents were able to enter the U.S. practically unhindered with forged passports.

Despite his leadership role in the CPUSA, Peters, who did not acquire U.S. citizenship, managed to stay under the radar of the authorities. Ironically, when the FBI learned about his subversive activities, it still took them a long time to realize that Alexander Stevens was in fact the same person as J. Peters. During the Cold War finding and exposing Communists became a matter of priority of counter-intelligence agencies, with the FBI, the INS and the HUAC leading the chase. Eventually, Peters was summoned to the HUAC (House Committee on Un-American Activities), where Richard Nixon was one of his interrogators. Peters refused to give any information and continuously pled the Fifth Amendment. Because he was not an American citizen, the INS also summoned him for hearings. Primarily, Peters was charged with entering the country illegally and was marked for deportation but to avoid further interrogations, just before the official order for deportation was issued, he decided to voluntarily leave the country and return to Hungary, where he lived to the ripe age of 96, and died in 1990.

It is to the credit of Thomas Sakmyster that he was able to search through an immense variety of sources to trace the subversive movement of the “Red Conspirator,” and give evidence of conspiratorial activities of the Communist Party throughout the 1930 and even during the Cold War. This book is highly recommended to anyone who wants to gain insights into the less sensationalized but nevertheless, relentless conspiracy of the CPUSA in attempting undermine the American system of democracy.