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ELIZABETH BENTLEY
THE STORY OF A COMMUNIST AGENT IN AMERICA

AN ABSTRACT
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by
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Elizabeth Terrill Bentley testified to the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration in 1948. She was called as an expert on Communist underground activities because she had spent most of the previous decade as a courier for a major Russian spy ring. The story she told the Congressmen, and the background to that story, forms the basis of my work entitled Elizabeth Bentley: The Story of an American Communist Agent.

Bentley was born on New Year's Day, 1908, in New Milford, Connecticut. Her parents, John and May Bentley, were pillars of the community. The family moved several times during Elizabeth's youth, ending up in Rochester, New York, where she graduated from East High School in 1926.

Bentley went on to Vassar College. Here she majored in foreign languages, concentrating on French and Italian. She was attracted to several leftist organizations during her four years at Vassar and was also greatly influenced by her dramatics teacher, Hallie Flanigan, who spoke ideally of the social changes taking place in the Soviet Union.

After graduating from Vassar in 1930, Bentley spent two years as a teacher at Foxcroft School in Virginia. She also spent a year studying at the University of Florence, where she developed a dislike for fascism. Returning to the United States in July, 1934, she was alone (her parents had died while she was in Italy) and unemployed. She decided to enter the Columbia University School of Business and train for a

secretarial job.

While at Columbia she became friends with Mrs. Lee Fuhr, a widow who was also studying at Columbia. Fuhr was a member of the American League Against War and Fascism. Bentley joined the League under Fuhr's sponsorship, and soon found herself very active in League affairs.

Bentley was unaware that the League served as a front for the Communist Party. Proving herself a loyal and dependable worker for the League, she was asked to join the Party. After a brief hesitation, she agreed, and joined the Party in March, 1936.

In early 1938, Bentley obtained a job with the Italian Library of Information, a New York based propaganda agency of Musolini's government. She was put in touch with Jacob Golos--code name Timmy--who instructed her on how to pass on information to the Party. Golos, who would be Bentley's lover until his death in November, 1943, was an agent of the Soviet secret police (NKVD).

Bentley worked for the NKVD until 1945. After leaving the Library of Information most of her work was as a courier. She gathered information from spies in Washington and transported it to Golos and other Russian agents in New York. She had several conflicts with her Russian superiors after Golos' death and stopped all courier activity by the end of 1945.

In 1946, Bentley went to the FBI with her story. In

July and August of 1948, she testified about Communist activities in the United States. Her testimony, given to both House and Senate committees, caused a stir, but was soon overshadowed by other revelations made by ex-Communists.

Bentley went on to give interviews and lectures on Communism. Within a few years, however, she was no longer in demand. She spent her last years teaching and trying to live down her infamous past. She died in December, 1963.