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Informers

The informer network was a part of human capital of the communist police state. But the informers themselves have been largely silent in the histories of those states that are now available. For the most part, the informers do not tell their own stories, and no one tells it for them. A few documents from the archives of the Soviet security police allow us to glimpse their perspective. These documents were created by the KGB, most likely, for use in training handlers in the routes by which informers came to the KGB, their varied motivations, their social and psychological strengths and weaknesses, and the methods that could develop them into productive assets. The cases that arise in the documents were selected for that purpose and cannot be considered representative of the mass informers. Nonetheless they make up a rich and varied portfolio of the predicaments of individuals who were caught, often unexpectedly, between the anvil of the Cold War and the hammer of Soviet rule. The paper presents a few such stories.