

Brits search for traitors at the top

Britain seems to churn out spy scandals the way Japan produces TV sets. The latest intrigue that has Britain abuzz concerns charges that MI-5, the nation's spy-catching agency, did all sorts of nasty things to former prime minister Harold Wilson back in 1974.

These accusations have been made by former MI-5 agent Peter Wright in an as-yet-unpublished memoir. The British government has been engaged for some time in a highly embarrassing and seemingly futile attempt to quash publication of Wright's book. This week, Wilson confirmed Wright's charges. Friends of Wilson fueled the scandal by adding claims that MI-5 had been aided and encouraged in its campaign to harass Wilson by the CIA and South African intelligence.

Pretty juicy stuff. What we do know is that MI-5 agents did for a while spy on Harold Wilson during his second term in office in the early 1970s. There may well have been a "dirty tricks" campaign waged against Wilson and some of his closest aides. All of these charges were made a decade ago and were open knowledge in the intelligence community. Their renewal comes at a time when MI-5 is again, as so frequently in its lurid past, fraught with charges of Soviet penetration, moles, traitors and compromised homosexuals.

Thanks to the most recent revelations, it now appears fairly certain that there was a most highly placed mole in MI-5, either its director or his No. 2. Britain's foreign intelligence arm, MI-6, was also rotten with traitors. Within the lower ranks of MI-5 was a group of counterspies who were determined to smoke out remaining Soviet moles inside Britain's establishment.



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Wilson, contrary to the impression given by recent press reports, was not singled out for suspicion by MI-5's mole-hunters simply because of his leftist policies and anti-South African agitation. There was a far more important reason for MI-5's actions.

In the early 1970s, a senior KGB officer defected to the West. He had been in the Western European section of Moscow Centre and had some knowledge of KGB penetration of NATO governments. The defector told the CIA that "a head of state in a northern European nation was a KGB agent." Alarm bells went off at CIA headquarters. In spite of intensive efforts, the CIA could not confirm — at least so far as I know — the identity of the mole but circumstantial evidence pointed strongly to Britain and its Labor prime minister, Harold Wilson.

Just as Britain's upper class was riddled during the period 1930-1970 with homosexual traitors and communist sympathizers, so also its working class and the Labor party were rife with Soviet operatives. A shocking number of Labor leaders, including at least three senior Labor members of Parliament, were known Soviet agents.

Many of Britain's largest and most politically powerful unions were directed by "militants" who took their orders from Moscow. Today, the hard left of British labor still remains in thrall to the KGB.

No wonder then that a small band of patriots inside MI-5 decided to risk their careers by watching Prime Minister Wilson. There were enough clues and suspicion in MI-5's view, to warrant such an unprecedented act. They were encouraged by a CIA that was utterly horrified that the leader of America's closest ally — and the sharer of Washington's most precious secrets — might be a Soviet agent.

What MI-5's spy-hunters found has never surfaced. Wilson and his left-wing aides left office under a haze of suspicion and innuendo. Subsequent investigations of the Wilson tenure have remained top secret. Given Britain's zeal in concealing the crimes of its traitors, one must doubt that the full story about the Wilson years will soon emerge.

Was the whole episode an outrageous example of western paranoia? I don't think so. Recall the recent case of the Norwegian government minister Arne Treholt. This suave, handsome politician was clearly heading for a run at the office of prime minister. Treholt was also a KGB agent. Fortunately, he was caught, but not before giving away some of NATO's most important secrets and not before shaping Norway's foreign policy in just the way ordered by the KGB.

If a high-ranking government minister in Norway, why not a British prime minister from the Labor party? And what might a hard look into Canada's recent past reveal?