

# Spycatcher's importance

Reading about the secrets of western intelligence agencies is pretty depressing business. No wonder they want to keep their files forever closed to public gaze. For what we see in them, as Peter Wright's book *Spycatcher* so painfully shows, is how the Soviets have run rings around our intelligence establishment.

*Spycatcher* is not for the average reader looking for James Bond adventure. On the contrary, it is packed full of tedious and painstaking counter-intelligence work all set against the sombre backdrop of a generation of highly placed British traitors. What strikes the reader so hard is the steely patience needed to track down spies, the hours of sifting through musty old files, the endless watching, crosschecking and referencing.

And when spies are sometimes caught, the shocking difficulty of prosecuting in our western legal system.

Wright also confirms what others have told us, namely that most of the supposed major coups by western intelligence, such as the Berlin tunnel or the MI-6/CIA spy Oleg Penkovsky, were Soviet disinformation operations. That President Kennedy was bluffed by Krushchev during the Cuban missile crisis after being fed bogus data by Penkovsky. That both the CIA and MI-6, Britain's foreign spy agency, were outwitted, outfought and left looking like awkward amateurs by the grand masters of the Soviet KGB and GRU.

There are no major secrets in Wright's book that have not leaked out before. In fact, this column has referred to a number of incidents supposedly "revealed" in Wright's book like MI-6's plots to poison Egypt's Nasser or to destabilize the Labor government of Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Wright confirms these plots, speaking with the authority of an assistant director of MI-5.

The British government has reacted with fury,

## Punch



"Trouble is, once we lift the pressure sales will dip and then it'll go into paperback."

## ERIC MARGOLIS



banning Wright's book in the U.K. under the Official Secrets Act, and trying, unsuccessfully, to have it suppressed in other countries.

Part of the British government's angry response in understandable. Secrets are to be kept, even by retired spies, and certainly not revealed until at least 25 years after the fact. Wright deals with matters that are only 15 years old. There must be a balance between freedom of the press and legitimate national security.

Having reluctantly concluded that Wright was wrong to publish this book, I must admit that I'm glad he did. Because *Spycatcher* shows, in stomach-churning detail, just how rotten and degenerate Britain's upper class has become.

The story of the "magic circle" of communist homosexuals at Cambridge and Oxford is well known. Wright adds the final chapter to this tale of treachery by detailing how the traitors Philby and Blunt were protected because their prosecution would prove frightfully embarrassing to their upper-class cronies.

Even today, Margaret Thatcher still refuses to reveal the whole story of the British traitors because doing so would besmirch the reputations of some of her senior Tory allies. Labor, for its part, wants no mention of how its ranks were infested with Soviet agents.

No wonder Wright has penned his book with acid instead of ink. Here is a man who devoted his life to defending his country against communist spies. What he got at the end of a long career was a tiny pension and the bitterness of seeing high-born traitors escape to comfortable retirement.

Chief among these, Wright contends, was his own boss at MI-5, Sir Roger Hollis, whom Wright insists was a longtime Soviet agent. Concrete proof that Hollis was a spy is lacking but there is strong circumstantial evidence that either Hollis or another senior head of MI-5 was a traitor.

Unless the KGB opens its files, we will never know for sure all of the Soviet moles and double agents who nearly brought MI-5, MI-6 and the CIA to ruin in the 1960s and early '70s. It was a dreadful period, described by CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton, as "a wilderness of mirrors." A time, let us recall, when even the CIA's director, William Colby, came under suspicion. A time when neither MI-5 nor the FBI had enough men to just shadow the huge number of known Soviet agents operating in their countries.

The western public should know of how its governments and that this danger still exists today. *Spycatcher* is the lament of a soldier who saw his side beaten; revenge against the Establishment that put class interest before those of the nation and a notable warning for us all.