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# Never To Be Disclosed: Government Secrecy in Britain 1945 - 1975

by

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in History

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*Warwick*

C.R.M.

*September 2008*

## DECLARATION

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. None of the material in this thesis has been published prior to the date of submission.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the practice of government secrecy in Britain from 1945-1975. Drawing on oral testimony, unpublished correspondence, and newly released archival material, it addresses the question of how and why governments kept information secret in the context of the Cold War and profound domestic social change. Topics incorporated within the ambit of this study include the origins and troubled history of the Official Secrets Act; the customs and cerebral landscapes of the civil service; the investigative journalism of Chapman Pincher; the disappearance of naval frogman 'Buster' Crabb; and the censorship of political and intelligence biographies. In a departure from traditional histories of secrecy, often written by detractors in the spirit of shrill political partisanship, it will be shown that many secrets were entirely defensible, concealed legitimately in the interests of national security and good government. The argument emphasises that the most effective antibodies to state secrecy were memoirists – who, possessing deep reservoirs of secret knowledge, exploited their status and old boy contacts to circumvent regulations they had themselves parented, and abided by, during their official careers. By 1975, it will be offered that Whitehall had begun to volunteer more information, especially under the aegis of official histories and other selectively discharged 'insider' accounts, in order to ameliorate public relations and deflect calls for more wide-ranging open government initiatives. While primarily political history, this thesis also incorporates socio-cultural analysis of the secret bearers themselves.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BAC	British Aircraft Corporation
BSC	British Security Co-ordination
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CSCA	Civil Service Clerical Association
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency [US]
DG	Director-General [MI5]
DPA	Defence Procurement Agency
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
D-Notice	Defence Notice
EDES	National Republican Greek League
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation [US]
FO/FCO	Foreign Office/Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GC&CS	Government Code and Cypher School
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GRU	Soviet Military Intelligence
HMG	His/Her Majesty's Government
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationary Office
HO	Home Office
Humint	Human Intelligence
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JSM	Joint Services Mission
KGB	Soviet Secret Service/Security Police
MI5	The Security Service
MI6	The Secret Intelligence Service
MI9	Wartime Evasion and Escape Service
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSA	National Security Agency [US]
OIA	Official Information Act
OSA	Official Secrets Act
OSS	Office of Strategic Services [US]
PRO	The Public Record Office
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
RAF	Royal Air Force
Sigint	Signals Intelligence
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service [MI6]
SOE	Special Operations Executive
TNA	The National Archives
TSR2	Tactical Strike/Reconnaissance 2 Aircraft
UKAEA	UK Atomic Energy Authority
Ultra	Signals Intelligence Security Classification

In the summer of 1945, as the Labour Party settled into office, and as world war evolved into a precarious peace, secrecy was an implacable part of British government – from Downing Street to the out-stations of Whitehall. Long accepted by leaders of every political persuasion, the business of government was done, as a rule, in secret. ‘No government can be successful which cannot keep its secrets’, wrote the new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, on 9 November 1945.<sup>1</sup> Since the polity pioneered ‘double secrecy’, in other words being secretive about the existence of secrecy itself, the public knew very little about why secrets were kept or the systems artfully crafted to regulate and monitor the dissemination of official information. Without a thirty or fifty-year rule, the state was the chief arbitrator of what reached the public domain, and lawfully could keep records of whatever vintage under permanent lock and key. Beyond the political core executive, Britain’s intelligence agencies were as secret as the day they were created, neither seen nor talked about, if only to uphold the polite fiction that they did not ‘officially’ exist. At a wider societal level, reflecting both paternalistic Conservatism and Fabian-influenced liberal democracy, there subsisted an unparalleled deference for the integrity of secrets.<sup>2</sup> Officials were trusted to act in the public interest and with this touching good faith came a mandate to operate in silence. As the American sociologist and commentator Edward Shils would later claim, ‘The acceptance of hierarchy in British society permit[ted] the government to retain its secrets, with little challenge or resentment’.<sup>3</sup> Enfeebled by the D-Notice system and fearful of the Official Secrets Act (OSA), which criminalised the unauthorised disclosure of official information, newspapers, both popular and broadsheet, seldom

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA) PREM 8/436, ‘Secrecy of Cabinet Proceedings’, Note by the Prime Minister, CP (45) 282, 9 November 1945.

<sup>2</sup> D. Marsh, D. Richards and M.J. Smith, *Changing Patterns of Governance in the United Kingdom* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> E.A. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London, 1956), p. 49.

pried into the most secret affairs of state. In 1945, therefore, the realms of public authority and public awareness were almost totally sundered. Britain – to borrow Richard Aldrich’s telling formulation – possessed an ‘Empire of Secrecy’<sup>4</sup> where, by common consent, certain things should never be disclosed.

This thesis takes a fresh look at how this empire of secrecy evolved in the subsequent three decades. What secrets were kept and why? What mechanisms existed to control the disclosure of official information? What secrets, if any, were exposed and by whom? The meta-question behind these various interrogatives is how far Britain’s empire of secrecy had changed, if at all, by 1975? One might ask, with some justification, whether another discussion about secrecy is necessary. Surely, after the publication of David Vincent’s pathbreaking *The Culture of Secrecy*, which ran the gamut from the Great Reform Bill to the Thatcher administration, there is little more to be said?<sup>5</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. In the ten years since its publication, a host of new and exciting archival material has come to light. This, of course, brings with it the self-evident value of showcasing new sources. More importantly, however, it allows us to reframe certain questions and probe unexplored areas. A major contention of this investigation is that we are now in a far better position to understand both the penetration and contestation of secrecy within Fleet Street. The role of the press, whether as secret keepers or co-ordinated intruders on government secrecy, has often been occluded by a preoccupation with highly publicised *causes célèbres* such as the *Sunday Telegraph* case in 1971 and the ABC Trial in 1978. Attempts by the state to regulate and choreograph disclosures of a more quotidian nature have been ignored. Another relatively neglected yet distinctively challenging and fertile subject is the extent to which successive governments have gone to censor and suppress unwelcome memoirs by former employees. The story of Thatcher’s international legal vendetta against *Spycatcher* and the MI5 alumnus, Peter Wright, is depressingly familiar; but the

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<sup>4</sup> R.J. Aldrich, ‘Policing the Past: Official History, Secrecy and British Intelligence since 1945’, *English Historical Review*, 119:483 (September 2004), p. 922.

<sup>5</sup> D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* (Oxford, 1998).

backchannel manoeuvring which attended countless other 'insider' publications has received an incomplete assessment.<sup>6</sup>

As will become clear, government secrecy has steadily evolved into a much abused term, in both scholarly literature and public discourse. Richard Crossman, committed leftist and author of the controversial *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, famously described secretiveness as the 'real English disease and in particular the chronic ailment of the British Government'.<sup>7</sup> For those critics grounded in anti-statist traditions and the fear of officials amassing too much power, secrecy is the epistemological bulwark of inefficiency, corruption, political embarrassment, and other malfeasance of administration. James Callaghan, then shadow Foreign Secretary, candidly admitted as much in his evidence to the Franks Committee in 1972: 'We are not going to tell you anything more than we can about what is going on to discredit us'.<sup>8</sup> Some contend, moreover, that obsession with secrecy over the workings of government can be so pervasive that it becomes an end in itself. Put another way, it perpetuates secrecy for secrecy's sake, with little regard for whether a justified need to protect information really exists on every occasion. This thesis stands in a somewhat contrapuntal relationship to this viewpoint. Episodes will be discussed where secrecy, left unchecked, clearly blighted sound policymaking. Other occasions will emerge where officials deliberately misappropriated the leverage of national security – 'one of the oldest blocking tactics in the book'<sup>9</sup> – to conceal abuses of power and to maintain the veneer of respectability. The fact that national security appeals to patriotic sympathies, and is an 'ambulatory concept' so vague as to defy easy definition, makes it a valuable 'trump card' over the right to information. It will also become apparent that secrecy often carried its own penalty, as it was from concealment that perceptions of government and policies were drawn, and public distrust formed. Crossman ventilated

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<sup>6</sup> P. Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (Richmond, 1987); M. Turnbull, *The Spycatcher Trial* (London, 1988); D. Burnet and R. Thomas, 'Spycatcher – The Commodification of the Truth', *Journal of Law and Society*, 16:2 (Summer 1989), pp. 210-24.

<sup>7</sup> R. Crossman, 'The Real English Disease', *New Statesman*, 24 September 1971, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in K. Theakston, *The Labour Party and Whitehall* (London, 1992), p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> R.N. Taylor, *The Ponting Affair* (London, 1985), p. 7.

this argument while writing for the *New Statesman* in September 1971: 'One result of this secrecy is to make the British electorate feel it is being deliberately kept in the dark and increasingly to suspect the very worst of its rulers'.<sup>10</sup>

Other evidence, however, presents a more ambivalent picture, suggesting that openness was not always a virtue and secrecy was not always a vice. Legitimate secrets had to be kept in the interests of national security. In certain fields, at certain times, such as defence and intelligence, secrecy was a necessary evil. It is sometimes forgotten that openness informs the enemy as well as the public. Strict secretaries enjoining officials were also necessary to safeguard deliberative processes and to facilitate the efficient operation of government business: 'Not all discussions' – to quote the Franks Committee – '[could] be carried on at noon in the market place'.<sup>11</sup> Regrettably, much of the existing literature on secrecy is heavily politicised, bringing to the subject a 'kind of intellectual baggage, which should have been left at the customs barrier'.<sup>12</sup> A right-wing scholar is typically stentorian in his or her laudations of secrecy; a hard left-winger, by contrast, is happy to transmogrify a work of history into a polemical broadside on behalf of greater openness. E.P. Thompson's contributions, for example, are spiced with an intensely one-sided animosity.<sup>13</sup> Criticism is, of course, healthy when examining any citadel of power; but, as Walter Bagehot observed in his classic study of the English Constitution, 'Nothing can be easier to make a case...against a particular system, by pointing out with emphatic caricature its inevitable miscarriages, and by pointing out nothing else'.<sup>14</sup> As several scholars have noted, the ability to put forward a nuanced and dispassionate account is difficult, especially when we consider that, even by the early 1990s, governments were still holding back postal interception files from the eighteenth

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<sup>10</sup> Crossman, 'Real English Disease', p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Hailsham, *On the Constitution* (Glasgow, 1992), p. 2. The most heavily 'politicised' accounts are: T. Barnes, *Open Up! Britain and Freedom of Information in the 1980's* (London, 1980); D. Wilson (ed.), *The Secrets File: The Case for Freedom of Information in Britain Today* (London, 1984); J. Rusbridger, *The Intelligence Game* (London, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight* (London, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> Cited in B. Emmlott, 'Foreword', in B. Emmlott *et al.* (eds), *Changing Times: Leading Perspectives on the Civil Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and its Enduring Values* (London 1999).



century and steadfastly refused to name the directors of their secret services.<sup>15</sup> Baldly stated, what follows is neither apologia nor rehabilitation, but rather a balanced redefinition.

### Historiographical Considerations

Scholarship on secrecy has a rich pedigree. Philosophers have explored ethics and ontology; students of law have examined fundamental questions of jurisprudence; and developmental psychologists have conducted phenomenological and scientific studies of the mental processes behind secrecy.<sup>16</sup> In terms of government secrecy, it is no exaggeration to acknowledge Max Weber as being the founder of the field. Published after his death in 1919, but most likely written before the Great War, Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*) considered secrecy as endemic to all administrative institutions: 'Every bureaucracy', Weber told us, 'seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret'.<sup>17</sup> Secrecy, it was argued, insulated bureaucrats from criticism and allowed them to go about their business unhindered and without public accountability. As Weber explained: 'Bureaucratic administration always tends to be an administration of "secret sessions": in so far as it can, it hides knowledge and action from criticism'.<sup>18</sup> The main problem with this 'structural' approach is that it lacks historical specificity and overestimates homogeneity between inherently incomparable bureaucratic systems. Although theoretically perceptive, Weber had little to say, as he later admitted, about either the causes or modes of secrecy in particular national contexts. His assessment, moreover, did not extend beyond the bureaucracy and failed to unpack the appeal of secrecy for politicians.

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<sup>15</sup> Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. vii; R.J. Aldrich, 'The Secret State', in P. Addison and H. Jones (eds), *A Companion to Contemporary Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 336-7.

<sup>16</sup> S. Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York, 1982); J. Hull, *Commercial Secrecy: Law and Practice* (London, 1997); P. Birkinshaw, *Freedom of Information: The Law, the Practice and the Ideal* (London, 2001); A. Kelly, *The Psychology of Secrets* (London, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> M. Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in *Essays in Sociology*, translated and edited by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (Oxford, 1946), pp. 233-4.

Since the 1980s, buoyed by the arrival of official secrecy as an issue of major public salience, historians of modern Britain have gradually supplanted the 'ideal type' formulations to which Weber and a subsequent generation of sociologists subscribed.<sup>19</sup> Many accounts, framed firmly within the conceptual horizons of legal and political history, have explored the form and operation of Section 2 of the OSA, which remained on the statute book until 1989.<sup>20</sup> Although voluminous, as the chronological list of publications in the footnotes suggests, stand-alone legal histories are all lacking in one way or another. It is now widely recognised that the OSA, which was activated on average no more than once every two years up to 1979,<sup>21</sup> was not the cause of government secrecy – only its most overt manifestation or symptom. As Drewry and Butcher put it, 'legislation tells only part of the story. The rest is embedded in British political culture, constitutional conventions and the understandings and habits of civil service behaviour'.<sup>22</sup> Shifting the locus of their enquiry away from the law, certain historians have proposed that secrecy is an analogue of Britain's national character, extending through and beyond the orbit of the state and permeating society and social relations as a whole. Peter Hennessy, the most fastidious connoisseur of post-war government, once wrote that: 'Secrecy is as much a part of the English landscape as the Cotswolds. It goes with the grain of our society. Its curtailment, not its continuity, would be aberrational. Whitehall...is only its greatest, not its sole monument'.<sup>23</sup> In US academe, there is now a burgeoning literature on American practices of secrecy, with a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See F.E. Rourke, 'Secrecy in American Bureaucracy', *Political and Science Quarterly*, 72:4 (December 1957), pp. 540-64.

<sup>20</sup> T. Bunyan, *Political Police in Britain* (London, 1976); D.C. Rowat (ed.), *Administrative Secrecy in Developed Countries* (London, 1979); D. Leigh, *The Frontiers of Secrecy* (London, 1980); D. Hooper, *Official Secrets* (London, 1987); R.M. Thomas, *Espionage and Secrecy* (London, 1991); R. Thurlow, *The Secret State* (Oxford, 1994); A. Rogers, *Secrecy and Power in the British State: A History of the Official Secrets Act* (London, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 17, pp. 116-8.

<sup>22</sup> G. Drewry and T. Butcher, *The Civil Service Today* (Oxford, 1988), p. 175.

<sup>23</sup> P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 347.

strong emphasis on contemporary matters, the implications for democracy and the balance between security and freedom.<sup>24</sup>

The tendency to interpret government secrecy as part of a broader social process (or 'diagnose', to employ a favourite conceit of the field) encouraged a range of scholars to filter their accounts through the prism of 'culture'. Clive Ponting, himself the survivor of an unsuccessful prosecution under the OSA, was the first to lend a new sharpness and depth to the debate:

A powerful and persistent culture of secrecy – reflecting the basic assumption that good government is closed government and the public should only be allowed to know what the government decides they should know – was carried over from the nineteenth century and refined in the twentieth century when it was given statutory backing through Britain's formidable secrecy laws.<sup>25</sup>

Ponting's account attempted to reconstruct a government 'culture of secrecy' in all its institutional settings. Currents and sub-fields included 'Executive and Cabinet Secrecy', 'Secrecy and the Civil Service', 'Local Government Secrecy', and 'Nuclear Secrecy'. It was, however, in Vincent's work that the implications of broadening the field's scope were most fully worked out. With a cool eye and lively pen, Vincent's encyclopaedic discussion explored a plethora of interesting but not always pertinent by-ways, such as professional, commercial, medical, and domestic secrecy.<sup>26</sup> The culture of secrecy paradigm is not universally embraced. Critics point to the notoriously slippery concept of 'culture'. Culture, like other important categories of historical analysis ('class', 'community', society'), possesses significations, seated in contemporary discourse, which

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<sup>24</sup> A. MacKenzie, *Secrets: The CIA's War at Home* (London, 1997); D.P. Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (London, 1998); P. Melanson, *Secrecy Wars* (Washington 2001); C. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (London, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> C. Ponting, *Secrecy in Britain* (Oxford, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> P. Mandler, 'Reviewed Work: *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* by D. Vincent', *The American Historical Review*, 105:3 (June 2000), pp. 1013-4; N.F. Gullace, 'Reviewed Work: *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* by D. Vincent', *The Journal of Modern History*, 73:1 (March 2001), pp. 159-60; C. Ponting, 'Reviewed Work: *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* by D. Vincent', *Journal of Law and Society*, 27:2 (June 2000), pp. 335-7.

often have little or no relevance to their respective inferences in the past.<sup>27</sup> E.P. Thompson called culture a 'clumpish term', whilst others have referred to it as a 'dustbin concept', too often explaining everything and nothing.<sup>28</sup> Despite these reservations, it would be wasteful to discard the term, and make do with a smorgasbord of more neutral anthropological catch-alls such as 'the custom of secrecy', 'the ritual of secrecy' or 'the habit of secrecy'. Although indiscriminate, a culture of secrecy was clearly recognised and contested (if not always given linguistic form) by officials in the past. For example, when comparing British secrecy with that of other Western democracies, Lord Franks did everything but spell out the concept, emphasising that 'constitutional arrangements, political tradition, and national character, habits and ways of thought, all have their influence'.<sup>29</sup>

The framework adopted in this thesis is greatly indebted to Vincent's scholarship. However, what follows avoids the 'kitchen-sink' approach and returns, instead, to the strictly *government* culture of secrecy proffered by Ponting. Dealing with every conceivable aspect of secrecy (how it affects doctors, patients, birth control, social workers) can lead to a confusing morass of over-inclusiveness and distract from the core political narrative. By conflating the experience of crown servants and doctors are we not in danger of brewing an academically expedient 'secrecy porridge'? Vincent freely concedes moreover that a multifarious history precluded an interest in the 'substance' of restriction.<sup>30</sup> By ignoring peripheral concerns, it is hoped that this study will illuminate not only the processes and correlates of information control, but also some of the secrets themselves. The secrets discussed relate to the main spheres of state: intelligence, defence, the executive, government and the bureaucracy. Generating and protecting secrets deemed vital to national security, each sphere formed part of

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<sup>27</sup> See M. Rubin, 'What is Cultural History Now?', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (London, 2002), pp. 80-94; F. Inglis, *Culture* (Cambridge, 2004); P. Burke, *What is Cultural History* (London, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Burke, *Cultural History*, p. 23; Marsh, Richards and Smith, *Changing Patterns of Governance*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. viii, p. 16.

what Peter Gill calls, 'concentric circles of security', with the intelligence agencies at the centre being the most secretive for obvious reasons.<sup>31</sup> However, I am as much interested in official secrets that possessed 'political electricity', or had the potential to cause personal embarrassment, as those that were considered integral to the safety of the state. As Harry 'Chapman' Pincher told the Franks Committee, 'Very often the things that have caused the biggest row are not on security, but things which are embarrassing to the Department or to the Minister. Politically embarrassing is a higher security classification than top secret!'<sup>32</sup>

### Secrecy and the Media

Parts of this thesis will be devoted to exploring whether the press functioned as a bedmate or sparring partner when it came to protecting state secrets. One line of assessment and popular liberal mythology depicts the media as a storming, raucous enemy of secrecy, stymied by the OSA but instrumental in holding officials and institutions accountable to the public. The Cold War witnessed the rise of the investigative reporter (or 'digger') who, as nobody's poodle, attempted to sniff out secrets and much more in the kind of profit-driven activity Fleet Street had rarely indulged. In the light of several anger-mottled dramas, most notably the 'Cable-Vetting Affair' in 1967, statesmen were mourning the end of deferential journalism. In April 1972, Robert Armstrong, then Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, wrote of the period that he had never known journalists so preoccupied with 'clashes of personalities, scoops and leaks'.<sup>33</sup> Peter Hennessy, while writing for *The Times* in October 1978, presented a similar picture, relating to the basic psyche of contemporary journalism: 'Reading a Cabinet minute always induces a certain frisson in a journalist. Reproducing it in a newspaper is even better. The sense of illicit pleasure is probably

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<sup>31</sup> P. Gill, *Policing Politics: Security Intelligence Agencies and the Liberal Democratic State* (London, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.

<sup>33</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, R.T. Armstrong to E. Heath, 28 April 1972.

the only happy effect of the blancmange of secrecy in which Whitehall embeds itself.’<sup>34</sup> A cursory appraisal would also suggest that the media became more political and devoted more time and space to scandals and confrontation. In July 1972, the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, noted that the ‘tendency of reporters to comment, as distinct from reporting, [had] become disproportionate in recent years’; he also saw ‘grounds for suspecting prejudice on the part of some producers of current affairs’.<sup>35</sup>

However, debate persists. As Ann Rogers argues, certain sections of the media have been equally as likely ‘to contribute to, rather than mitigate, secrecy in Britain’.<sup>36</sup> This argument has a long lineage. The Labour Party firebrand, Aneurin Bevan, once observed that censorship was scarcely necessary in Britain: ‘There is no need’, he explained, ‘to muzzle sheep’.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in 1956, Edward Shils wrote, ‘The British journalist, in his dealings with the government, handles himself as if he were an inferior of the person clothed with the majesty of office’.<sup>38</sup> Fleet Street’s purported timidity is an accusation most readily levelled against lobby correspondents. Established in 1884, the lobby grants a coterie of accredited journalists the licence to enter the engine room of Westminster, inaccessible for the remainder of their profession, and receive officially sanctioned and ‘ready to wear’ briefings from MPs and Ministers. The golden rule underlying the system is that, while the briefing may be published, correspondents should never disclose the source of their information. Appointment to the lobby is traditionally done on the old boy net. One journalist – albeit possibly suffering from the acid of envy – called it a ‘home from home’ for the products of the English boarding school, complete with tacit etiquette, tatty carpets and late-night booze.<sup>39</sup> For critics, the lobby represents ‘a dishonest and mutually corrupting arrangement, unworthy of a

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<sup>34</sup> P. Hennessy, ‘Modest Little Central Cell Keeps a Lookout for Hurricanes’, *The Times*, 3 October 1978, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, ‘Public Presentation of Government Policy’, CP (72) 70, Memo by the Prime Minister, July 1972.

<sup>36</sup> Rogers, *Secrecy and Power*, p. 68.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in ‘Fleet Street Rebellion’, *Time*, 6 May 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Shils, *Torment of Secrecy*, p. 51.

<sup>39</sup> M. Tempest, ‘Media Maze: The Byzantine World of the Lobby’, *Guardian*, 15 April 2002.

modern democratic society and a genuinely free press'.<sup>40</sup> As well as impeding journalists on the rung below, who are deprived of exclusive briefings, there is a presumption that lobby correspondents are taught to dance by those on the rung above. Reliant on the lobby for information, they are compelled to 'take their line' from carefully processed material, and this can mean giving a sympathetic gloss to executive decisions or even dry-running ideas without officially committing Her Majesty's Government (HMG). As Cabinet Secretary, Robert Armstrong admitted that the lobby was like feeding fish to penguins, and could be wielded by officials 'to influence opinion without accepting responsibility'.<sup>41</sup>

But what about the mainstream media? Again, Ann Rogers leads the case for the prosecution, claiming that the wider press corps actively supported and colluded with the state. Editors and journalists, she argued, shared the same 'elite vision' as their governmental counterparts – a vision 'engendered by general class, cultural, social and financial allegiances'.<sup>42</sup> Rather than publish exposés, journalists would, out of class loyalty, collude supinely in the withholding of information. Crossman detected this in September 1971:

If the truth be told, the press lords are members of the closed society which ensures that so much of the information available to government remains 'inside knowledge', and that well-informed discussion of the great issues of state is the privilege of a tight little oligarchy which hoards the truth as squirrels hoard their winter food supply.<sup>43</sup>

Other scholars, such as David Leigh and John Jenks, have attributed the press's purported obedience to the so-called 'beat structure' of post-war journalism. Over time and by necessity, they argue, journalists who covered political institutions were not only taught the value of secrecy, but were compelled to identify and agree with the

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<sup>40</sup> Ponting, *Secrecy in Britain*, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> P. Hennessy, 'Accelerated History? Whitehall and the Press since 1945', *James Cameron Lecture 2000*; P. Hennessy, 'Government vs the Press', *The Times*, 21 June 1984, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Rogers, *Secrecy and Power*, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> Crossman, 'The Real English Disease', p. 1.

views of their government sources.<sup>44</sup> Failure to do so would have put them out of business – unless, of course, they were prepared to join the much-maligned, radical press. In an important primer from the period, E.P. Thompson speculated that large sections of the domestic media had been effectively co-opted, and were used to plant stories and propagate gossip on behalf of government departments: ‘In the last few years senior officials have taken to leaking like a wardful of incontinents, daily sheets from Fleet Street wrapped between their legs as nappies’.<sup>45</sup> This thesis aims to tease out some of these themes. How supine was the national press? How ‘close’ were certain mainstream journalists and ‘diggers’ to officialdom? Is there any hard evidence of departments peddling statements to sycophantic conduits in Fleet Street?

Should journalists step out of line, the government could always resort to the OSA, a blunt instrument to bludgeon miscreants and police the boundaries of acceptable discourse. But there was an alternative – voluntary rather than legal methods of censorship. One such mechanism, operational since 1912, is the D-Notice system. The system – often described as ‘uniquely British’ – provides guidance to the media on the publication or broadcasting of national security information. Overseen by the D-Notice Committee, an advisory body nominally made up of government officials together with representatives from Fleet Street, its purpose is to assist the media in identifying subjects whose public discussion would adversely affect the defence (hence the ‘D’) of the realm. During the Cold War, its existence was justified on the belief that the Soviet enemy was drawing on publications, however insignificant, to make a reasonable approximation of British weapons, security, and intelligence operations and methods. The system has always been constituted on a purely voluntary basis; there is no legal requirement for the media to participate and a D-Notice can only be regarded as a letter of advice or guide to security considerations. The decision whether or not to publish rests, in the final analysis, with the editor or publisher concerned. ‘Its success’,

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<sup>44</sup> Leigh, *Frontiers of Secrecy*; J. Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘A State of Blackmail’, in E.P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight* (London, 1980), pp. 117-8.



emphasised the Radcliffe Report in 1962, 'depends upon goodwill and, in effect, upon very little else'.<sup>46</sup>

The D-Notice system should suit both sides. For HMG, it provides a less officious and speedy means of communicating security concerns to the press before any damage is done. For the media, it forewarns an editor that an item is unfit for publication, and thus helps to prevent needless legislative action. 'A D-Notice is a two-way contract', opined Sir James 'Ned' Dunnett (Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence) in May 1971: 'It recognises the national interest in an informed press and invites them to preserve the national interest by protecting classified information'.<sup>47</sup> However, as this thesis will discuss, the system has never been universally esteemed and has endured a chequered history. Proponents of pure-flame liberalism have long questioned any arrangement that trammels the autonomy of the press. Even when national security is at stake, it is argued, the system 'goes against the grain of a free press in a free society'.<sup>48</sup> Leonard Downie, former editor of the *Washington Post*, claimed that such a binding alliance with statesmen would be unconstitutional in America.<sup>49</sup> It is, of course, essential that the system confines itself to defence matters in order to have any credibility with the media; but, all too often, the 'national interest' injunction has been illicitly extended to conceal political embarrassment rather than genuine security matters.

## Methodology, Outline and Sources

The principal concern of what follows is the means by which official information was withheld, restricted and exposed. The scope of such a study is potentially immense. Government secrecy rubs shoulders with, and fits into a much wider discussion about, privacy, parliamentary practice, public oversight and accountability, freedom of

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<sup>46</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> TNA DEFE 23/65, J. Dunnett to Law Officer's Department, 20 May 1971.

<sup>48</sup> *Third Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1979-80, The D-Notice System*, HC 773 (August 1980), Memo, Appendix 12 (D22), pp. 138-9.

information, surveillance, citizenship – governance in the round. This thesis makes no claim to provide a definitive ‘total history’ or reference-volume coverage of the topic. Rather than circumnavigate the secret state or attempt to write a continuous and chronologically structured narrative, it offers a thematically linked menu of case studies. There is, of course, a modicum of arbitrariness in proceeding with a selective hand and deciding which aspects are worthy of inclusion. Woven together, however, the strands should reveal some of the textures that have underlain both the culture of, and opposition to, government secrecy in Britain. Structuring the analysis thematically should also enable the general reader to pick and choose areas most satisfying to his or her own curiosity or area of expertise. The periodisation, 1945 – 1975 (in effect a self-imposed thirty-year rule), was reasoned on a number of levels. Firstly, it coincides with the first Cold War, a period which saw heightened anxieties of external attack, domestic infiltration and espionage. The spectre of the communist threat and the blurred boundary between war and peace arguably provided officials with an easy justification for more stringent information management. The first Cold War was also a time when the military-industrial complex was growing exponentially, accompanied by a social dilution by technical experts and newly educated members of the Welfare State, which was bound to alarm the traditional ruling class secret-keepers. Secondly, it provides a discrete chronology for studying opponents of secrecy, coinciding with the proliferation of more news-hungry journalists, but anteceding an age of transparency lobbies and freedom of information public interest groups. It also predates the era of e-governance which, from the early 1980s, would change (if not complicate) the task of creating, storing, protecting and preserving official records.

This thesis unfolds in six substantive chapters. Taking a broad temporal perspective, spanning from 1850 to 1920, Chapter 1 sketches the legal framework of secrecy. Here readers will be provided with useful context as to the origins and main provisions of Section 2 of the OSA. Understanding this now defunct legislative mechanism is crucial to the overall narrative, since it fortified the rules by which

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<sup>49</sup> *Third Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1979-80, The D-Notice System*, HC 773

governments released information, and by which others, including the media, could publicise it. (Readers will look in vain for a detailed examination of the many famous cases where governments have enforced this legislation; all of these episodes have been exhaustively covered elsewhere.) Chapter 2 casts the net away from the law *per se* to consider secrecy in the civil service. The civil service has a reputation for being a closed system, a secretive village in which government is treated as a private affair and the doctrine of confidentiality is one of the fundamental working assumptions.<sup>50</sup> Few, however, have paused to consider the logic and function of this mentality. Is it something endemic to those who share common patterns of socialisation in school and university; or is it, rather, something that is learned 'on the job' – inculcated, over time, by routine and ways of working in a modern and closed-career structure? Chapter 3 examines the journalistic career of Chapman Pincher. A leading investigative reporter for thirty years, specialising in the fields of defence and espionage, Pincher has been the subject of an unpardonably small number of historiographical contributions. As yet no biography has been written. Pincher's story is perfect for this thesis. Although a voracious critic of official secrecy, he was also known for planting stories on behalf of government departments. In a memorably bitter philippic, E.P. Thompson described Pincher as an 'official urinal', only too eager to exploit information surreptitiously obtained from government spin-doctors.<sup>51</sup> Chapter 4 represents one of the first comprehensive accounts of the so-called Commander Crabb Affair in 1956. There are strong temptations to consign Crabb's mysterious disappearance beyond the pale of scholarly attention, leaving the subject to the sensationalist speculations of the conspiratorial media. I would argue, however, that the Crabb case is useful, not only as a vantage point from which to study the growth and effectiveness of official secrecy, but also as a frozen moment in the uneasy relationship between the press, political leaders and the intelligence services.

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(August 1980), p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> See H. Heclo and A. Wildavsky, *The Private Government of Public Money* (London, 1981).

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 'State of Blackmail', p. 116.

The final two chapters deal with memoirs. Ironically, it has often been those drawn from official circles, either as politicians, civil servants or intelligence practitioners, which have posed the greatest challenge to official secrecy. Determined to 'surmount the bounds of mortality',<sup>52</sup> to quote G.P. Gooch, by recounting the important engagements of his or her career, the memoirist is compelled to challenge the laws and conventions about what can and cannot be disclosed in the public domain. The history of governmental attempts to regulate this genre of literature, and to censor its most potent revelations, remains largely *terra incognita*. This lacuna requires urgent attention. As George Egerton argues, given the ubiquity of these accounts in modern Britain, not to mention their important 'latent functions' in conceptualising political processes and shaping the social memory of the past, it is imperative that scholars begin to map its landmarks and contours.<sup>53</sup> Chapter 5, therefore, looks at the censorship of intelligence autobiographies (and official histories), while Chapter 6 examines a range of contretemps surrounding the publication of ministerial memoirs, from Sir Anthony Eden to Richard Crossman.

A few words about sources. At first sight, it is easy to assume that administrative secrecy is an impenetrable subject, and that departments reflexively hoard the most revealing records. 'Government is not to be conducted in the interests of history', declared Lord Radcliffe in December 1975; 'the historian cannot have as of right a smooth highway constructed for him through the intricate paths of public administration and statecraft.'<sup>54</sup> Repelled by the apparent lack of available sources, the most recent recruits to the field have come through the 'linguistic turnstile',<sup>55</sup> extracting their interpretations from discourse analysis and representational categories of evidence. Ann Rogers, for example, relies exclusively on the cross-fertilisation of newspaper sources and parliamentary debates. All historians, of course, are required to

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<sup>52</sup> Cited in G. Egerton, 'Introduction', in G. Egerton (ed.), *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory* (London, 1994), p. xi.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs*, Cmnd. 6386 (London, December 1975), p. 31.

perform an intuitive 'leap of faith' between their evidence and their conclusions; but a methodology built solely upon inference from the heavily mediated worlds of Fleet Street and Parliament is unrewarding. It is also unnecessary. Since the mid-1990s, following the Waldegrave Initiative on Open Government and the introduction of redaction, a tranche of Cold War files has steadily made its way to the National Archives at Kew.<sup>56</sup> New archives relating to intelligence invariably grabbed the headlines, but just as important has been the declassification of files relating to government ministries such as the Cabinet Office, the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The Freedom of Information Act, which came into effect on 1 January 2005 and codified a right of access to information held by public bodies, has reinforced a far more propitious research environment for the historian of secrecy. Primarily, therefore, this thesis advances a methodological predisposition to archive-based research.

Amidst this documentary surfeit, where did I begin? It should be emphasised that keyword searches, carrying obvious designations such as 'Secrecy' and 'Secret', are fruitless when devilling around the catalogues of national repositories. Like a detective, one is required to work by accretions, adding a 'piece here and scrap there', until a composite picture begins to materialise.<sup>57</sup> The case study approach instilled discipline into the process and determined which sets of records were to be consulted. Every chapter engages with documents generated by the Cabinet Office. This is because, as the principal locus of government decision-making, the Cabinet Office had an imprint across every aspect of secrecy. Indiscretions by the press, the censorship of memoirs, the formulation of basic concealment policies and procedures all feature prominently in these documents. Themes and arguments were also played out in the records of other departments. D-Notices and their supporting documentation were generally found in MOD files, whilst the 'socialising' of draft memoirs for clearance could be traced

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<sup>55</sup> This delightful phrase was coined by S. Pedersen, 'What is Political History Now?', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (London, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> See R.J. Aldrich, 'Did Waldegrave Work? The Impact of Open Government upon British History', *Twentieth Century British History*, 91 (1998), pp. 111-26.

<sup>57</sup> R.W. Winks, *The Historian as Detective* (London, 1968).

through a number of departmental records – Home Office, Foreign Office and MOD. A nose for detective work also took me away from the well-worn road to Kew. For example, the story of Anthony Eden's Suez memoir, *Full Circle* ('one of the most important works of history and autobiography to be published since the war'),<sup>58</sup> was partly reconstructed using evidence gleaned from the Avon Papers housed at Birmingham University. I should like to thank Countess Avon for granting permission to access these papers. It should be added, moreover, that 'cross-country paper chases'<sup>59</sup> were not always necessary; the civil service trade union archive, based at Warwick University, brought into clearer focus union attitudes to positive vetting – something that has thus far evaded systematic scholarly attention.

This is not to say, however, that I blithely accept the presupposition that the truth is only to be located in the archives. Many state papers, without sounding sophomoric, are uninteresting and uninformative – written in 'civil service-ese'. It is often difficult to ascertain the assumptions and ideas of the personalities involved, to see them as 'sentient reflecting beings'.<sup>60</sup> Cabinet records, which are primarily concerned with the decisions reached, seldom reveal the premeditated stratagems and the unconscious feelings of officials. As Patrick Gordon Walker, Cabinet Minister in Harold Wilson's first Labour Government, recalled: '[They] give no indication of the order in which the points were made: they are always marshalled pro and con. Not all the points made in argument are recorded. No indication is given of the tone or temper of the debate.'<sup>61</sup> Official documents also require careful handling: civil servants are often accused of 'cooking' the minutes. Richard Aldrich has cautioned historians against interpreting records from Kew as an unproblematic 'analogue of reality'.<sup>62</sup> Even in private, officials routinely speak in guarded tongues rather than brass tacks, whilst

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<sup>58</sup> Birmingham University Library (BUL), Avon Papers, AP 33/3/1/64, R. Blake to A. Eden, 16 February 1960.

<sup>59</sup> J. Namier, *Lewis Namier: A Biography* (Oxford, 1971), p. 282.

<sup>60</sup> This phrase is coined by M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), p. xxiii.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in G. Warber, 'Collusion' and the Suez Crisis of 1956', *International Affairs* (April 1979), p. 226.

declassified files are meticulously weeded, cleansed and processed before entering the public domain. One danger, as Aldrich argues, is that history written purely from a 'diet of processed food' is effectively official history, albeit once removed.<sup>63</sup>

This thesis, therefore, has attempted where possible to go beyond the printed word by combining archival material with oral history. The majority of the personal testimonies presented in this investigation were conducted with late-career and retired civil servants. Having worked for the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) during numerous summer vacations, I was able to convince several former colleagues to roll back their years of career-hardened professional obfuscation, and provide often candid vignettes about their profession. Where possible, I have tried to use these interviews as something more than colourful adjuncts to conventional sources, deploying them not only to clarify working practice, but also as unique (if not entirely representative) evidence for motivation, atmosphere, attitudes and relationships. In order to explore commonalities and differences in experience and feelings, interviewees were selected from a diverse pool, drawn from both the higher civil service and the middle-management grades. I was especially keen to interview non-public school civil servants who had forged a career just below the main governing elite. Having entered the service at a relatively junior grade, and climbed the Whitehall escarpments through ability rather than social distinction, these individuals would be generally immune from the cultural pieties of the Establishment. This is not say that the organic process of 'growing [my] own records'<sup>64</sup> does not pose certain methodological limitations. There is a risk that the narrator's testimony is ventriloquised by the interviewer into validating his pre-conceived ideas. Another problem is that interviewees may be of a venerable age; human memory is inevitably diminished by the effluxion of time. Indeed, as John Lewis Gaddis has argued, 'when the events in question were shrouded in secrecy, the

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<sup>62</sup> R.J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 4. See also R.J. Aldrich, *Witness to War: Diaries of the Second World War in Europe and the Middle East* (London, 2004), p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> R.J. Aldrich, 'Grow Your Own: Cold War Intelligence and History Supermarkets', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17:1 (Spring 2002), pp. 135-52.

possibility for error is very much compounded'.<sup>65</sup> Memories, moreover, may be 'overlaid by nostalgia' or contaminated by what has been absorbed from other sources and subsequent experience.<sup>66</sup> Interviewees who once occupied positions of power, or who perhaps had been 'wronged' in the past, may self-consciously shape their testimony for justification and advocacy. Despite such problems (often referred to as the 'discolorations and encrustations' of lived experience),<sup>67</sup> using oral histories in conjunction with archival sources was considered absolutely essential for a well-rounded picture of government secrecy.

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<sup>65</sup> J.L. Gaddis, 'Intelligence, Espionage and Cold War Origins', *Diplomatic History*, 13:2 (1989), p. 211.

<sup>66</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (3rd edn, New York, 2000), p. 199.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourses and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998), p. 12.



Official secrecy was for a long time governed as much by convention as by the strict letter of the law. Between 1889 and 1920, however, secrecy was reconstituted as a formal legal category, most notably with the passing of the OSA (1889) and its various amendments (1911 and 1920). The decision to codify official information was foregrounded by the state as an impromptu response to the exigencies of national security; the spectre of war with Germany, coupled with the popular fear of foreign intelligence networks, demanded that *de facto* strategies of control were legally regulated. Those acquainted with the historiography of Whitehall will no doubt recognise this argument as the main thesis of Peter Hennessy: 'The real impulse towards even tighter secrecy in Edwardian times was the fear of German espionage'.<sup>1</sup> Other historians, however, advance a more complex understanding of the rationale for the Act. As befits a student of the *longue durée*, Ken Robertson found its roots at a much deeper level in the politics, beliefs and social structures of the nineteenth century. While the state justified legislation as an urgent response to external threats, argued Robertson, the resort to the statute book had little to do with spy fever and represented the culmination of a prolonged campaign by the ruling classes to curtail unauthorised disclosures by arrant members of the civil service.<sup>2</sup> Robertson's study won devotees. Both David Vincent and Ann Rogers have shown how, in an age of democracy marked by emerging forms of mass communications and a more socially heterogeneous and less tractable civil service, the OSA was passed to combat failing codes of gentlemanly restraint. 'Official secrecy legislation', asserts Vincent, 'stemmed in large part from the growing requirement to recruit to government offices those whose breeding, education, and pay excluded them from the rank of gentleman'.<sup>3</sup> This chapter, which traces the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> K.G. Robertson, *Public Secrets: A Study in the Development of Government Secrecy* (London, 1982), p. 58. Also see: T. Bunyan, *Political Police in Britain* (London, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* (Oxford, 1998), p. 91.

genesis and evolution of the OSA through its principal formative stages (1889, 1911, and 1920), is designed as a prelude to the main body of this thesis. The OSA, which was signed by everyone who joined the civil service, at whatever grade, no matter how modest, undergirded the culture of secrecy. It provided secrecy with its legislative teeth and set the parameters by which the press and others could disclose official information. Understanding it, therefore, is essential to the overall narrative.

### 1.1 1850 – 1889

Let us firstly turn to the pre-legal history of official secrecy in the nineteenth century. Circa 1850 Britain was regarded as one of the most 'open' of democratic countries. Statesmen, irrespective of their political coloration, spoke very publicly about the virtues of transparency and candour in government. 'Publicity is the fittest law for securing the public confidence', advocated the English jurist, Jeremy Bentham.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, practices of secrecy were seen as 'instruments of conspiracy', deployed by 'bullies, blackguards and buffoons' in the service of unenlightened despotism.<sup>5</sup> Overt forms of secrecy, believed Victorian liberals, were symptomatic of despotic continental regimes, not to mention being fundamentally opposed to the 1688-9 Bill of Rights, the great constitutional settlement of William III which ingrained freedom of speech, without the potential encumbrance of prosecution, into the polity.

Britain's liberal schema against secrecy manifested itself in several ways. The most concrete expression was the Public Record Office Act, passed in 1838. The state's recognition of its obligation to collect, preserve and make available the records of its own operations represented a necessary adjunct to the Great Reform Bill, enacted six years earlier. Records, hitherto known as 'Muniments of the Kingdom', were reconstituted as 'The People's Evidence'. Until the Act's amendment in 1958 (see Chapter 2), the release of documents to the public was however a 'matter for the

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<sup>4</sup> J. Bentham, 'Of Publicity', in J. Bowring (ed.), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (London, 1843), p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

discretion of departments', and the time-limit 'varied considerably'.<sup>6</sup> Britain's commitment to openness and unmolested communication was also demonstrated by the abolition of press taxation from the 1830s, which paved the way for the proliferation of relatively cheap newspapers and contributed to the 'massification' of political culture. Although, as Keith Robbins argues, much of its distinctiveness is now hard to discern such is the transience of novelty, 'New Journalism' transformed newspapers from mere 'sober organs' of instruction into entertaining and commercial propositions.<sup>7</sup> For the press, engaging in dialogue with a newly homogenised bourgeois readership demanded not only publicity ('For us publicity and truth are the air and light of existence' championed one leading article in 1852), but also 'exceptional news, exceptionally presented'.<sup>8</sup>

While the government's public discourse denounced all forms of secrecy, its private discourse had in fact long recognised the value of concealment. Walter Bagehot, the great essayist of Victorian public administration, observed that Cabinet meetings were not only 'secret in theory' but 'secret in reality'; official minutes were prohibited whilst the House of Commons would rarely sanction the reading of private notes.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, until the Cabinet Secretariat was established in 1916 (Maurice Hankey's 'greatest achievement'),<sup>10</sup> no formal record was made of Cabinet proceedings. With government business transmitted *viva voce*, it is no surprise that Bagehot dryly commented that, 'If you tell a cabman to drive to Downing Street, he most likely will never have heard of it, and will not in the least know where to take you'.<sup>11</sup> Ministers were also restricted in what they could reveal publicly by the Privy Councillor's Oath:

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<sup>6</sup> The National Archives (TNA) CAB 21/5230, 'Extract from a Guide for Departmental Record Officers: Note by the Keeper of Public Records', 29 April 1963.

<sup>7</sup> K. Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (London, 1994), p. 88; M. Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (Gateshead, 2002), p. 89, p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Leaders, *The Times*, 6 February 1852, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (3rd edn., London, 1882), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> J.F. Naylor, 'Hankey, Maurice Pascals Alers, first Baron Hankey (1877-1963)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33683>] (12 September 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Bagehot, *English Constitution*, p. 92.

You will, in all things to be moved, treated, and debated in Council, faithfully and truly declare your Mind and Opinion, according to your Heart and Conscience; and will keep secret all Matters committed and revealed unto you, or that shall be treated of secretly in Council. And if any of the said Treaties or Counsels shall touch any of the Counsellors, you will not reveal it unto him, but will keep the same until such time as, by the Consent of His Majesty, or the Council, Publication shall be made thereof...So help you God.<sup>12</sup>

Established in 1250, and still administered today, the Oath commits fealty to the Crown by stipulating that ministerial advice is the property of the monarch. Ergo, only with the consent of the head of state, can advice be disclosed. Far from convenient legal fiction, Lord Hattersley suggested that to break the Oath might be considered treasonable, while Peter Hennessy famously compared it to the 'Mafia's code of *Omerta* – [where] only the grave can bring release'.<sup>13</sup> Whereas in the nineteenth century councillors tended to embrace the Oath as if it were 'part campaign ribbon, part wound stripe', in more recent times it has been seen as a constitutional vestige, maintained only for pomp and tradition.<sup>14</sup> Dick Crossman, who hated the ceremonial of 'trundling off to the palace' to swear the Oath kneeling before the monarch, saw it as flummery designed only 'to camouflage stale royal authority'.<sup>15</sup> For Tony Benn, battle-scarred campaigner for the Oath's abolition, the whole ritual is nothing short of monarchical tyranny, imposing 'tribal magic and personal loyalty on people whose real duty is to their electors'.<sup>16</sup>

Secrecy was also prevalent in the civil service. Inculcated in all officials was a gentlemanly code of restraint, a discretionary 'je ne sais quoi' or state of mind, which could only be attained from parentage and upbringing. As Sir James Stephen (Colonial Under-Secretary) rhapsodised in 1841: 'There is a Christian virtue to which I have never heard an allusion from the pulpit. I mean the duty of silence. Frivolity of

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<sup>12</sup> TNA CAB 21/2678, 'Transcript of The Oath of the Privy Councillor', 1250.

<sup>13</sup> Lord Hattersley, 'The Republic: Let's Abolish this Absurdity', *Guardian*, 14 December 2000; Hennessy, *Whitehall*, p. 349.

<sup>14</sup> Lord Hattersley, 'The Republic: Let's Abolish this Absurdity', *Guardian*, 14 December 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mrs Anne Crossman, 19 December 2005.

<sup>16</sup> T. Benn, 'Labour's Oaths of Loyalty: Extracts from the Political Dairies of Tony Benn, 1963-72', *Guardian*, 10 April 2001.

discourse, mere talk for talk's sake, is one of the most besetting sins of our generation'.<sup>17</sup> Because no 'true-born' gentleman could tolerate the word 'secrecy', civil servants clothed their trade in distinct etymological garbs, such as 'discretion', 'reticence' and 'reserve'. Status was everything: only men of the best character were placed in positions of trust and over time secrecy became the heart and soul of a gentleman. To disclose information illicitly would almost certainly 'finish' a man. Silence was also achieved through age-old systems of patronage. Because no post had guaranteed security of tenure, its occupant was theoretically at the whim of his patron. Therefore, having been appointed by ministers, without regard to age or qualification, civil servants were expected to keep quiet and toe the line. In return for this arrangement, Ministers provided the professional protection from attacks levelled at government from Parliament, the public and an increasingly inquisitive press. In William James' estimation, a civil servant's willingness to remain silent made him a 'sky-blue soil, far above the vegetables of the earth'.<sup>18</sup>

By the late 1830s, the rapid development of a democratised political culture, coupled with the rise of 'New Journalism', had created problems. Many of the popular presses started adjuring a distinctly party-political role. Recognising that society was far more heterogeneous than bourgeois metanarratives suggested, many journalists proudly proclaimed that they were 'politicians first' and 'journalists second' and appealed to different classes of readership. Others, rather than staking their 'colours to an editorial mast', exhorted public officials to rule properly and this meant 'writing a Tory piece in the afternoon and a liberal piece in the evening'.<sup>19</sup> The putative newspaper of record, *The Times*, confidently fashioned itself as a force that could make and unmake governments. In 1834 Lord Lyndhurst famously described its then editor as 'the most powerful man in the country'.<sup>20</sup> Over time, the disclosure of state secrets, by any means

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> The Modern Records Centre (MRC) MSS 232/SCS/4/2/4, 'The Civil Servant and His Profession: Series of Lectures Delivered to the Society of Civil Servants', March 1920.

<sup>19</sup> Robbins, *Politicians*, p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society: From Caxton to Northcliffe* (London, 1978), p. 225.

possible and without fear of consequence, became the mantra of an ever more mercenary Fleet Street. ‘The press lives by disclosures’, declared *The Times* in 1852: ‘We are bound to lend no convenient shelter to acts of injustice and oppression, but to consign them at once to the judgement of the world’.<sup>21</sup> The London metropolitan press, in particular, began to attend to the ‘rights of the public’ – the forerunner of what we would now consider to be the ‘public interest’. In 1847, citing the ‘rights of the public’ as its justification, *The Times* brushed off the government’s attempts to impose censorship and published Lord Castlereagh’s correspondence at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.<sup>22</sup> The imperative to outdo market competitors dictated that newspapers became increasingly unethical in their pursuit of official information. During the 1850s many small news agencies passed into the hands of one or two powerful and unscrupulous organisations, able, because of their wide interests and large readerships, to pay enormous sums for sensational items. The Victorian press offered to placate the anxiety of incipient whistleblowers with the assurance of anonymity. The pretext most commonly used was the *nom de guerre* or ‘unnamed source’; as *Saturday Review* claimed, the nameless contributor would be the ‘area of calm in the heart of the cyclone’.<sup>23</sup> Whitehall conceded that the press’s growth had not been accompanied by adequate theoretical attention. Could civil servants be trusted to keep their distance? Under what circumstances would the ‘Fourth Estate’ recoil from publishing the facts? The Earl of Derby remained confident. In theory, as a corollary of the privileges and freedoms that they now enjoyed, journalists had entered a contract with the government and were expected to accept certain restrictions and surrender their prerogative powers. ‘The press owes its first duty to the national interests’, Derby argued: ‘If the English press aspires to the influence of statesman, so also it [will] share in the responsibilities of statesman’.<sup>24</sup> This optimism, however, would be misplaced.

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<sup>21</sup> Leaders, *The Times*, 6 February 1852, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Leaders, *The Times*, 6 February 1852, p. 4.

The pace of bureaucratisation created new and unforeseen pressures for the policymaking elite. The accumulation of government business compelled the civil service to 'run to paper'. Written communication was necessary to preserve the impartiality of public servants, while the democratic process demanded that Parliament had the right to inquire into any action taken by the state. In consequence, all sorts of transactions were committed to paper or parchment. The number of registered papers in the Treasury, for example, averaged between 2,500 and 3,000 per annum in the period 1783-93; by 1800 it was 4,812; by 1820, 22,288; and by 1849, 29,914.<sup>25</sup> The influential liberal thinker John Stuart Mill, who worked as an administrator in the East India Company, recalled: 'The whole government of India is carried on in writing. All the orders given, and all the acts of the executive officers, are reported in writing'.<sup>26</sup> Departmental registries were set up to process the increased flow of paperwork. Bureaucrats also advanced scientific methods of filing, indexing and registration, and pioneered administrative appurtenances such as the internal memo and procedural manual. Although historians have since labelled this development 'The Victorian and Edwardian Revolution in Information Management', it was Max Weber who first observed the escalation of written communication: 'Administrative acts, decisions and rules are recorded in writing, even in cases where oral discussion is the rule or is even mandatory'.<sup>27</sup> According to David Vincent, Whitehall's teeming mass of information, which naturally required a corresponding increase in the number of administrators, served to cement what he called the gentlemanly 'union of honour and secrecy'. It was, he continued, a 'creative, modern, response' to the perceived assault of the 'Information Revolution'.<sup>28</sup>

Appeals to secrecy based on gentlemanly codes were gradually threatened by the evolving social composition of the civil service. Laid before Parliament on 23

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<sup>25</sup> N. Chester, *The Administrative System 1780-1870* (Oxford, 1981), p. 282.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> See A. Black and R. Brunt, 'Information Management in MI5 Before the Age of the Computer', *Intelligence and National Security*, 16:2 (Summer 2001), pp. 158-65; M. Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organisations*, translated and edited A.M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York, 1947), p. 332.

November 1853, The Northcote-Trevelyan Report described Whitehall as a sanctuary for the 'unambitious, the indolent and the incapable', and identified 'amateurism, inefficiency and extravagance' as the inescapable consequence of patronage networks.<sup>29</sup> Steeped in liberal utilitarianism, the Report condemned time-honoured nepotism, and called for competitive literary examination, overseen by a Civil Service Commission, 'to test the intelligence as well as the mere attainments' of aspirants. The Report's implementation was initially slow, but gathered pace following the appointment of Robert Lowe as Chancellor in December 1868. Lowe – 'a slave of the intellect'<sup>30</sup> – was utterly convinced that recruitment according to social station vitiated administrative performance. Having placed the Treasury on a Benthamite 'open competition' footing, on 4 June 1870 Lowe passed a new Civil Service Order in Council, which granted the Treasury control over appointments in all departments. The incorporation of meritocratic 'bloods' into the administrative classes has been the focus of several quantitative inquiries. Henry Roseveare's study of the Treasury's bureaucratic elite revealed that, apart from the first three men appointed in the period 1870-1913 (who were simply leftovers of the nominated system), fifty-seven of the remaining fifty-eight were university graduates.<sup>31</sup> Gone were the days when Whitehall was the finishing school for a particular social group. There would now be a symbiotic relationship between appointment and performance.

The Northcote reforms were anathema to the old nobles of Whitehall who naturally had a vested interest in the prevailing system of patronage and jobbery. Integrating second-class bureaucrats, or 'vegetables of the earth', was understood as an attack on the established order, in particular the role of the aristocrat in government. 'The more the civil service is recruited from the lower classes, the less it will be sought after until at last the aristocracy will be altogether disassociated', lamented Lord

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<sup>28</sup> Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> *The Northcote-Trevelyan Report*, Parliamentary Papers, 27 (1854), cited in Lord Fulton, *The Civil Service, Report of the Committee 1966-68* (London, 1968), Cmnd. 3638, Volume 1, Appendix B.

<sup>30</sup> Hennessy, *Whitehall*, p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> H. Roseveare, *The Treasury: The Evolution of a British Institution* (London, 1969), p. 179.



Romilly.<sup>32</sup> The recruitment of upwardly mobile social groups, it was feared, would undermine the shared spirit of gentlemanly discretion, hitherto successful because of the uniform congenital traits of those in positions of power. For the Foreign Office and Home Office, throwbacks to the pre-Northcote regime, honourable secrecy was alien to those not of gentle birth. Sir George Cornwall Lewis, who in 1855 had succeeded his father into the baronetcy and personified hereditary forms of government, emphasised that character was far more valuable than education in the holders of permanent office:

The honourable secrecy which has distinguished the clerks of our superior offices, and their abstinence from communicating information to interested parties, cannot be too highly recommended. But this discreet reserve depends on qualities, which cannot be made the subject of examination by a central board, or be expressed by marks upon a paper of written answers.<sup>33</sup>

Many aristocrats questioned whether the ‘competition wallahs’<sup>34</sup> could resist the blandishments of news-hungry journalists. Indeed, on 20 March 1883, the *Echo* famously boasted that payment could induce civil servants, from any department of state, to donate information – typically, £5 for minor news and £100 for the betrayal of ‘great secrets’.<sup>35</sup>

Aristocratic fears about press intransigence and service ethics were confirmed by a series of high-profile disclosures. On 23 October 1854, during the Siege of Sevastopol, *The Times* published uncensored extracts from several war correspondents’ dispatches. With operational plans exposed, in a move presaging the later strategy of D-Notices, the War Office sent a circular to editors urging them to expunge news ‘calculated to furnish valuable information to the enemy’.<sup>36</sup> Despite ‘very cordial and proper replies’, only three weeks later, on 12 November 1854, the *London Gazette* printed in full Lord Cardigan’s dispatches charting the now legendary Charge of the

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<sup>32</sup> Cited in J. Morley, *The Life of Gladstone* (London, 1908), p. 380.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Hennessy, *Whitehall*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> TNA HO 144/20992, ‘A History of Unauthorised Communications to the Press. Forthcoming Deputation by the Newspapers Proprietors Association’, 13 June 1930.

<sup>36</sup> TNA CAB 134/1139, ‘Press Censorship Manual’, October 1953.

Light Brigade.<sup>37</sup> More seriously, on 11 December 1858, two confidential and politically charged despatches, written by the Lord High Commissioner to the Ionian Islands (Sir John Young), appeared, to the obvious surprise and discomfiture of the Colonial Office, in a leading article in the Liberal-biased *Daily News*. The despatches, clearly drafted *sub rosa*, exposed government duplicity in the administration of the Islands. On the one hand, they revealed the ruling Tory desire to extricate Britain from Santa Maura, where 'pretensions for patronage and expenditure showed no limits'; on the other hand, they stressed the importance of laying claim to Corfu, which was ready to be 'enriched by Anglicisation, British capital and enterprise'.<sup>38</sup> Young initially passed off the significance of the article as 'nothing but empty and foolish talk to catch popularity with the mob'.<sup>39</sup> The free press, he continued, 'has no character of reality or echo in the minds of the people'. Young's mood became less forgiving when both the newspaper editor responsible and William Guernsey, who it was discovered had stolen the despatches from the Colonial Office library as retribution for his unsuccessful application to the department, were acquitted of charges of larceny. Guernsey, described in the calendar as a 'gentleman', was condemned only in moral terms. According to *The Times*, the 'judge could not refrain from expressing his surprise that a man who had filled the position in society of Guernsey should be guilty of such an act'.<sup>40</sup> The unpunished offence provided sobering confirmation that the standards of aspirants to the civil service were irrevocably amorphous and that no statute existed to prosecute any citizen or crown servant for the unauthorised disclosure of official information.

Vexed by the Guernsey debacle, but not yet willing to commit to a full-blown architecture of legalised secrecy, in 1861 the state extended the Larceny Act. Affixed to the Act was a copyright caveat, directing that official information was the property of the Crown, and that the government therefore had a legitimate discretion to its use. Sections 24 and 25 dictated that:

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> TNA CO 883/1/8, Copy of Despatch from J. Young to E.B. Lyton, 14 July 1858; TNA CO 883/1/8, Copy of Despatch from J. Young to H. Du Pré Labouchère, 10 June 1857.

<sup>39</sup> TNA CO 883/1/8, J. Young to E.B. Lyton, 19 August 1858.

<sup>40</sup> Law, 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times*, 16 December 1858, p. 9.

A person who steals or for any fraudulent purposes takes from its place of deposit or from the person having the lawful custody thereof of any original document relating to any office or employment under Her Majesty's Government...is guilty of felony.<sup>41</sup>

Far from draconian, the Act operated mostly in civil, rather than criminal court, whilst successful prosecutions invariably took the form of financial compensation; if a custodial sentence was dispensed, those convicted were 'liable to penal servitude for a term *not* exceeding five years'.<sup>42</sup> Co-opting public servants into a gentlemanly culture of discretion was the preferred *modus operandi* for regulating the dissemination of information. Between 1873 and 1884, departments issued stiffly worded circulars which, as well as underlining that transgressors risked dismissal from office (a particularly potent threat for those with a pension scheme), likened improper communication to a form of purgatory. Imbued with moral rather than legal authority, Sir Ralph Lingen's communiqué of 3 June 1873 encapsulates the attempt to bind lesser mortals to a doctrine of honourable secrecy: 'The unauthorised use of official information is the worst fault a civil servant can commit. It is on the same footing as cowardice by a soldier. It is unprofessional'.<sup>43</sup> Having laboured their way through a public school education, which was valued for its ethical training as much as its academic tuition, topmost officials were trusted to play by the tacit conventions. The Northcote-Trevelyan reforms, which had placed a premium on top quality schooling for the senior civil service (preferably firsts in 'Mods and 'Greats'), had consolidated Oxford and Cambridge as the prime repositories – or 'articulators' – of honourable secrecy. The problem, therefore, was the rank and file.

The aristocracy was proved painfully right in all its forebodings. On 31 May 1878, the draft of a secret treaty between Britain and Russia ('the *Projet de Memorandum*'), held before the Congress of Berlin, was leaked to the *Globe and Traveller* by an embittered writer in the Foreign Office, Charles Marvin, just two-and-

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<sup>41</sup> TNA WO 32/6347, 1861 Larceny Act, 24 & 25 Vict. C.96. s.s 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 120.

a-half hours after it had been signed. Condemning publication as ‘unauthorised and surreptitious’, the Cabinet inquiry provided ‘strong evidence’ that Marvin had been paid by the newspaper.<sup>44</sup> Although there was little doubt that he had communicated the material, this in itself was not an offence and, like Guernsey before him, Marvin was absolved. At the trial, which had been convened on the charge of Larceny, the Counsel grimly concluded: ‘There was no law which made the defendant liable to punishment, even if such an indiscretion has really been committed in the eagerness to satisfy the public craving for information’.<sup>45</sup> The episode, which caused major political embarrassment for Gladstone since the treaty had been negotiated without public knowledge, confirmed the nascent radicalisation of the press. Hitherto officials had confidently regarded the *Globe* as a respectable vendor for informed opinion. The unpunished crime also revived the question of how to control socially inferior civil servants. A man of modest pedigree – symbolising ‘every degree of broken fortunes’<sup>46</sup> – Marvin was the son of a draughtsman and his employment history included an inglorious stint as a warehouse worker in Watling Street, London. Lord Tenterden, then Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, castigated his actions as typical of the ‘cheap and untrustworthy class of people’.<sup>47</sup> Penumbral classes operating at menial levels presented a big problem, since small salaries and lack of career prospects made the deterrent value of dismissal negligible. As Marvin himself wrote from the safety of his memoir, ‘I was so disgusted with the Foreign Office for sucking the best years of my life for the miserable sum of £90 that I resolved to place upon the market every piece of information that chance threw my way’.<sup>48</sup>

By the late 1880s, incidents of unauthorised disclosure by temporary clerks and white-collar workers had increased. In 1887, a dockyard draughtsman, Terry Young,

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<sup>44</sup> TNA CAB 41/11/14, ‘Case: Globe Statement’, S. Hulhart, 15 June 1878.

<sup>45</sup> News, ‘Charge of Stealing Documents’, *The Times*, 28 June 1878, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> C. Marvin, *Our Public Offices* (2nd edn., London, 1880), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup> Marvin, *Public Offices*, p. 248.

sold confidential warship designs to an unidentified foreign power.<sup>49</sup> Although publicly dismissed, Young could not be prosecuted. At a time when Britain feared that her maritime supremacy, taken for granted since Trafalgar, was again being seriously challenged by France, failure to do so left the Admiralty calling for legal coercion. *De facto* strategies had failed: what else could realistically be done to stem the haemorrhaging of information? On 5 April 1887, Salisbury's government agreed to draft, *in camera*, the 'Breach of Official Trust Bill'. The Bill, conflating in its title both the imprimatur of the law and ethical codes of practice, was submitted on 29 November:

If any person, whether a public servant or not, gives information to the King's enemies he is guilty of treason...Disclosure of a state document might also, no doubt, be laid as an overt act in an indictment for treason felony. This Act applies to a state of peace, and not merely to a state of war.<sup>50</sup>

While primarily designed to counter the disloyalty of the civil service, and silence enemies within the state, the Bill was portrayed to Parliament as an indispensable and urgent buffer to external espionage threats. The application of the word 'Secrets' in the Act's title was a visible demonstration of this. 'It provides', announced the Lord Chancellor in June 1889, 'for the punishment of those persons who give information to the enemies of the country, or who act as spies'.<sup>51</sup> The decision to dramatise overseas intelligence gathering was quite deliberate in order to offset protracted and sticky questions about civil liberties. The tactic worked: ordinarily abrasive Parliamentarians put aside their tribal loyalties and supported the legislation *in toto*. 'I entirely approve of the general objects of the Bill', advocated the erstwhile Liberal Lord Chancellor Lord Herschell.<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that the espionage threat was a paper-tiger. Since the Franco-Prussian War, both France and Germany had established intelligence

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<sup>49</sup> Chatham Correspondent, 'Dismissal of Dockyard Draughtsman for Breach of Trust', *The Times*, 9 March 1887, p. 7; News, 'Parliamentary Notices', *The Times*, 10 March 1887, p. 7; News, 'Parliamentary Intelligence', *The Times*, 6 April 1887, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> TNA WO 32/6347, 'Memorandum as to Law: Breach of Official Trust', 29 November 1887.

<sup>51</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 338, 20 June 1889, cols 52-3.

<sup>52</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 338, 11 July 1889, cols 85-6.

departments, and were actively looking to exploit security weaknesses and map potential theatres of conflict. For Britain, currently in 'splendid isolation', the need to guard military and naval secrets was paramount.

The Act, which was given Royal Assent on 26 August 1889, was divided into two parts. Section 1, widely known as 'the spying clause', dealt with a broad purview of espionage crimes; Section 2 with breaches of official trust. Section 2 laid down that it was an offence for any crown servant, 'by means of his holding or having held an office under Her Majesty the Queen', to communicate official information to a person to whom it 'ought not, in the interest of the state, *or otherwise in the public interest*, to be communicated at that time'.<sup>53</sup> Implicit was 'an obligation of secrecy'; no crown servant – regardless of his position or the importance of his duties – was permitted to disclose official information without authorisation. Government contractors were equally liable. In contrast to the *droit administratif* presiding in France, which directed that civil servants could not be indicted in ordinary tribunals, under the OSA, as Lord Haldane later explained, an official was 'no better off than anybody else'.<sup>54</sup> He could be hauled before any court and justice was meted out as if he were a private citizen.

But no sooner had the ink dried on the Act than voices began declaring it nugatory. Because a 'public interest defence' was incorporated into the law, the burden of proof fell upon the prosecution, thus making convictions potentially hard to secure. The state would have to show incontestably that the leaked information was in fact damaging to 'national security'. Widely criticised for being prolix in style, and maddeningly circular in argument, the Act failed to lay down the parameters of what constituted 'official information'. 'The terms are so wide as to include acts which may be of trivial importance', complained the Parliamentary Counsel: 'And it is inexpedient that such acts should in every case be felonies punishable with penal servitude for life'.<sup>55</sup> The statute only targeted spies and crown servants; the press, which had long offered

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<sup>53</sup> TNA WO 32/6347, 'Chapter 52 of the Official Secrets Act, 1889', 26 August 1889.

<sup>54</sup> MRC MSS 232/SCS/4/2/4, 'The Civil Servant and His Profession: Series of Lectures Delivered to the Society of Civil Servants', March 1920.

<sup>55</sup> TNA WO 32/6347, Parliamentary Counsel to War Office, 8 March 1895.

inducements for disclosure, was not liable to prosecution. George Campbell MP called the Act 'a farce' and challenged legislators to 'go further and punish not only those who steal information, but also the receivers of the stolen goods – the newspapers'.<sup>56</sup> Others, including the later Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, warned against re-opening the delicate questions raised by the Act: 'We [must] let the sleeping dog lie'.<sup>57</sup> Calls for its repeal, however, could not be suppressed; the Act was without 'bark and bite' and officials demanded action.

## 1.2 1890 – 1920

Enforcing new legislation involved long and bitter disputes with a militant press lobby. Initially, however, encouraged by the government's decision to desist from censorship during the Second Boer War, the press co-operated. At the 1904 Committee of Imperial Defence, it was decided that a draft Bill, making it a criminal offence for the press to disclose secrets during wartime, be prepared in readiness for Parliamentary submission should an emergency occur.<sup>58</sup> Editors of the leading London and provincial newspapers were approached and the great bulk of the 200 replies endorsed the proposal. By June 1906, the idea of new legislation had been given general approval by a conference of press dignitaries, and a subcommittee of the Newspaper Society was set up 'to consider any Bill that may be drafted'.<sup>59</sup> On 6 February 1908, with the Bill finally readied, the Newspaper Proprietors' Association condemned 'in strong terms' the statute and withdrew from negotiations with the Government. Frank Glover, President of the Newspaper Society, objected to the fact that the Bill had packaged journalists, somewhat accusatorily, in the same way as spies:

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<sup>56</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 338, 20 June 1889, cols 52-3.

<sup>57</sup> TNA WO 32/13727, 'Memorandum: The Official Secrets Bill', 13 November 1895.

<sup>58</sup> TNA ADM 116/4082, 'The Publication of Information Affecting the Fighting Services of the Crown: An Historical Review', May 1923.

<sup>59</sup> TNA ADM 116/4082, W. Churchill to G. Greene, 1 January 1912.

We consider that no good cause has been shown for suspecting the patriotism and discretion of those who conduct the newspapers. There is no evidence that information concerning naval and military matters during time of war has been improperly published in the past.<sup>60</sup>

Draftsmen, moreover, had surreptitiously moved the goalposts: clauses had been inserted to capture peacetime disclosures, while the notion of 'official information' was extended to include all material produced by government offices. The Lord Chancellor, in an eleventh-hour bid to salvage the Bill, reminded pressmen that penal sanctions only applied to those who broke the rules: 'It should be clear that anyone in the press conducting his duties honourably should be quite safe'.<sup>61</sup> The appeal failed: the Institute of Journalists derided the Bill as a 'too wide and indefinite menace to the freedom of the press', while *The Times* castigated the attempt to 'graft upon British law some of the worst features of Continental bureaucracy'.<sup>62</sup> Ministers, however, still considered the Act desirable; and, rather than abandon their proposals altogether, were prepared to wait for a more propitious moment to reintroduce them.

Fears of foreign espionage and the possibility of confrontation with Germany steadily paralysed press opposition. Spy scares and war jitters found a popular voice in a morass of best-selling intrigue narratives. Perhaps the most well known cultural fantasy to translate concerns about invasion is *The Riddle of the Sands*, by Erskine Childers, published in 1903.<sup>63</sup> The *Riddle*, which openly pronounced itself as propaganda camouflaged as fiction, concerned two English yachtsmen stumbling upon a secret German plot to launch a naval attack on Great Britain. According to Arthur Davies, one of the book's plucky adventurers, German spies had already reconnoitred the disposition and might of the Royal Navy. The *Riddle* was so convincing in its assessment of coastline security that the Naval Intelligence Department was moved to investigate the feasibility of a sea-borne assault. Among the many other examples of invasion literature published during the late Edwardian period was *Spies of the Kaiser*

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<sup>60</sup> F. Glover, 'To the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 9 May 1908, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 178, 11 May 1908, col. 674.

<sup>62</sup> News, 'The Official Secrets Bill', *The Times*, 11 May 1908, p. 6; News, 'The Newspaper Society', *The Times*, 14 May 1908, p. 12; *The Times*, 7 May 1908, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> E. Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands* (London, 1903).



(1909) by William le Queux.<sup>64</sup> Queux, who was a close associate of newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe, was absolutely convinced that every alien servitor with square-set shoulders and a guttural accent was a German emissary in disguise. Despite some reservations ('The public will be wise if they leave the waters, clerks and alien publicans to become sinister figures in the stories of sensational novelists'),<sup>65</sup> Fleet Street shared the literary world's concern about fifth columnists, and dedicated countless column inches to the inadequacy of Britain's defences. In 1906, the *Daily Mail* famously commissioned le Queux to write, 'The Invasion of 1910', which depicted German spies terrorising every major town in England. By 1909, inspired by hearsay and press-clippings, the Secretary of State for War, R.B. Haldane, had called a Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence to consider the nature and extent of foreign espionage.<sup>66</sup> The Sub-Committee's Report, which detailed the particulars of some thirty alleged cases of espionage (including twenty-four in the first three months of 1909 alone), was 'left in no doubt' that an extensive phalanx of clandestine warriors presently operated in Britain. Recognising that the country had no regular system for 'keeping in touch' with that threat, the Sub-Committee recommended that a Secret Service Bureau be established (ancestor of today's MI5 and MI6), under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. With espionage still largely thought of as 'ungentlemanly', members of this body would refer to themselves as 'players', not spies.

Fears of the invading Hun brought the matter of amending the OSA into fresh prominence. The Sub-Committee insisted that individuals who knowingly published secret information should be prosecuted. Recognising that the current Act was (as Sir Herbert Stephen described it) 'verbose, clumsy, and intricate', departments had in fact long since desisted from using it.<sup>67</sup> In May 1908, a former Crown servant, who had sold fortification plans of Malta and Gibraltar, received less than a year's imprisonment because the government had no confidence to prosecute upon an OSA charge. The Sub-

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<sup>64</sup> W. le Queux, *The Spies of the Kaiser* (London, 1909).

<sup>65</sup> Editorials, 'The Spy Mania', *The Times*, 21 August 1908, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> TNA CAB 16/8, 'Report and Proceedings of the Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence', 24 July 1909, Appendix 1.

<sup>67</sup> Editorials, 'The Official Secrets Bill', *The Times*, 20 May 1908, p. 11.

Committee also had lingering anxieties about the press. Paradoxically, although sympathetic to the spy menace, many journalists were still trying to unearth sensitive material. According to Spencer Ewart, Director of Military Operations, the majority of journalists had 'forgotten entirely their duty to their nation'; only *The Times* – 'uninfluenced by mere journalistic rivalry' – had shown any willingness not to publish sensitive information.<sup>68</sup> The First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, had taken considerable umbrage at the recent case of battleship construction secrets appearing in the *Daily Mail*. The correspondent in question had entered a military installation and taken a copy of secret cyphers on the tail of his shirt.<sup>69</sup> The Sub-Committee made it clear that spies probably provided less practical information to a potential enemy than an uncensored press. All intelligence services and statesmen were hermeneutically inclined, searching for information in books, letters or newspapers. Bismarck, for example, had reportedly boasted to Prince Louis of Battenberg that he had acquired all the information he needed in the Franco-Prussian War from French local newspapers.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the German Foreign Office was known to be using the *Daily Telegraph* for corroborating military detail, from as far back as 1870. 'The final result of an unchecked domestic press', asserted Ewart, '[is] that a German General landing a force in East Anglia would know more about the country than any British General, and more about its town than its own British mayor'.<sup>71</sup> Knowing that new legislation would still attract a 'good deal of anxious attention from the press', Ewart implored ministers not to unveil the Act until a suitably expedient moment, when national security could be judiciously invoked.<sup>72</sup> The search for a smokescreen had begun.

The opportunity to introduce the new Act without Parliamentary clamour or press insubordination arrived with the Agadir crisis of 1911. Diplomatic brinkmanship had reached breaking point, with Lloyd George, in his famous Mansion House speech,

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<sup>68</sup> TNA KV 1/4, 'Intelligence Methods', S. Ewart, 1909.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 16/8, 'Report and Proceedings of the Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence', 24 July 1909.

<sup>70</sup> TNA KV 1/4, 'Intelligence Methods', S. Ewart, 1909.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

publicly warning Germany about its sabre-rattling policies. The Home Secretary, in laying the Bill before Parliament, declared: 'The secrecy which it has been hitherto desirable in the public interest to observe...cannot any longer be maintained owing to the evidence which it is necessary to produce in cases against spies that are now pending'.<sup>73</sup> Ministers with a visceral hatred of the statute book had long since left the political arena: 'Every other country has legislation of this kind', stated John Seely, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.<sup>74</sup> With war drawing visibly nearer, and ministers insisting that further dilatoriness would only be harmful to the public interest, Parliament entrusted the Liberal Government with unprecedented latitude. Introduced to the House in May as crisis legislation targeting spies, the new Bill was passed with virtually no scrutiny in half an hour, on 18 August 1911; only ten Labour MPs voted against it whilst Parliamentarians neglected to debate the salient points. 'Two men got up to speak', recollected Seely, 'but both were forcibly pulled down by their neighbours after they had uttered a few sentences'.<sup>75</sup> Given the speed of events, the new Act was passed over in near complete silence, even within the ship of state itself. Some departments were neither consulted nor notified of its provisions. In September 1911, Sir John Anderson, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, complained, 'We have no correspondence with regard to the Act'.<sup>76</sup> The press lobbyists, meanwhile, were conspicuous by their absence; their attention was elsewhere, conditioned by the Agidir Crisis and its ramifications, and mounting public demands for legislation to allay the espionage threat.

Despite lip-service paid to the idea that the Act offered little that was potentially damaging to the public interest (Haldane had promised 'not to enact any large body of new restrictions but to make more effective the law as it was intended to be made by

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 16/8, 'Report and Proceedings of the Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence', 24 July 1909.

<sup>73</sup> News, 'Spy Organisation in England', *The Times*, 9 October 1914, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 29, 18 August 1911, col. 2252.

<sup>75</sup> Cited in D. Wilson, 'Information is Power: The Causes of Secrecy', in D. Wilson (ed.), *The Secrets File: The Case for Freedom of Information in Britain Today* (London, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> TNA WO 32/13732, J. Anderson to R.H. Brade, 12 September 1911.

the 1889 Act'),<sup>77</sup> the parliamentary legislator had clearly built a Trojan horse. Notwithstanding a more draconian Section 1, again prohibiting what are compendiously referred to as espionage offences, an all-encompassing Section 2 was extended to include the receipt, as well as the communication, of official information, a provision that directly impinged upon the freedom of the press. It was now an offence for newspapers to incite civil servants to make unauthorised disclosures. Section 2 (2) dictated:

If any person receives any...information, knowing, or having reasonable ground to believe, at the time when he receives it, that the...information is communicated to him in contravention of the Act, he shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, unless he proves that the communication...was contrary to his desire.<sup>78</sup>

The new Act, in going against the grain of most criminal law, stipulated that the defendant was guilty until proven innocent ('unless he proves that communication was contrary to his desire') and thus stripped away his right to remain silent. By removing a presumption of innocence, and thus placing the onus of proof solely on the defendant, it was not necessary for the prosecution to prove that the accused's actions were prejudicial; the defendant was compelled to show that he was acting innocently. The protection typically afforded to a defendant by the requirement of *mens rea*, which dictates that the act does not make a person guilty unless the mind is also guilty, did not easily accompany the 1911 legislation. While clearly enforceable for Section 2 (2) and the mere receipt of information ('knowingly, or having reasonable ground to believe, at the time when he receives it'), *mens rea* was not an obvious constituent of Section 2 (1), which created the offence of unauthorised disclosure. Analogous to 'strict liability' – a legal doctrine that makes a person responsible for a crime regardless of culpability or fault – under Section 2 (1) the plaintiff only needed to prove that the offence happened and that the defendant was responsible. Good faith was not a valid defence. Undefined verbiage ('official secret', 'duty' or 'interest of the state') also determined that, according

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<sup>77</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 28, 25 July 1911, col. 642.

<sup>78</sup> TNA CAB 21/4705, 'Cabinet Committee on the Official Secrets Act', Attorney General to Law Officer's Department, November 1938.

to one calculation, over 2,000 differently worded charges could be brought under Section 2.<sup>79</sup>

Section 2 indiscriminately ruled that *all* information generated by the state, and which a crown servant learned during the course of his employment, was 'official', regardless of its nature or importance. It provided, therefore, protection against leakages of any kind of information, and not just those connected with defence or national security. The Franks Committee, which reported in 1972 (see Chapter 2), underlined the broad compass of the legislation: 'The leading characteristic is its catch-all quality. It makes no distinctions of kind, and no distinctions of degree. It catches all official documents and information. A blanket is thrown over everything; nothing escapes'.<sup>80</sup> In theory at least, civil servants were liable to prosecution should they divulge without authorisation even innocuous information, such as how many paper clips or toilet rolls were ordered by a government department. For journalists, until the Act's repeal in 1989, the ever-present threat of being hauled over the coals made Section 2 an effective and feared instrument of censorship. Take, for example, the following episode. In 1950, having discovered through an informant that errors had been made in the construction of nuclear reactors at Windscale in Cumberland, Chapman Pincher informed Sir Archibald Rowlands, then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Supply, that he was keen to expose the blunder. Rowlands then dangled the threat of criminal proceedings: 'If you print this I can assure you we shall prosecute you under the Official Secrets Act'.<sup>81</sup> Pincher, in fear of breaching Section 2, decided not to run the story. A year later, with the Windscale project back on track, Rowlands confessed to Pincher: 'I was amazed you did not print it at the time because Her Majesty's Government could not have prosecuted you anyway'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>81</sup> TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

It should be emphasised that Section 2, in both its 1889 and 1911 manifestations, was only concerned with the *unauthorised* disclosure of official information. Disclosures made by crown servants authorised to do so did not contravene the Act. The power of ministers and senior civil servants to communicate information beyond the village of Whitehall and effectively bring it outside the scope of the Act rested on what later became known as 'implied authorisation'. In the words of the Franks Report, 'the doctrine to which we have been listening is that every official may be authorised, either by the consent of his superior or by his duty in carrying out the job which he is doing, to communicate to the outside world'.<sup>83</sup>

The Act went through its final major revision (before 1989) in 1920. Amendments empowered a court to conduct trials *in camera*; incorporated new espionage offences (illicit use of uniforms, forgery, falsifying documents, impersonation, communicating with foreign agents *et al.*); and consolidated offences related to the unauthorised receipt of information.<sup>84</sup> This included the condition that any person retaining an official document should be guilty of misdemeanour punishable by up to two years imprisonment. Once again the government pushed the Act through parliament on the pretext of protecting national security. 'We are dealing with spying and attempts at spying', emphasised the Attorney General, Sir Gordon Hewart.<sup>85</sup> On this occasion, however, there was more parliamentary interest in the proposals. In the House of Lords, one speaker accused ministers of trying to preclude debate and introduce the Bill, 'sub silentio'.<sup>86</sup> Unlike 1911, the Act's passing generated greater discussion in Fleet Street, with journalists questioning whether the safety of the state was really at stake. The government, thundered the *Daily News*, had whipped up a culture of fear in order to slip the change through.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the *Daily Herald* wrote, 'An illusion [has been] created that the State is in danger so that statesmen may have a

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<sup>83</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 4, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Robertson, *Public Secrets*, p. 70.

<sup>85</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 135, 2 December 1920, col. 1566.

<sup>86</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 135, 2 December 1920, col. 1541.

<sup>87</sup> News, 'DORA's Daughter', *Daily News*, 30 June 1920.

free hand to attack freedom'.<sup>88</sup> The Act's amendment also caused friction within Whitehall. Not unlike 1911, the Colonial Office had been kept out of the loop. The Act, protested Lord Milner (Secretary of State for the Colonies), had been drafted 'with an eye' to UK conditions and it was unacceptable that the War Office should be demanding its application throughout the Empire.<sup>89</sup> After a fair bit of vacillation, it was eventually decided that the Dominions should be exempt from the Act, albeit on a strict proviso that they 'enforce something of their own in every respect as good'.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusions

This chapter has examined the circumstances in which the OSA came to be. Before 1889, legalised secrecy was judged to be offensive to British notions of good government, and subversive of the public interest in a modern democratic age. Although secrecy existed, it could not be found on tablets of stone and was embedded in administrative structures, regulations and *mentalités*. By the late nineteenth century, however, Whitehall had sought refuge in the panacea of the law. The growth of state bureaucracy, coupled with the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms, brought an influx of employees who did not share the social pedigree, privileges and gentlemanly codes that had set apart their institutional ancestors. The end to endemic patronage slowly eroded the honourable traditions of secrecy. Beyond the reach of ethical restraint and discipline, blue-collar workers and temporary clerks could not be trusted to maintain a judicious silence about their work, while the emergence of an inquisitive popular press, emancipated from government control and subsidy, provided an outlet for damaging leaks. In 1889, with too much information reaching the marketplace via unauthorised disclosures, Britain passed its inaugural OSA, and thereby criminalised breaches of official trust. To engineer its smooth passage through Parliament, HMG made great play of the espionage threat, a tactic that was repeated in 1911. In circumstances of

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<sup>88</sup> News, 'Official Secrets', *Daily Herald*, 29 November 1920.

<sup>89</sup> TNA HO 144/20992, Loose Minute, Lord Milner, 9 December 1920. The self-governing Dominions included: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa and Newfoundland.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

considerable disquiet, insecurity and excitement, the public's readiness to defer to the decisions and policies of government soared to an all-time high. No patriot could dispute the need to protect the state – and its secrets – against foreign enemies. The 1911 Act, in particular, was accompanied by a complete diminution of press defiance and scarcely a ripple of debate in Parliament. Spy mania, the Agidir crisis and the threat of war in Europe had congealed to shape and texture a remarkable deference to the state. What no one noticed, however, was the fact that the real purpose of the Act was not to deter espionage, but to eliminate leaks by a lower class of worker in Whitehall. Further major legislation to reform the OSA was not passed until 1989. Section 2 of the 1911 Act, therefore, was in operation throughout my chosen period. Section 2, the footprints of which will be seen throughout this thesis, must be viewed as a symptom of the wider culture of secrecy and not its root cause.



## CHAPTER TWO | A SILENT SERVICE: THE CULTURE OF CIVIL SERVICE SECRECY

'My dear boy, it is a contradiction in terms: you can be open or you can have government'.  
Sir Arnold Robinson, Fictional Cabinet Secretary in *Yes, Minister*.

Secrecy is a way of life in the British Civil Service. As an organisation, it can be compared to a secret society, replete with its own peculiar tastes and rituals. Members, as well being unified by objectives and purpose, possess knowledge known only to their fraternal and exclusive initiates. With access to secrets, most importantly, comes a responsibility to keep them. The image of a 'silent service', saturated with the values and incantations of secrecy, has resonated in both academic writing and popular culture. In Whitehall, declared Peter Hennessy, 'the rule is that the fewer people know, the better, including insiders'.<sup>1</sup> Michael Herman is characteristically astute when he says that, 'it is very hard to get civil servants talking about their work'.<sup>2</sup> Media discourses have done much to cultivate and popularise a Trappist stereotype. In the BBC television series *Yes, Minister*, Sir Humphrey Appleby is the avatar of the secret state, possessing a muted attitude towards the public and concealing key facts in his submissions to Ministers. According to T.A. Critchley's *The Civil Service Today* (1951), 'civil servants are all too often regarded as a particularly odious breed of State spies with sealed lips and the proud motto, "Stealth, Secrecy, and Snooping"'.<sup>3</sup>

Without a long-standing Code of Practice, setting out the duties and responsibilities of civil servants (not introduced until 1996), civil service secrecy has proved incredibly difficult to codify or articulate. The nineteenth century constitutional theorist, Sir Robert Lowe, could neither identify its properties nor provide a pure specimen, discerning – somewhat unsatisfactorily – 'a sort of freemasonry among men which it is not very easy to

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<sup>1</sup> P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr Michael Herman, civil servant, 21 August 2007.

<sup>3</sup> T.A. Critchley, *The Civil Service Today* (London, 1951), p. 13.

describe, but which everybody feels'.<sup>4</sup> As discussed in the introduction, while delineating some useful interpretive contours across different tracts of time and space, Max Weber also failed to distinguish either cause or praxis. Others have attempted to solve this taxonomical dilemma with varying success. Some have attributed secrecy to an inbred love of country, engendered from wartime service and consolidated during the Cold War, amidst renewed fears of being 'blitzkreiged' out of existence by a totalitarian foe. According to Chapman Pincher, in an interpretation now redolent of Foucault's 'Will to Knowledge', civil servants are more drawn to the perpetual spirals of power and pleasure which secrecy inevitably confers:

The joy of being at the top is being in the charmed circle of the few 'in the know'. Civil servants say that this is what they miss most when they retire.<sup>5</sup>

Bewildering to outsiders, the array of initials, acronyms and secret codenames in which civil servants clothe their work reinforces the extent to which they are exclusively 'in the know', and thus inflates their appetite for self-importance. The so-called 'peacock syndrome' is often most prevalent among junior staff, who like to push out their chest, and erect their proverbial plumage by boasting to their neighbours about knowing state secrets. In a recent interview, for example, a retired minor technical officer from Portland Dockyard gasconaded to me: 'I know things that would bring down governments'.<sup>6</sup> Not freestanding, civil service secrecy has also been treated as a practical response to public opinion and a reflexively manipulative media. 'The unspoken heart of the argument for closed government', claimed Peter Kellner and Lord Crowther-Hunt in 1980, 'is that private debate among civil servants and ministers produces more rational policies. Wise

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<sup>4</sup> J. Winter, *Robert Lowe* (Toronto, 1976), p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> M. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I* (London, 1981); Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007. See also D. Wilson, 'Information is Power: The Causes of Secrecy', in D. Wilson (ed.), *The Secrets File: The Case for Freedom of Information in Britain Today* (London, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Private Information.

men, cogitating quietly on the nation's problems, will produce the right answers, if they are shielded from the hubbub of the political marketplace'.<sup>7</sup> This viewpoint has seasoned durability. 'Secrecy has – and always will – reflect the reality of the environment in which information is distributed', one senior civil servant told me in 2007: 'knowing that the media distort information, knowing that its usage will be questioned, precludes greater openness'.<sup>8</sup> The propensity of the civil service to inoculate itself and its political masters against a fickle 'Fourth Estate' is persistently lampooned in *Yes, Minister*. In one episode, Sir Humphrey explains that 'Ministers should never know more than they need to know' – because, 'like secret agents, they could be captured and tortured...by the BBC'.

What follows does not seek to rework warmed-over versions of the 'Stealth, Secrecy, and Snooping' arguments against the civil service that have existed since the 1950s. Taken as an essay in sociological analysis, it attempts rather to understand the 'taxonomy' and/or 'foundations' of civil service secrecy in the period 1945-75. The overarching question is quite simple and does not gain by elaboration: why were civil servants secretive? This chapter has sought critical engagement with the experiences and views of several MOD senior and middle-ranking civil servants – both serving and retired. Some have preferred not to be named and will be cited in the footnotes as 'private information'. One interviewee – when asked 'Why are bureaucrats so secretive?' – compared the process to riding a bike: 'One cannot learn to ride a bike by reading a manual. The necessary skills are *learnt* by personal experience and practice'.<sup>9</sup> The idea of 'learning' secrecy, without recourse to a rationally conceived blueprint or bible, has pedigree. It is the contention of this chapter that civil service secrecy is linked, but also 'learned', through a host of constitutional conventions, private codes, security routines and overlapping legislation. Civil servants are cultural beings: their beliefs and actions are

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<sup>7</sup> P. Kellner and Lord Crowther-Hunt, *The Civil Servants: An Inquiry into Britain's Ruling Class* (London, 1980), p. 275.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr Nigel Jarvis, civil servant, 21 March 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Ken Furber, civil servant, 1 February 2008.

reflective of, and reflected in, the practices of their collective environment. Although scattered, it is true, across a large range of organisations and locations, the civil service is unified by a common culture – or ‘habitus’.<sup>10</sup> A habitus is difficult to put into words; it includes the totality of habits, skills, and other non-discursive knowledges that might be said to ‘go without saying’ for a specific group. That is to say, knowledge of how to act that is produced through experience, observation and emulation, as much as discussion and debate. As David Marsh, David Richards and Martin Smith have hinted at in their recent study *Changing Patterns of Governance*, it is a source of discipline which does not have to be imposed from above because fellow workers may say, ‘this is not the way things are done around here’.<sup>11</sup> A social construction, created and sustained through the actions of every civil servant, the habitus of Whitehall engenders a commitment to secrecy. It informs people of when to speak and when to remain silent. At the level of policy-making (see below) it reinforces the conservative belief that the ‘gentleman in Whitehall knows best’ – and the ‘gentleman who dares to question Whitehall is no gentleman’.<sup>12</sup>

I have been perhaps a little disingenuous thus far in treating the civil service as a monolithic entity. There are in fact two civil services and the lines of demarcation are complicated and mutable. Firstly, as H.E. Dale reminds us, there is the ‘Higher Civil Service’; beginning at the rank of Assistant Secretary, or Grade 5 in today’s ‘open structure’, the higher civil service denotes the small proportion of top officials who formulate policy and advise ministers.<sup>13</sup> The administrative elite occupies what Hennessy describes as ‘the ringside seats in the stadium of British Government’.<sup>14</sup> Although the social arithmetic of Whitehall is still surprisingly hard to gauge, by birth, education and breeding, the upper echelons have a relatively unchanging sociomorphology. In 1945 78.6 per cent of all

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<sup>10</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> D. Marsh, D. Richards and M.J. Smith, *Changing Patterns of Governance in the United Kingdom* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Jay cited in TNA T 222/678, J.H. Woods to E. Bridges, 29 July 1954.

<sup>13</sup> H.E. Dale, *The Higher Civil Service* (Oxford, 1941), p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> P. Hennessy, *Cabinet* (Oxford, 1986), p. 191.

Permanent Secretaries were educated at Oxbridge; in 1960 73.1 per cent; and in 1970 88.2 per cent.<sup>15</sup> Three in every five, serving in the period 1900-1984, glided to the top via a 'Clarendon' public school.<sup>16</sup> As several commentators have argued, because inhabitants come from the same cloistered social and educational backgrounds, they tend to see the world through spectacles much bounded by their class, tribal and patriotic loyalties.<sup>17</sup> For example, in one of many cases of 'cricket' being sublimated into administration, an unsuccessful candidate for promotion is often regarded as 'not Test standard, but a good county player'.<sup>18</sup> In the popular imagination, a higher civil servant is synonymous with the caricature of a middle-aged adult in a pin-striped suit, carrying a furled umbrella and a freshly ironed copy of *The Times*. (Deconstructing the 'sartorial theatre' of Whitehall still awaits its historian.) Secondly, there is the larger, more socially heterogeneous labour force that encompasses the rank-and-file. While mandarins 'help to make government policy', the lower grades 'help to carry government policy out' and seldom have access to ministers.<sup>19</sup> The social engine that drives the rank-and-file is also very different: a nightwatchman in a defence establishment is unlikely to be a product of public boarding or Oxbridge.

The higher civil service is, by the nature of its values, beliefs and role, more secretive than the rank-and-file. One would generally expect this. For example, officials engaged on market-sensitive or nuclear firing-chain work have to be extremely secretive. Dale, a senior civil servant during the inter-war period, suggested that when an official becomes an Assistant Secretary 'he begins to breath a rather different air'.<sup>20</sup> Through the doctrine of 'implied authorisation', the 'top brass', unlike the lower reaches, exercise their

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<sup>15</sup> K. Theakston, *The Civil Service Since 1945* (Oxford, 1995), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> K. Theakston and G.K. Fry, 'Britain's Administrative Elite: Permanent Secretaries 1900-1986', *Public Administration* 67:2 (Summer 1989), pp. 129-47, esp. p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> H. Hecllo and A. Wildavsky, *The Private Government of Public Money* (London, 1981); G. Drewry and T. Butcher, *The Civil Service Today* (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Kellner and Crowther-Hunt, *Civil Servants*, p. 272.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>20</sup> Dale, *Higher Civil Service*, p. 17.

own judgement in determining what official information they may lawfully communicate to the outside world. After years spent pursuing a modern career structure – ‘learning to ride the bike’ so to speak – they are entrusted to self-authorise under the OSA. As Sir James Dunnett, Permanent Secretary to the MOD, explained to the Franks Committee in late 1971, the doctrine is determined by seniority: ‘If you cannot rely upon them to have a reasonable measure of discretion...I think there is something lacking in them as under secretaries or deputy secretaries.’<sup>21</sup> The habitus of the civil service is to a large extent created by the higher civil service. The higher civil service operates as a centripetal force: its actors condition the way people behave by providing them with rules and practices that carry ‘webs of meaning’<sup>22</sup> about what is right and wrong. The diffusion of these regulatory discourses – or what Bourdieu calls ‘pedagogic processing’ – is succinctly captured by Nigel Jarvis, Grade 5 in the Defence Communication Services Agency: ‘Although people are flushed through the system, and new people come in, it is still very hard to move the culture of the ‘old’ generation. As a junior official you adopt the policies, practices and behavioural patterns that are in place.’<sup>23</sup> Whether serving in the senior or junior grades, therefore, the same basic ethos of secrecy applies.

## 2.1 Anonymity and Neutrality

There can be no theorisation of civil service secrecy without some orientation to the structure of the political system and the ‘hidden wiring’<sup>24</sup> that binds non-elected officials to the Ministerial Executive. The most important aspect for this section is the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Devised in the nineteenth century, and regarded by Sir Ivor Jennings as ‘the overriding constitutional convention which regulates the whole service’,<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 3, p.107.

<sup>22</sup> Marsh, Richards and Smith, *Changing Patterns of Governance*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mr Nigel Jarvis, civil servant, 21 March 2007.

<sup>24</sup> P. Hennessy, *The Hidden Wiring: Unearthing the British Constitution* (London, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> I. Jennings, *The Law and the Constitution* (London, 1959), pp. 207-8.

ministerial responsibility dictates that the exposition of government is the sole responsibility of ministers. Although the idea of 'responsibility' is odoriferous and slippery, it has in effect two meanings. Firstly – in what has been called 'explanatory responsibility'<sup>26</sup> – a minister is obligated to defend to the House the work of his or her department. Secondly – in addition to being responsible for his or her own conduct – a minister is held vicariously culpable for every decision or policy that is criticised. With ministers 'carrying the can', civil servants are neither publicly identified with the work of their department, nor, when blame is apportioned, directly accountable to Parliament or the public for their actions. Operating under the motto 'never defend, never explain, never apologise', the civil service *qua* the civil service considers these functions as entirely for politicians, and not for itself. 'It is no concern of a civil servant to defend the policy of a department under which he has served', underlined an unsigned Cabinet minute in September 1946.<sup>27</sup> As G. Drewry and T. Butcher explain, the shield of anonymity is necessary partly to preserve the rule that all actions are unequivocally taken in the minister's name, and partly because public identification of officials with particular government policies 'could lead to a situation in which a future government of a different political party might find it difficult to work with them'.<sup>28</sup> The concomitant of this is absolute ministerial control of policy. This is often referred to as the 'cement' interpretation of official secrecy, by which civil servants cannot set themselves up publicly as an alternative power bloc to the government.

Until the 1970s (see Section 4), the principle of anonymity was observed almost universally. Save reverential obituaries, or truncated entries in *Who's Who*, the Whitehall 'core' were scarcely mentioned by the media or in parliament. 'Thirty years ago', Hennessy suggested in 1988, 'few among the quality newspapers' readership would have had more

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<sup>26</sup> G. Marshall, 'Police Accountability Revisited', in D. Butler and A.H. Halsey (eds), *Policy and Politics* (London, 1978), pp. 61-2.

<sup>27</sup> The National Archives (TNA) CAB 21/2165, 'Use of Official Documents in Private Publications', Minute, September 1946.

<sup>28</sup> Drewry and Butcher, *Civil Service Today*, p. 151.

than the sketchiest notion of who Sir Norman Brook was'.<sup>29</sup> Anonymity, when taken to its extreme, could lead to an almost total detachment from public life. As Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend seldom left the so-called 'tingling centre'<sup>30</sup> of the civil service, spanning the half-mile from Trafalgar Square to Westminster Abbey; only once – Whitehall legend has it – was he spotted taking lunch away from his private table in the Cabinet Office mess.<sup>31</sup> To many senior civil servants anonymity is valued as being constitutive of their privileged role in public administration. Several interviewees rhapsodised about their enormous sense of personal self-satisfaction when they hear a minister discourse in phrases or passages that they themselves had crafted. As one contemporary MOD official observed, 'There is unquestionably the thrill of non-recognition. It's a great feeling to tell the wife – but only the wife – that there has been no change to the words'.<sup>32</sup> The same interviewee described himself as a 'private man with a public spirit'.

Civil service secrecy stems from a further constitutional arrangement: political neutrality. For the civil service to serve all governments alike, it has long been held essential that a bureaucrat's personal views do not cut across the discharge of his official duties. As Ridley notes, political neutrality involves two elements that are separate, but mutually reinforcing.<sup>33</sup> Firstly, it implies that the civil service is an independent body, standing outside and above the competing political actors of the day. Untainted by the sectional interests of a party or class, a civil servant is a 'non-political expert' charged with formulating advice not for the purpose of influencing public opinion, but for the benefit of elected officials – who alone are given *carte blanche* on the facts. The voluntary acceptance of avowed 'professional' neutrality is wonderfully captured by a former chief of the Control Telegraph Office:

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<sup>29</sup> P. Hennessy, 'Profile: Sir Robert Armstrong', *Contemporary Record*, 1:4 (Winter 1988), p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> A. Sampson, *The New Anatomy of Britain* (London, 1971), p. 234.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr Ken Furber, civil servant, 1 February 2008.

<sup>33</sup> F.F. Ridley, 'Political Neutrality in the Civil Service', *Social Studies Review*, 1:4 (1986), pp. 23-8. Also see Drewry and Butcher, *Civil Service Today*, pp. 150-3.



Every man, says the proverb, has two faces: one for the world and one for a woman when he loves her. But the civil servant has a third; he faces his private convictions in the dark.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, neutrality dictates that the civil service is expected to identify with the policies of every government with equal fidelity and devotion. When the electoral pendulum swings, creating a government of a different political complexion, a civil servant will behave like a 'chameleon' – changing his colours accordingly.<sup>35</sup> For Sir Edward Bridges, the archetypal advocate of political nonalignment, carrying out the wishes of the party in office to the unavoidable vexation of the Opposition was the sign of a higher calling: 'There is nothing in which we British civil servants take more pride than the fact we can and do serve all governments with equal loyalty'.<sup>36</sup>

For a long time all civil servants, irrespective of their grade, were debarred from engaging in political activities or canvassing for political support. The reason was plain: involvement in partisan pursuits would obscure the extent to which a non-elected official was still *au fond* a disinterested and impartial servant of Parliament. The absolute ban on political activity, which was constitutionally approved in 1910 following an Order in Council, was eventually challenged in January 1948 by the civil service unions. Union leaders argued that the service was not a monolithic organisation in which a single rule could be applied. Following the Second World War, which saw an influx of 'irregulars' and 'temporaries' to manage the increased volume of administrative work, the civil service had trebled in size: from roughly 350,000 members in 1939 to over 1 million in 1945. Despite only a small percentage of this total indulging in public administration as such (the administrative class, for example, numbered only 3,500),<sup>37</sup> the inclusive character of the ban, without regard to type or function, meant that a charwoman was restricted no less

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<sup>34</sup> The Modern Records Centre (MRC) MSS 232/SCS/4/2/4, 'The Psychology of the Civil Service. Lecture given to the Society of Civil Servants', March 1920.

<sup>35</sup> Ridley, 'Political Neutrality', pp. 23-8.

<sup>36</sup> TNA T 273/222, 'BBC Broadcast: The Civil Service Tradition', E. Bridges, 1954.

than a permanent secretary. Union pressure impelled HMG in February 1948 to review the existing regulations. Published the following year, the Masterman Report sought to reconcile the fact that while, 'the life of every citizen is being directly and acutely affected by all grades of the hierarchy',<sup>38</sup> the civil servant himself was disqualified from the natural and growing expectations of political citizenship. In the view of the Committee it remained axiomatic that, 'the political neutrality of the Civil Service is a fundamental feature of British democratic government and is essential for its efficient operation'.<sup>39</sup> To abandon controls would expose Whitehall to something analogous to a 'spoils system'. In other Western countries, including America (where until 1883 the federal executive was empowered to dismiss all civil servants attached to an outgoing administration), it was not uncommon for the government of the day to fill top bureaucratic posts with officials who agreed with its politics. Even in France, which had its own equally permanent civil service, ministers could insist on having their own *cabinet* of like-minded political appointees.

The heterogeneous composition of the civil service nevertheless afforded scope for relaxing the rules. 'In the sphere of public affairs which are not matters of party controversy', the Report concluded, 'civil servants should be given more latitude to play their part in the normal activities of citizenship, so long as they do so in an unofficial capacity and observe the code of reserve'.<sup>40</sup> It recommended therefore drawing a line of demarcation below the administrative, professional, scientific, technical and executive grades and above the minor, manipulative and industrial grades.<sup>41</sup> Those 'above the line' would represent the 'politically restricted'. Civil servants in this group would be prohibited from all forms of political activity: election to the House of Commons; writing letters to the

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<sup>37</sup> MRC MSS 415 Box 87, 'Political Activities of the Civil Service', L.C. White, August 1949.

<sup>38</sup> Masterman, *Report of the Committee on the Political Activities of Civil Servants* (London, June 1949), Cmnd. 7718, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Minor and manipulative grades encompassed nightwatchmen, leading storemen, porters, telephonists, packers, modellers, messengers, paperkeepers, cleaners and hostel wardens. (MRC MSS 415 Box 87, W.J. Ellerby, 4 July 1949.)

press or publishing literature setting out their political views; canvassing on behalf of parliamentary candidates; appearing on and speaking from election platforms; and accepting invitations to conferences convened by, or under the aegis of, party political organisations. Those 'below the line' – constituting the 'politically free' – would be subject to no restrictions. Implementation of the Report was slow as Ministers crossed swords with the main civil service unions. On 4 July 1949, the Civil Service Clerical Association (CSCA) issued a circular suggesting that the Report was unnecessarily restrictive and created 'absurd anomalies' between the two categories of staff; for instance, under the proposed two-tier system the status of typists, clerical staff and junior executive officers was unspecified.<sup>42</sup> In April 1953, after much procrastination on both sides, it was agreed that there should be a 'third class', comprising all civil servants omitted from the two other categories. This intermediate group would be eligible for permission to participate in politics – except parliamentary candidature. It is a platitude for 'outsiders' to consider these regulations as a serious check on the civil liberties of the service. The reality is quite different; as one Grade 6 who served in the 1970s explains, 'If I had wanted to fly a political flag, I would have left years ago. Besides, I'm *house-trained* now'.<sup>43</sup> His final comment – far from being flippant – underlines the importance of the Whitehall habitus as a modulating force.

## 2.2 Security Routines

Civil service secrecy is anchored in a multitude of formal and informal security routines. These are the ceremonies by which the importance of secrecy is driven home for many civil servants. As Nigel Jarvis explained to me, 'For most of us, the need for secrecy is clear as crystal when we assign security classifications, lock our documents away at night or get positively vetted' – the system of screenings which determines whether a politically suspect

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<sup>42</sup> MRC MSS 415 Box 87, W.J. Ellerby, 4 July 1949

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr Ken Furber, civil servant, 1 February 2008

civil servant should be excluded from secret work.<sup>44</sup> The bulk of these routines were established during the Cold War. Before 1945, with the exception of strict wartime controls, security in the civil service was a casual and colourless affair. For political reasons, no government was prepared to blemish the name of its 'world-beating bureaucracy'<sup>45</sup> with a deluge of unpopular security measures. The reluctance to address internal security also reflected a Panglossian faith in the integrity of the service and age-old methods of recruitment. For generations, wealth, status and a good education had been the preferred barometers of trustworthiness and provided an entrée into the higher echelons of Whitehall. Its right to rule seldom questioned, the Establishment refused to entertain the possibility that so-called 'Good Chaps', recruited through 'Old Boy' networks, could be security risks. The blind faith reposed in the incestuous and gentlemanly world of Britain's inner sanctum was brutally exposed by the Soviet super spies Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross, toffs to the man. With splendid irony, so predictable was the stepping-stone for the moneyed classes progressing from public school to public office, the KGB used Cambridge as a recruitment station for future agents.<sup>46</sup> As this section will now discuss, the confluence of foreign espionage and new doubts about the Establishment made the tightening of control a top priority, if only to placate American allies who chafed at the primitive state of Britain's security architecture and repeatedly threatened to terminate channels of communication.

In summer 1945, with wartime regulations steadily passing into abeyance, the only real evidence of security in the workplace was the practice of security classifications. Introduced in 1944, primarily to homogenize British and American practice ('the difficulties of working with the Americans without a common standard were very

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mr Nigel Jarvis, civil servant, 21 March 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Hennessy, *Whitehall*, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> A. Rogers, *Secrecy and Power in the British State: A History of the Official Secrets Act* (London, 1997), p. 49.

considerable'),<sup>47</sup> Whitehall possessed a four tier grading system: Top Secret – the unauthorised disclosure of which would cause exceptionally grave damage to the nation; Secret – the unauthorised disclosure of which would cause serious injury to the interests of the nation; Confidential – the unauthorised disclosure of which would be prejudicial to the interests of the nation; and Restricted – the unauthorised disclosure of which would be undesirable in the interests of the nation.<sup>48</sup> The classification of a document related to the 'degree of damage' which would result from its unauthorised disclosure and determined the precautions to be taken in its handling. Naturally, the higher the classification, the more stringent the physical safeguards required and the more restrictive the rules about access. The responsibility for deciding whether to classify a document, and what level of classification to apply, rested with its creator. All departments were given central advice on the correct use of the system. They were also required – '[albeit] within the limitations imposed by the availability of staff' – to review classified material periodically with a view to downgrading where possible; when the total bulk was too large, emphasised a Cabinet Office Defence Committee, properly graded documents received inadequate protection whilst security procedures more generally were brought into contempt.<sup>49</sup> In practice, of course, over-grading was endemic because many civil servants sought to avoid under-classifying by error.

Graded documents have long induced an obsequious respect in Whitehall. Classified information, tautologically, is more respected because it is classified. At the start of the Cold War, however, it is interesting to note by way of a brief excursus that its premier category, 'Top Secret', was very nearly replaced. Intended not as an adverb, but rather as a telescoped way of describing the 'top layer of secret papers', the term had been

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<sup>47</sup> TNA PREM 11/268, E. Bridges to N. Brook, 1 April 1952.

<sup>48</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 2, p. 15. Privacy markings, such as 'Commercial: In Confidence' and/or 'Staff: In Confidence', are also used to identify information which does not warrant a security classification but which nevertheless requires protection.

<sup>49</sup> TNA CAB 21/2843, 'Cabinet Office Defence and Civil Committee Section', Miscellaneous Note, 1952.

introduced during the war as 'the price which Britain had to pay' for American acceptance of the four tier system; Washington had refused to employ the English alternative, 'Most Secret', because, 'to their way of thinking', it implied that 'secret' papers were not really secret at all.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his reverence for the subtleties of language, Winston Churchill led the campaign for change. 'Secrecy is not measured by altitude', he wrote to his Cabinet Secretary in March 1952: 'If it were so many might think that 'Bottom Secret' would be more forceful and suggestive. It would be good and correct in English to say 'Most Secret'".<sup>51</sup> Churchill, however, would be disappointed. By the early 1950s Top Secret had become the accepted name for the highest security classification throughout the Commonwealth and NATO. Changing its title, ruled MI5, or operating two different systems (one for domestic and the other for international business), would involve not only a major upheaval, but also a serious loss of efficiency.<sup>52</sup>

Fears of internal subversion, underscored by a series of revelations about communist penetration of the civil service, threw into question Whitehall's long-standing indifference towards security. Anxieties came to a head in September 1945 when the Russian cipher clerk, Igor Gouzenko, fled the Russian Embassy in Ottawa with evidence of a Soviet spy ring operating in Britain and Canada. Gouzenko's evidence, which led directly to the arrest and conviction of the British physicist Alan Nunn May (codename 'Alek'), was accompanied by an outpouring of Red-baiting. By late October 1947, the Conservative MP, Sir Waldron Smithers, was calling for HMG to outlaw all Communists from government employment: 'Will [the Prime Minister] have a showdown before it is too late?'<sup>53</sup> Across the pond – in what many now see as a prelude to McCarthyism – Harry Truman had instituted a Loyalty Program requiring fidelity oaths and backgrounds checks of all federal

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<sup>50</sup> TNA PREM 11/268, N. Brook to W. Churchill, 3 April 1952; TNA PREM 11/268, E. Bridges to N. Brook, 1 April 1952.

<sup>51</sup> TNA PREM 11/268, W. Churchill to N. Brook, 27 March 1952.

<sup>52</sup> TNA CAB 21/2837, R. Hollis, 27 March 1952; TNA PREM 11/268, N. Brook to W. Churchill, 3 April 1952.

<sup>53</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 443, 27 October 1947, cols 503-4.

workers. Self-dubbed 'Loyalty Boards' were empowered to dismiss any employee if there were 'reasonable grounds' to doubt his or her reliability. One could forgive Attlee for evincing caution. Truman's Loyalty Program was attacked from all corners of the political spectrum in the US. The left denounced it as a reprehensible assault on basic civil liberties – a hard-hitting domestic companion to the Truman Doctrine; the right, meanwhile, was scandalised by the dearth of actual dismissals and accused the administration of 'going soft' on the Soviet menace.

While Western counter-intelligence continued to investigate Gouzenko's leads ('Alek' had been readily identifiable but Gouzenko's second scientific traitor was still at large), Attlee established a Cabinet Committee on 'Subversive Activities', known in Whitehall as GEN 183. According to GEN 183 (itself a 'hidden' body), the KGB, GRU and Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) were looking to filch several categories of information from UK pockets. These included military secrets, especially those related to atomic research, as well as material bearing upon government policy and intentions in any field.<sup>54</sup> With the danger real, therefore, the Committee recommended that the 'only safe course' was the exclusion of *all* Communists from secret work. GEN 183's definition of a 'Communist' was stretched to include all CPGB members, both open and covert, as well as all those who kept left-wing acquaintances. Anyone whose consciousness had been inflected by Marxism was a potential messenger boy of Moscow. 'The first duty of every civil servant is to give his individual allegiance to the State', concluded the Report; and, while not all Communists would be prepared to betray their country, even after prolonged exposure to indoctrination, there was 'no way of separating the sheep from the goats'.<sup>55</sup>

A committee of ministers and senior civil servants approved GEN 183's Report on 16 June 1947.<sup>56</sup> Tighter security, it was argued, was essential if HMG was to overturn the

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<sup>54</sup> TNA CAB 130/20, 'The Employment of Civil Servants Exposed to Communist Influence: Report by Committee on Subversive Activities [GEN 183]'.  
<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CAB 130/20, Minutes of Meeting, 16 June 1947.

McMahon Act, passed by isolationist senators in August 1946, which had severed Anglo-American communications over atomic energy. The chief stricture of this new initiative – retrospectively labelled ‘Negative Vetting’ – was simple: all UK civil servants suspected of having fascist or communist associations were to be precluded from working with secret information. The inclusion of fascists, whose numbers must have been small, was arguably designed to give the process a semblance of balance. The responsibility for rooting out potential subversives rested with MI5 who would check the names of officers engaged in ‘particularly sensitive work’ against their records of known communists and sympathisers – totalling, in the case of the CPGB and its fellow travellers, some 250,000 files.<sup>57</sup> In certain cases a further check would be made of the Central Criminal Records at New Scotland Yard. As so-called ‘high temperature’<sup>58</sup> Departments orbiting close to issues of national security, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Supply (the home of H-bomb development), and the MOD were strictly off-limits for Communist sympathisers. From the outset, officials were determined not to render Communists as martyrs or, conversely, expose them to public disdain. Those already in post, therefore, ‘in respect of whom adverse advice had been received from the Security Service’, would be quietly redeployed in other branches of the public service which did not involve ‘contact with secret matters’.<sup>59</sup> Dismissal would only be used when an individual’s background militated strongly against transfer. In other aspects negative vetting was a silent occurrence. Civil servants appealing against judgements were denied legal representation. As Attlee made clear to Vincent Tewson, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, ‘Given the need to safeguard secret sources of information, we cannot have these cases investigated by a judicial tribunal

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<sup>57</sup> TNA CAB 120/30, ‘Positive Vetting: Report by the Committee on Subversive Activities’, 27 October 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Drewry and Butcher, *Civil Service Today*, p. 92.

<sup>59</sup> TNA CAB 130/20, Minutes of Meeting, 16 June 1947.



under the normal forensic process, including the questioning of the evidence by the civil servant's own advocate'.<sup>60</sup>

For nearly a year, fearing public outcry, Attlee refused to announce Negative Vetting as avowed government policy. When the Prime Minister finally did so, on 15 March 1948, socialist firebrands pilloried him for 'grovelling to the Tories and the big dollar boys of America'.<sup>61</sup> National security, however, was such an unconditional trump that it took no great parliamentary skill for Attlee to pull the rug from under his political detractors: 'Experience, both in this country and elsewhere, has shown that membership of, and other forms of continuing association with, the Communist Party may involve acceptance by the individual of a loyalty, which in certain circumstances can be inimical to the State'.<sup>62</sup> Less easy to quell were the civil service unions. For groups such as the CSCA, vetting ceded the issue of individual rights to perceived state policemen, including MI5, and constituted a very deliberate attempt by HMG to neutralise domestic political opponents by muddying the line between enemies within and enemies without. (Here I differ from David Vincent's argument that Union leaders, enjoying a gradual but very real rapprochement with the executive branch, were 'not averse to the stigmatising of the Communist sympathies which were shared by disruptive elements within their own organisations'.)<sup>63</sup> Negative Vetting, protested L.C. White (General Secretary of the CSCA), underlined how superpower conflagration could all too easily be manipulated against internal enemies and was tantamount to a 'service witch hunt' in which nobody was safe: 'Once a political test is applied...there is no limit to its ultimate application. It may be the Communists today; it may be sections of the Labour movement tomorrow'.<sup>64</sup> For an 'association' not known for its militancy, these were hard words indeed.

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<sup>60</sup> TNA PREM 8/948, C. Attlee to V. Tewson, 21 December 1948.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in R.J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), pp. 117-8.

<sup>62</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 448, 15 March 1948, col. 1703.

<sup>63</sup> D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain 1832-1998* (Oxford, 1998), p.196, p. 195.

<sup>64</sup> MRC MSS 415 Box 87, 'Red Tape: The Service Witch Hunt', L.C. White, 1948.

By 25 May 1949, only fifty staff had failed Attlee's loyalty test: of these none had been dismissed, three had resigned and ten had been transferred.<sup>65</sup> Hounded by Union leaders, security authorities were overjoyed when they expelled a fascist discovered burrowed in the War Office, since 'it made the whole operation look even-handed'.<sup>66</sup> Under-resourced and anxious not to 'swamp the more positive security work of the Service, namely following up leads on real spies',<sup>67</sup> MI5 did not have the capacity nor the inclination to investigate everyone in Whitehall, which, despite creeping cuts in manpower, numbered nearly 1 million in 1949. As Sillitoe advised GEN 183, 'the number of names submitted should be kept to an absolute minimum if the process of vetting [is] to work efficiently and smoothly'.<sup>68</sup> It was also the case that MI5 no longer considered communism in the civil service as a serious threat. Spy chiefs confidently predicted that the number of CPGB members hiding in the rarefied administrative grades did 'not exceed a score'.<sup>69</sup> 'The risk has been dealt with and there is, therefore, nothing more we need to say', insisted MI5's May 1948 survey on communism in the public service.<sup>70</sup> Within two years, as the counter-intelligence net closed in on further moles, this assessment was made to appear wilfully premature.

The arrest of the nuclear physicist Klaus Fuchs – 'potentially the most important [atom] spy in Britain'<sup>71</sup> – on 2 February 1950, and his subsequent incarceration for crimes of espionage against the West, resulted in a recrudescence of 'Red Web' paranoia. 'We on our part must realise that we are at war – the greatest war in history', thundered Lord

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<sup>65</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG 210/06B, Miscellaneous Note, 25 May 1949.

<sup>66</sup> P. Hennessy and G. Brownfield, 'Britain's Cold War Security Purge: The Origins of Positive Vetting', *The Historical Journal*, 25:4 (December 1982), p. 968.

<sup>67</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> TNA CAB 130/20, Minutes of Meeting, 16 June 1947.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 130/37, 'The Communist Party: Its Strengths and Activities', Annex to GEN 226/1, 26 May 1948.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive I: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 1999), p. 167.

Vansittart, President of the Civil Service Society of Authors.<sup>72</sup> 'There is no abiding accommodation', he continued, 'between democracy and any totalitarian form'. The uncovering of Fuchs cast serious doubts on the state of Whitehall's defences and intensified distrust among American allies. Washington asked, quite reasonably, 'Who else is walking on the wrong side of your street?' According to Richard Aldrich, 'Western defence co-operation was Fuchs' principal victim', and it became an indispensable condition of renewing Anglo-American nuclear collaboration, which had been frozen since 1946, that Britain adopt tougher security protocol.<sup>73</sup> On 5 April 1950, therefore, Attlee appointed another Committee, chaired by Treasury official John Winnifrith. Discussions took place against a cloud of considerable public hysteria in the United States.<sup>74</sup> Under the House Committee on Un-American Activities, reds were suspected under every bed and careers, from Hollywood to Washington, were ended on the slightest of evidence of left-wing affiliations. Spearheading national paranoia were otherwise unimportant fomenters who courted political exposure and fame. On 9 February 1950, in a speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, the notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed to have in his possession a list of 205 card-carrying communists in the US State Department. Less public, but just as persevering as McCarthy's gang of 'primitives', J. Edgar Hoover, the power-hungry head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was waging a relentless war on the enemy within. As Hennessy claims, the challenge facing Attlee's security advisers was 'to find a way of reassuring the United States without imitating its excesses'.<sup>75</sup> What was called for was a policy of distrust, but without prejudice.

The Winnifrith Committee convened with two matters to address. Firstly, was there 'an inner circle of special secret posts'? And secondly, should such posts warrant extra

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<sup>72</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210/06B, 'House of Lords Official Report: Communists in the Public Service', Annex to Hansard, 166:10, 29 March 1950.

<sup>73</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 383.

<sup>74</sup> P. Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London, 2002), p. 91.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

protection?<sup>76</sup> As Vansittart explained to the House on 29 March 1950, such an investigation had 'nothing in common with the shy-making bally-hoo of Senator McCarthy, the very way not to handle matters of this kind'.<sup>77</sup> The chief problem was establishing which categories of staff should be included on the so-called 'special list'. Those with access to atomic energy information were a given: but what about civil servants, diplomats and civilian contractors? The amorphous and elusive character of public bureaucracy arguably militated against accurate qualification; thousands of middle-ranking officials were intermittently involved at the coalface of policy-making and secret work. It was also essential, for fear of bureaucratic meltdown, not to overburden MI5 with costly and potentially unending inquiries. The Committee, therefore, devised a 'formula' which encompassed only 'exceptionally sensitive' posts:

Posts...must make the holder privy to the whole of a vital secret process, equipment, policy or broad strategic plan, or to the whole of an important section of that process, equipment, policy or plan, where disclosure would be of crucial value to an enemy or potential enemy strategically or politically.<sup>78</sup>

The Committee's MI5 representatives, Roger Hollis and Graham Mitchell, were instrumental in convincing the working party that neither the top military ranks, nor the senior officers of the intelligence services, should warrant inclusion. Such crown servants had already undergone rigorous testing by their respective personnel branches. (No doubt Hollis's motivation here would be grist to the mill of Chapman Pincher, who remains convinced that the later Director-General shrewdly used his executive powers to side-step suspicion that he was a Soviet agent.) The total of vettees, as a result, would not surpass

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<sup>76</sup> TNA CAB 120/30, 'Positive Vetting: Report by the Committee on Subversive Activities', 27 October 1950.

<sup>77</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210/06B, 'House of Lords Official Report: Communists in the Public Service', Annex to Hansard, 166:10, 29 March 1950.

<sup>78</sup> TNA CAB 120/30, 'Positive Vetting: Report by the Committee on Subversive Activities', 27 October 1950.

roughly more than 1000 posts.<sup>79</sup> The Committee also questioned the efficacy of existing screening methods. Present procedures did not, unless the individual concerned was on MI5's radar as a known suspect, reveal any details about his family, friends or associates. Almost across the board, Departments had made no conscious effort to determine for themselves the trustworthiness of vettees, relying 'completely on the check provided by the Security Service'.<sup>80</sup> Winniffrith nevertheless gave short shrift to the sort of laboratory-like inquisition that had already begun in the United States. Although keen to restore American confidence, especially with regard to atomic matters, assimilating the draconian tactics of the FBI, in which candidates completed a detailed form delineating their bloodlines and were then grilled by police chiefs, was considered 'repugnant to British thinking'.<sup>81</sup>

The schizoid requirement of the Committee for a strategy that should both protect the state, save money and interfere as little as possible with civil liberties, produced a scheme known as 'Positive Vetting'. An active assessment of a candidate's character, rather than merely a plain test of political affiliation, positive vetting would consist of two stages.<sup>82</sup> Stage One would involve a careful study of the subject's background, relatives, and associates; here MI5 and Departments would work collaboratively. He or she would then complete a security questionnaire, designed to solicit details of criminal offences, subversive associations and periods of foreign travel or residence. The vettee would also nominate two referees to whom the security authorities could seek further particulars. Stage Two would entail an interview – or 'field investigation' – by an experienced police officer. Recognising that positive vetting could generate a stream of conjecture within departments, arousing suspicions towards 'men of blameless life and unblemished

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210/06B, 'Form E.93: ESTASEC. Security Questionnaire'; C. Pincher, 'Whitehall Purge Gets Tougher: Loyalty Oath Demanded', *Daily Express*, 15 January 1952; Lord Franks,

reputation',<sup>83</sup> the Committee insisted that the whole process be carried out *in camera*. Referees would be undisclosed; interviews would take place behind closed doors; and officials with suspect loyalty would remain anonymous. At first, Attlee refused to adopt the scheme outside of the Atomic Energy Division of the Ministry of Supply, a decision that was criticised in Washington as vacillation. The cold-shouldering of American allies reflected, in part, the fact that there was little political capital to be gained from the wholesale denunciation of the enemy within. Few parliamentarians were viscerally anti-communist whilst the main civil service unions, federated under the umbrella of the Council of Civil Service Unions, were still at odds with Attlee over his first security purge.<sup>84</sup> It was also uncertain whether positive vetting would in fact make Whitehall mole-proof. As the Winniffrith Report conceded: 'We do not suggest that this procedure will yield substantial results. The great majority of unreliable persons will already be known to the Security Authorities and their presence disclosed by current methods'.<sup>85</sup>

American pressure to extend positive vetting to all 'sensitive' positions across the public service intensified after the dramatic flight to Russia of Burgess and Maclean, two spies in the Foreign Office, in May 1951. In Washington, the damage inflicted by the two traitors, especially Maclean, was considered inestimable, as he had since become joint secretary of the Combined Policy Committee, directly overseeing nuclear development. In London in July 1951, the Americans convened a Tripartite Security Conference together with the Canadians, where they press-ganged Attlee to broaden the purview of positive vetting. Here the Americans underlined that such a scheme was the *sine qua non* of renewed nuclear co-operation between the two countries.<sup>86</sup> As an exercise in gesture politics, therefore, the application of positive vetting to all 'vital posts' across Whitehall

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*Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 2, p. 374.

<sup>83</sup> Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 94.

<sup>84</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210/06B, 'Bulletin: Security Precautions', February 1952.

<sup>85</sup> TNA CAB 120/30, 'Positive Vetting: Report by the Committee on Subversive Activities', 27 October 1950.

became virtually the last act of the departing Labour administration in November 1951. Extending the scope of intrusive security enquiries generated scarcely a ripple of discussion in Parliament. The treachery of Burgess and Maclean had provided the *casus belli* for which Attlee had been looking.

Vetting was reassessed in 1955 by a Conference of Privy Councillors, which emphasised that the greatest risk to national security was no longer professional foreign spies, but officials vulnerable to Communist indoctrination.<sup>87</sup> Its White Paper added 'character defects' to the scope of vetting inquiries, on the grounds that certain predilections, if deliberately hidden, could render an individual liable to blackmail or entrapment by a hostile intelligence service. Enemy 'talent spotters', it was emphasised, were constantly on the look out for men of 'weak moral fibre' who could not live down public exposure of a forbidden sexual preference or past indiscretion. As a result, sexual orientation and behaviour, as well as 'serious failings', such as drunkenness, drug addiction, undue extravagance and the keeping of 'bad company', all became matters to which departments could probe. A former Grade 5 in the DPA was perhaps unintentionally revealing to me when he recalled: 'I was astonished when the MOD vetting unit asked, quite bluntly, "Do you have a drink problem, sir"'.<sup>88</sup> Openly homosexual, and renowned for outrageous drinking and loudmouth behaviour, Burgess and Maclean embodied the conviction that 'loose living' jeopardised security. In their case, oddly enough, possessing proclivities provided the perfect cover for their duplicitous activities. As Allan Hepburn puts it: 'Traipsing about with his fly open, he (Burgess) distracted people with his virility'.<sup>89</sup> Where suspicions surfaced about an individual's character, the new system 'tilt[ed] the balance in favour of offering greater protection to the security of the state, rather than in

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<sup>86</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, pp. 424-5.

<sup>87</sup> *The Report of the Conference of Privy Councillors on Security*, (London, 1955), Cmnd. 9715.

<sup>88</sup> Private Information.

<sup>89</sup> A. Hepburn, *Intrigue* (London, 2005), p. 196.

the direction of safeguarding the rights of the individual'.<sup>90</sup> This hard-line policy would prevent all penalised civil servants from having access to the evidence held against them. Notwithstanding residual leftist concerns about civil liberties (The Whitley Council feared 'tale bearing, malicious gossip and ill-judged reports', whilst Tony Benn later chafed at the 'odious business' of arbitrating a man's character),<sup>91</sup> the 1955 reforms were met with neither public hostility, nor open parliamentary protest. Following the defections of Burgess and Maclean, vetting was no longer a mythical chimera begotten of American hysteria but a necessary response to a great, hidden danger.

The 1962 Radcliffe Inquiry on Security Procedures in the Public Services, summoned after the discovery of the Portland Spy Ring, extended positive inquiries to civil service trade union officials whose job involved negotiating with Ministries on behalf of public servants.<sup>92</sup> According to several MI5 reports, the CPGB possessed a remarkable 'zeal, pertinacity and cohesion' when it came to seizing control of trade unions.<sup>93</sup> Most General Secretaries were openly 'on the Party line' (L.C. White, for example, had sat on the editorial board of the *Daily Worker*) and it was not inconceivable that such individuals were seeking to purloin information or suborn officials. Empowering departments with the authority to bar senior trade unionists from the corridors of Whitehall put the capstone on HMG's vetting policy. The Winniffrith Committee had originally estimated that positive vetting would engulf around 1,000 posts; but, as the Dicklock Report revealed in 1982, in thirty years it had snowballed to approximately 68,000.<sup>94</sup> Quantitative data on those transferred or dismissed on the basis of vetting inquiries is frustratingly patchy. According to figures produced by the National Whitley Council, by March 1957 24 civil servants had been dismissed, 23 had resigned, 81 had been transferred to non-secret stations and 30 had

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<sup>90</sup> *The Report of the Conference of Privy Councillors on Security*, (London, 1955), Cmnd. 9715.

<sup>91</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210.06C, 'Security Precautions in the Public Service', Letter from the Treasury to the National Whitley Council, December 1956; T. Benn, *The Benn Diaries: Selected, Abridged and Introduced by Ruth Winstone* (London, 1996), p. 120.

<sup>92</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681.

<sup>93</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 118.



been reinstated.<sup>95</sup> None had been named. By comparison, US security purges were verifiable and were accompanied by public hearings, targeted campaigns against individuals and zealots bringing charges on vague and imprecise grounds. The fact that positive vetting did not 'engender anything like McCarthyism'<sup>96</sup> is frequently applauded. Such praise is perhaps unwarranted. As Anne Rogers argues, large-scale witch-hunts would have propelled a host of awkward questions about entrenched elitism in the higher civil service, where recruitment and advancement still revolved around parentage, schools, universities and personal annexions.<sup>97</sup>

How successful was positive vetting? Detractors emphasise that vetting failed to spot traitors. Most moles were discovered through their own mistakes and profligacy, or through information obtained from defectors or a Venona breakthrough. The Portland spy Harry Houghton, who had been recruited by the KGB while serving at the British Embassy in Warsaw during the early 1950s, was identified by MI5 as a result of a tip-off from the Polish defector Michal Goleniewski. As a mere clerical officer, Houghton also aroused suspicions by living well beyond his visible means, matching wealthy imbibers round-for-round in local bistros and enjoying foreign holidays. Eventually unmasked by the KGB defector Anatoli Golitsyn in 1962, John Vassall – the private secretary who had been drawn into a homosexual 'honeytrap' before his recruitment as an agent – also gave himself away by cutting a dash around town in Savile Row suits and throwing lavish parties at his regency flat in Dolphin Square, Pimlico. The process of vetting had several imperfections. As the Radcliffe Inquiry conceded, the notion of 'character defects' encompassed so many vices as to entrap the whole of Whitehall, whilst, in practice, 'the most dangerous traits

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<sup>94</sup> Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 97; P. Hennessy, 'Making Whitehall Mole-proof', *Economist*, 5 June 1982.

<sup>95</sup> MRC MSS 296/REG/210.06C, 'National Whitley Council. Dismissals and Transfers on Security Grounds. Position as of 8 March 1957'.

<sup>96</sup> Hennessy and Brownfield, 'Cold War Security Purge', p. 970.

<sup>97</sup> Rogers, *Secrecy and Power*, p. 49.

from a security point of view' rarely showed themselves to investigators.<sup>98</sup> Vetting was also undermined by an immovable good faith in social station as the true yardstick of reliability. Vassall's career, for example, had been accompanied by constant displays of homosexuality and carousing, yet neither evidently had any bearing on his successful vetting application. There is little evidence – at least in the short term – that vetting led to a full interchange of Top Secret information with the United States. On 11 December 1951, with positive vetting in full swing, Sir Henry Tizard (MOD Chief Scientific Adviser) wrote that he was 'not happy at all' with American collaboration in the field of 'science, technology and production'.<sup>99</sup> Research reports, suggested Tizard, tended to be 'out of date' by the time they were circulated in Whitehall and had clearly been screened by 'elaborate security procedure[s]'.<sup>100</sup> The British Joint Services Mission (JSM) in Washington painted a similarly bleak picture. The Americans, reported one correspondence, possessed insufficient staff to facilitate unrestricted trans-national communication and were reluctant to increase overhead expenditure for this purpose because they could not see a useful return for their money.<sup>101</sup> Such arguments, of course, held little weight among US officials who pointed out, with some truth, that Britain could not possibly absorb every item of information volunteered.

The determination to carry out vetting without so much as a murmur presented its own problem. As the Radcliffe Inquiry pointed out, by keeping things quiet, 'the biggest single risk to security at the present time is probably a general lack of conviction that any substantial threat exists'.<sup>102</sup> Whitehall was already on red alert over document security, in the knowledge that the double agent, George Blake, used to photocopy material during his lunch hour or at night. Alongside vetting, therefore, HMG introduced a series of more

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<sup>98</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, pp. 18-9.

<sup>99</sup> TNA CAB 21/4740, H.T. Tizard to W. Churchill, 11 December 1951.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> TNA CAB 21/4740, JSM (Washington) to MOD, 29 September 1950; TNA CAB 21/4740, 'Exchange of Military Information', Miscellaneous Note.

visible and quotidian 'physical security' routines. In 1962, every civil servant was issued with a security handbook, entitled *Their Trade is Treachery*, which set down a twelve-point checklist for foiling a spy. Staff were instructed to keep the office tidy; attach all documents to a file ('loose papers are meat to a spy'); check that all classified material was put away securely at lunchtime and at the end of each day; not to discuss secrets on the telephone; not to take classified papers to canteens, lavatories or cloakrooms; not to use office paper and envelopes for private correspondence; not to leave security keys unattended ('a wax impression can be taken in a matter of moments'); and not to use the date of a birthday, or any other obvious number, for the setting of container combinations.<sup>103</sup> (Many combinations, one senior civil servant told me, correspond to the date of a red letter day in the history of the armed forces, such as The Battle of Trafalgar [21-10-18-05] or The Battle of Jutland [31-05-19-16].)<sup>104</sup> The Radcliffe Inquiry conceded that it was not unnatural for a public servant to see such measures as less deserving of his attention than more 'constructive' duties; this feeling, however, was 'precisely what a careless motorist thinks before a fatal accident'.<sup>105</sup> These routines were not simply aimed at the higher civil service. They also targeted junior grades, such as registry clerks, who quite often were in possession of a large amount of classified information.

### 2.3 "The Official Secrets Act Affects You!"

As well as being embodied in administrative regulation, civil service secrecy was also the consequence of legislation, of which Section 2 of the OSA was the primary instrument. Rarely activated in the court room (23 charges were brought between 1945-71, involving 34 defendants, of whom 27 were convicted and six acquitted),<sup>106</sup> the effect of Section 2

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<sup>102</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> (Private Copy) *Their Trade is Treachery* (London, 1962).

<sup>104</sup> Private information.

<sup>105</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, p. 33.

<sup>106</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 17.

should not be measured by the number of prosecutions, but rather by its influence on civil service behaviour. For many civil servants, Section 2 operated *in terrorem*, inducing the belief that it was best to say nothing unless authorised to do so. As Sir Burke Trend, then Cabinet Secretary, said to the Franks Committee: 'I am not saying that you say to yourself "If I say something to X will I be breaching the Official Secrets Act?" But you are conscious that at the back of everything you say and do all day long there is this tremendous sanction'.<sup>107</sup> The 'deterrent effect' of Section 2 was ceremoniously reinforced by a public servant's requirement to 'sign the Official Secrets Act' – a device of great rhetorical value but which had no force in law. In court, conviction did not depend upon proof that the accused knew of, or had had his attention called to, the provisions of the Act. As Peter Kellner and Lord Crowther-Hunt have claimed:

The fact that tens of thousands of people each year 'sign' the Act has almost nothing to do with national security; it has a great deal to do with indoctrinating civil servants into the culture of closed government.<sup>108</sup>

The standard OSA declaration, known officially as 'Estasecret', was first introduced in 1944. A paraphrased version, inviting the readers' attention to the basic tenets of the Act, was preferred to a longer, more complicated form couched in formal language. 'It would take an experienced person a good while to get at the meaning of Section 2', conceded an unnamed War Office official in November 1944: 'He certainly wouldn't do it while waiting to sign "on the dotted" line and, unless he were a lawyer, he would probably not arrive at the right conclusions even if he were given a copy to read at leisure'.<sup>109</sup> All new entrants were required to sign three copies of Estasecret; one copy was given to the officer, and the

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<sup>107</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 3, p. 320.

<sup>108</sup> Kellner and Crowther-Hunt, *Civil Servants*, p. 265.

<sup>109</sup> TNA WO 32/19030, 'Signing of Official Secrets Act Declarations by Government Employees', C2 to M.I.11, November 1944.

department retained the other two. Every official, on leaving the service, was given one of the remaining two copies.

Reproduced by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, posters delineating the provisions of the Act were used in the buildings of government departments, particularly in depots, workrooms and storehouses, where large numbers of industrial staff were assembled. In sites with an immediate military application, such as dockyards and munitions factories, extracts of the more important rules were promulgated in Depot Orders, communicated to the men by the foreman in charge, and pinned on notice boards.<sup>110</sup> Copies of the Act in poster form were essential for reminding staff that they were accountable to certain regulations and ran the risk of committing 'special offences'. According to MI5, posters had a 'general propaganda value in promoting secrecy'.<sup>111</sup> The layout of the poster was carefully designed. In September 1952, under the auspices of the Cabinet Security Policy and Methods Committee, a working party was set up to examine poster configuration. Its report, submitted on 10 November, made several conclusions. Firstly, the existing design failed to provide even basic information, such as the minimum punishment for a felony.<sup>112</sup> Secondly, new posters should be 'much shorter and much more striking'. It also emphasised, however, that any new poster was not to lay down or interpret the law; such an attempt could be criticised both by the Courts and by 'legalistically minded' employees.<sup>113</sup> These conflicting requirements, proposed Martin Furnival-Jones (then a rising star in MI5), could be reconciled by a poster which, as well as including a brief verbatim quotation from the most relevant provisions, conveyed a short message summarising the major offences.<sup>114</sup> Approved in spring 1954, pursuant to Furnival-Jones's

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<sup>110</sup> TNA WO 32/17602, Major General (Woolwich Arsenal), 16 May 1923.

<sup>111</sup> TNA CAB 21/4522, G. Mitchell to R.J.P. Hewison, 18 September 1952; TNA CAB 21/4522, 'Record of Meeting at Treasury', 10 November 1952.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. The Working Party comprised of representatives from the Treasury, Home Office, Ministry of Supply and MI5.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 21/4522, F. Jones to Working Party, 16 December 1952.

proposal, the final poster cleverly tapped into the semiotics of secrecy by incorporating a series of declamatory statements:

The Official Secrets Act affects you. You must not talk about or pass on information about your work unless you are authorised to do so. You must not keep or copy any drawing or document unless it is your job to do so. You must take care not to lose any drawings or other documents. You must hand them back when they are finished with or asked for. Penalties for infringing the acts may be heavy.<sup>115</sup>

Departments which employed a large number of lower-white collar and manual workers, especially those connected to defence procurement and implementation, ordered proportionately more posters than management intensive offices. For example, in April 1954, the Admiralty, War Office and Ministry of Supply requested 3,000, 2,000 and 1,200 respectively; in contrast, GCHQ ordered 50, the Treasury 24, the Foreign Office 12, and the Colonial Office 6.<sup>116</sup> So as to direct attention to the 'main' poster, which may over time have become familiar and left unread, four 'chaser' posters, replaced annually, were displayed in prominent positions throughout government buildings.<sup>117</sup>

Poster designs were intermittently refreshed throughout the Cold War. The impact of a poster, claimed one working party, was short-lived ('no longer than four weeks') irrespective of how good the design, whilst there remained the problem of how to communicate other subjects of security education such as correct classification of documents, the 'need to know' principle and the dangers of careless talk.<sup>118</sup> In May 1960, recognising that every poster must be designed with 'a particular *class* [emphasis added] of person in mind', the Central Office of Information put into circulation three new posters.

1. 'Keep it here'. Designed to teach the dangers of careless talk to industrial workers.

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<sup>115</sup> TNA CAB 21/4522, 'Record of Meeting at Treasury', 8 April 1953; TNA CAB 21/4522 A.B. Ashbourne to C. Felton, 9 April 1954.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> TNA CAB 21/4522, Working Party to J.L. Vernon, 23 August 1954.

<sup>118</sup> TNA CAB 21/4522, 'Cabinet Security Policy and Methods Committee. Report of the Working Party on Posters', Note by MI5, 13 May 1960.

2. 'Does he need to know?' Designed to teach scientists the necessity for preserving the 'need to know' principle.
3. 'Yours'. Designed to warn administrative and executive class civil servants of the dangers of failing to look after briefcases. (The point was made that the owner of a briefcase was less likely to be forgetful if it were lying on the seat opposite him rather than on a luggage rack.)<sup>119</sup>

Supplementary visual aids were also made available to departments. These included: adhesive stickers attached to telephones to warn users against improper disclosure; security advice on blotters and desk calendars; and OSA slogans in official diaries and magazines.<sup>120</sup> It is questionable whether the visible warnings had any long-term effect on daily approaches to security by individual civil servants. However, from the management viewpoint, no member of staff could claim ignorance of the Act as a defence in court.

## 2.4 Raising the Curtain?

Before the 1960s, civil service secrecy was rarely, if ever questioned. The British public, on the whole, accepted that civil servants were secret servants and that the process of decision-making should be carried out *sub rosa*. Benign attitudes to secrecy reflected a basic deference towards authority, a prevailing consensus that 'Whitehall knows best' and that skilled, liberalistic officials could be trusted to act in the public interest. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, this ingrained habit of deference began to diminish. The Suez debacle, coupled with economic bleeding, brought the first stirrings of discontent; both pointed to a foundering administrative machine and established a context of national dissatisfaction and introspection. The search for scapegoats increasingly centred on Whitehall. Revelations about Cambridge spies, coupled with the salacious dramas of John Vassall, John Profumo *et al.*, demonstrated a growing malaise in public institutions and rubbed away veneer after veneer of worthiness from the administrative elite. A public opinion suddenly sceptical about the probity of Whitehall was rendered more cynical from the late 1960s by

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 21/4522, K. Tolson to P.V. Jones, 23 November 1960.

allegations that senior civil servants were pursuing their own serving-serving agenda. For the socialist firebrand Tony Benn, the civil service possessed a political life of its own, sabotaging government initiatives out of naked class interest. 'The civil service', he later wrote, 'sees itself as being above the party battle, with a political position of its own to defend against all-comers, including in-coming governments'.<sup>121</sup>

The civil service had long been the butt of saloon-bar jokes; in the early 1950s, Sir Edward Bridges remarked that civil servants would always be ranked as objects of good-humoured raillery, along with mother-in-laws and Wigan Pier. The collapse of deference, however, brought more hostile judgements. Lord Rothschild, writing in the 1970s, commented that 'disparaging the civil service [had] become a national pastime, rather like throwing beer bottles at football matches'.<sup>122</sup> Behind these attacks was a recurring question: 'What's wrong with Whitehall?' Voices were heard from both the left and right accusing the civil service of being too inbred, elitist and backward looking. The Fulton Committee, which reported in June 1968, decried what it called the 'cult of the amateur' and called for an influx of more efficient, more professional and more managerially minded administrators.<sup>123</sup> But, as David Vincent argues, 'concerns about inefficiency, class bias, remoteness...coalesced around the notion of closure'.<sup>124</sup> Economic and political failures had cast serious doubts about the desirability of closed policy-making, while Whitehall-rocking scandals made secrecy appear illegitimate. It suddenly dawned upon people, including politicians, that the civil service might have grown too powerful and that secrecy was being used to mask administrative pathologies. What was needed, therefore, was a more open dialogue with the public. The desire for more openness and greater accountability made

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<sup>120</sup> TNA CAB 21/4522, 'Cabinet Security Policy and Methods Committee. Report of the Working Party on Posters', Note by MI5, 13 May 1960.

<sup>121</sup> T. Benn, 'Manifestos and Mandarins', in *Policy and Practice: The Experience of Government* (London, 1980), p. 62.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in J. Paxman, *Friends in High Places* (Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 131.

<sup>123</sup> Lord Fulton, *The Civil Service, Report of the Committee 1966-68* (London, 1968), Cmnd. 3638.

<sup>124</sup> Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, p. 221.



strange bedfellows.<sup>125</sup> Conservative MPs, as well as radicals on the left, could both be found exhibiting a fondness for raising the curtain. 'Secrecy remains the last and lasting refuge of incompetence', declared the Tory MP Hugh Fraser: 'The air is for clearing down Whitehall – if needs be with a whiff of Miltonian grapeshot'.<sup>126</sup> Retired Permanent Secretaries also joined the debate, arguing, albeit from a different ontological perspective, that some relaxation was necessary to restore faith in Whitehall and ameliorate relations with the public. As far back as the mid-1950s, during a fireside-chat on the BBC, Sir Ernest Gowers had considered greater openness as the inevitable corollary of 'two World Wars, [the] Welfare State and [the] transformation in size of government'.<sup>127</sup> It was simply not expedient, he continued, for Whitehall to maintain 'the principle of a silent service with Ministers as its only spokesman'. By 1975 how far had discourses of openness successfully permeated the civil service? To what extent had it become more accountable and less 'faceless' to the public? How far had it lifted the veil covering the administrative process? It is to these questions that this final section now turns.

Harold Wilson, a former civil servant with knowledge of the Whitehall machine, became Prime Minister in October 1964 with an excited desire to modernise the civil service and ease it from the grip of fossilised mandarins into the hands of a more classless, meritocratic, and technically gifted workforce. Dismantling the 'gentleman amateur' culture of Whitehall was considered essential if Britain was to keep pace with profound social, economic, and scientific change. Wilson – who once remarked that 'the classics boys [had] always been against him'<sup>128</sup> – knew that he could not leave the task of reform to the civil service itself. On 8 February 1966, therefore, he announced to the House the appointment of a Departmental Committee of Inquiry, to be chaired by the then Vice-Chancellor of

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<sup>125</sup> See Theakston, *Civil Service*, p. 175-6.

<sup>126</sup> H. Fraser, 'Official Secrecy: A Refuge for Incompetence', *The Times*, 17 November 1970.

<sup>127</sup> TNA T 273/222, 'BBC Talk: The Civil Service and the Public', E. Gowers, 1954, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-70* (London, 1984), p. 468.

Sussex University, Lord Fulton. Fulton's Report, published after two years of gathering evidence, and imbued with the language of equality, contained a provocative opening:

The Home Civil Service today is still fundamentally the product of the nineteenth-century philosophy of the Northcote-Trevelyan report. The tasks it faces are those of the second half of the twentieth century. This is what we have found; it is what we seek to remedy.<sup>129</sup>

It then went on to highlight specific problems. Fulton shared Wilson's view that the civil service, especially the administrative class, was an outdated clerisy – over-populated by those with an Oxbridge or independent school background. Social exclusiveness, argued Fulton, meant that Whitehall's top brass spent insufficient time 'in post' and lacked formal professional training. This led to an 'all-rounder' environment, whereas what was needed was subject matter experts, to provide more knowledgeable advice to government in the 'white heat' age. Whitehall, he continued, was overrun with compartments and baroque classes which made it difficult for all but a few staff to set foot into the rarefied and senior positions.

Relevant for this thesis, however, was Fulton's critique of civil service secrecy. In a much-quoted extract, located quite intentionally in a chapter on 'The Civil Service and the Community', the Report delivered the first serious assault on the practice of closed policy-making: 'We think that the administrative process is surrounded by too much secrecy. The public interest would be better served if there were a greater amount of openness.'<sup>130</sup> While recognising that a 'degree of secrecy' should always be a part of administration ('it is difficult to see how on any other basis there can be a mutual trust between colleagues'), Fulton suggested that there were too many occasions when information was unnecessarily withheld and private consultation 'merely perfunctory'.<sup>131</sup> Disseminating more information – particularly material upon which policies were derived – would help to demonstrate that

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<sup>129</sup> Lord Fulton, *The Civil Service, Report of the Committee 1966-68* (London, 1968), Cmnd. 3638, para. 1.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

officials were discharging their responsibilities adequately and thus engender a closer bond between the governed and the governors. The Report also proposed that there was not enough contact between Whitehall and the community. In the modern world, claimed Fulton, the public service could no longer operate as a self-contained and largely self-sufficient profession in its own right. As skilled administrators, developing the blue print for a Britain reborn, civil servants should identify publicly with the policies of the duly elected government of the day. In summing up, the Report urged Wilson to hold an enquiry to 'make recommendations for getting rid of unnecessary secrecy in this country', including a review of the OSA.<sup>132</sup>

Wilson initially saw 'some merit in an enquiry of the kind suggested by the Fulton Committee'.<sup>133</sup> His mandarins, however, saw things very differently. Sir William Armstrong, Head of the Home Civil Service, thought it 'by no means clear that an enquiry by a body of outsiders – the bulk of whom would probably be naturally biased against secrecy – would advance matters'.<sup>134</sup> During May and June 1968, as evidenced by a series of recently declassified Cabinet files, Whitehall's *prominenti* exhibited considerable hostility towards anything that smacked of greater openness. While acknowledging that the OSA was a 'blunt instrument', passed in circumstances of sizeable alarm when public opinion entrusted the executive with surprising latitude, Sir Burke Trend was 'very chary' of amending them. They were, in his estimation, 'rather like the cane in the best type of orthodox school' – not used very often but possessing a 'remarkably stabilising effect'.<sup>135</sup> He wrote at length about how his American friends envied Britain for having the Acts; without similar legislation, US officials were all too easily embarrassed. Starting from scratch, moreover, would cause 'endless trouble' with Parliament and almost certainly

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<sup>131</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, 'Chapter VII: Serving the Community', Draft Extract from the Fulton Report.

<sup>132</sup> Lord Fulton, *The Civil Service, Report of the Committee 1966-68* (London, 1968), Cmnd. 3638, para 277-80.

<sup>133</sup> TNA PREM 13/1972, Lord E.A. Shackleton to H. Wilson, 27 September 1968.

<sup>134</sup> TNA PREM 13/1970, 'The Secrecy of Official Information', Draft Memorandum, 16 May 1968.

<sup>135</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, B. Trend to W. Armstrong, 21 May 1968.

produce 'something even less satisfactory' than the current statute.<sup>136</sup> Like Trend, Armstrong conceded that Section 2 was a 'harsh and repressive power', going beyond the requirements that originally gave rise to it.<sup>137</sup> That said, he doubted whether MPs could be trusted to devise a replacement statute. On the question of a more accountable profession, whose members would be known to the public and would be eligible to receive praise or to incur blame, both Trend and Armstrong defended the status quo:

If we move with the current tide of public opinion...we shall be running greater risks of embarrassing Ministers and we shall also be in danger of transforming ourselves from impartial advisers into individuals who will inevitably come to be thought of as identified with particular Ministers or policies.<sup>138</sup>

Whitehall's unease permeated the corridors of power. By November 1968, the idea of an enquiry was floundering on civil service resistance, with the Prime Minister reported as 'not in any particular hurry to reach conclusions' about official secrecy.<sup>139</sup>

On the surface then nothing much had changed. Post-Fulton, mandarins had hunkered down, thwarting the enquiry of which they disapproved and convincing hapless ministers not to expose the process of government before the bar of public opinion. It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that the cause of greater openness had bypassed Whitehall altogether. Under Wilson's Labour Government, Britain introduced its own Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, more commonly known as the 'Ombudsman' or 'grievance man', to whom members of the public could take their complaints about the bureaucracy. In theory, the Ombudsman is a 'tribune of the people', empowered to seek redress if Whitehall is discovered to be at fault. The proliferation of parliamentary select committees, to which civil servants were often asked to give evidence, also increased the general accountability of officials. Several permanent secretaries, most

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, 'The Secrecy of Official Information', W. Armstrong, 24 May 1968.

<sup>138</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, B. Trend to W. Armstrong, 21 May 1968.

<sup>139</sup> TNA PREM 13/1970, M. Halls to G. Walker, 26 November 1968.

notably Trend, deserve credit for providing episodic groundswells of support for the 1967 Public Records Act, which reduced from fifty to thirty years the embargo placed on the opening of government records. For Trend, writing to the Prime Minister in November 1963, the original 1958 Act (which established the time limit of fifty years) was inimical both to the public interest and to the requirements of genuine scholarship. 'So long as we resist', argued the historian's Cabinet Secretary, 'the general public will base their judgements on episodes such as the transfer of power in India, [the Malayan Emergency and African independence] partly on memoirs, partly on histories derived from incomplete and biased material and by official histories from other countries'.<sup>140</sup> Newly independent states were well advanced with writing their versions of decolonisation; against this background there was a danger that the 'British side of the story' might be liable to go by default. Although Trend failed to sell the idea to a Conservative government (Alec Douglas-Home was concerned that a shorter period would release sensitive documents about appeasement), he successfully pushed it through under Harold Wilson, who no doubt sensed the opportunity to rekindle the controversies of Munich.

In January 1969, the leader of the opposition, Edward Heath, raised the stakes by calling for a review of administrative secrecy. Unable to dodge the issue, Wilson announced that 'the whole question of the release of official information, including the OSA, should now be under consideration'.<sup>141</sup> This decision earned the Prime Minister few friends in Whitehall. 'To my mind', wrote Sir Anthony Part (Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade), 'the whole character of civil service work would be changed for the worse if we were to go anything like so far as the Swedes in the way of open administration. We should go to the stake to preserve secrecy'.<sup>142</sup> And to the stake they went. On 5 March, in characteristic alarmism of style (no anodyne drafting here), mandarins submitted a paper to HMG suitably crafted to unnerve ministers. Abounding in mordant statements, the brief

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<sup>140</sup> TNA CAB 21/5230, B. Trend to A. Douglas-Home, 22 November 1963.

<sup>141</sup> TNA PREM 13/2528, 'Personal Minute', H. Wilson.

<sup>142</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, A. Part to W. Armstrong, 4 February 1969.

underlined that it was neither 'practicable' nor 'expedient' to open up the decision-making process, suggesting that it would generate a host of sticky questions about the role of 'subjective judgements' and 'the reactions of various interests at home and abroad'.<sup>143</sup> (Attached supporting material, entitled 'Background Notes for Ministers', derided the 'fashionable current myth that the quality of public business would be improved if it were carried out in a kind of "goldfish bowl"').<sup>144</sup> As well as questioning whether a 'real public demand' for information really existed, the brief warned that a more generous disclosure policy would require additional staff to implement it and thus impose heavy costs on an already overstretched budget. In a classic piece of chicanery, it also reminded Wilson that if civil servants became less anonymous, they would be 'free to disclose in what respects their advice had *not* [emphasis added] been accepted by Ministers'.<sup>145</sup>

Mandarin shock tactics had the desired effect. By late March, Labour Ministers were once again apathetic about greater openness, unanimous in their conviction that an external enquiry would be a step too far and require a *masse de manoeuvre* of government money.<sup>146</sup> Failure to set up an enquiry was nevertheless a public relations disaster for the Wilson government. Its response therefore was a rather bland White Paper, *Information and the Public Interest*, published in June 1969. The result of an internal, rather than external inquiry, the White Paper attempted to reassure the public that the OSA was not itself a barrier to greater openness: '[It is] concerned only with unauthorised disclosure of information, and not with the extent to which the amount of authorised disclosure may be increased'.<sup>147</sup> Without Section 2, it continued, 'There would be the greatest difficulty in defining satisfactorily what categories of information should qualify for special protection and what should not'. The White Paper also pointed to the continuing growth in the

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<sup>143</sup> TNA PREM 13/2528, 'The Release of Official Information', 5 March 1969.

<sup>144</sup> TNA PREM 13/3096, 'Information and the Public Interest: Background Notes for Ministers', 19 June 1969.

<sup>145</sup> TNA PREM 13/2528, 'The Release of Official Information', 5 March 1969.

<sup>146</sup> TNA PREM 13/2528, B. Trend to H. Wilson, 24 March 1969.

<sup>147</sup> *Information and the Public Interest* (London, June 1969), Cmnd. 4089, p. 11.

volume of official publications. Planting the idea that the government had already started to make more information available was not strictly disingenuous. In 1967 HMG had introduced the 'Green' Paper – a form of publication designed to set out for public discussion policies and proposals while they were still at the formative stage. By spring 1969, Green Papers had been published on health service reorganisation, regional employment premium, highways strategy and a proposed national minimum wage.<sup>148</sup> Many departments had begun to print periodicals and reports detailing information on which policies were based. According to C.G. Jarrett, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, 'it was chastening to realise how few people paid attention to them'.<sup>149</sup> One might argue, however, that Green Papers *et al.* were less genuine displays of openness, but rather innocuous concessions designed to offset demands for an enquiry and legal reform.

Heath's accession to the premiership in June 1970 brought renewed hope of an outside enquiry. A year earlier, he had been a vocal critic in the war against secrecy, advocating 'an open society in which the people have access to information on which they can judge policies and policymakers'.<sup>150</sup> By early 1971, however, commissioning a review remained something for which no party had the stomach when in office. 'It [should be resisted] for as long as possible', declared an unsigned Cabinet minute.<sup>151</sup> Fulton's recommendation was finally given the spur it needed with the trial of Jonathan Aitken, then a journalist, in February 1971 for publishing a confidential report in the *Sunday Telegraph* about British help to Lagos during the Biafra War. In acquitting Aitken, the judge, Mr Justice Caulfield, savaged the elastic ambit of Section 2 and went on to suggest that it should be 'pensioned off'. Against this backdrop, not even the mandarin black-arts could sabotage an enquiry, duly appointed by the Home Secretary (Robert Carr) on 21

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<sup>148</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, Lord E.A. Shackleton to B. Trend, 27 September 1968.

<sup>149</sup> TNA CAB 164/640, C.G. Jarrett to W. Armstrong, 26 January 1969.

<sup>150</sup> E. Heath cited in P. Hennessy, 'Accelerated History? Whitehall and the Press since 1945', *James Cameron Lecture 2000*.

April to 'review the operation of Section 2' and 'to make recommendations'.<sup>152</sup> Chairmanship of this landmark enquiry was always going to be a humdinger of an appointment. Two years earlier, Harold Wilson had suggested the former Labour Minister and chairman of ITA, Herbert Bowden (by then a life peer), only to be told by his Principal Private Secretary, Michael Halls, that Bowden 'might well come out with a far too liberally minded report – almost Swedish'.<sup>153</sup> Keen to minimise the risk of manipulation by Whitehall, Heath opted for Oliver Franks, an Establishment man, but with a reputation for straight talking. Under Franks, secrecy would not be fêted nor flattered, but rather assessed with an unbiased mode of cognition.

Franks invited a number of representative bodies, mainly in the fields of the media, government and the law, to make submissions to the Committee. Permanent Secretaries weighed in with cautionary tales. 'Once you embark on the business of striptease of a government – where do you stop?', declared Trend.<sup>154</sup> Journalists, by contrast, demanded the complete abolition of Section 2, suggesting that decisive legal reform was essential if Whitehall was to be shaken out of its well-honed secretive culture. In a provocative oral session, Chapman Pincher attempted to explain how the OSA both restricted and stupefied officials:

Whenever there is a tremendous row in the department everybody clams up automatically, saying 'My God, we are all in trouble, let us have no more for a bit'. They might even get a directive from [their] head saying, 'For God's sake, we have got to get out of this one alive, let us have no more'.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> TNA PREM 13/3473, Miscellaneous Note.

<sup>152</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, Preface.

<sup>153</sup> TNA PREM 13/2528, M. Halls to H. Wilson, 21 February 1969.

<sup>154</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 3, pp. 324-5.

<sup>155</sup> TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.



Pincher warned, however, that 'if Section 2 were abolished tomorrow' many mandarins would still 'go on in their sweet way and say – "We are not going to tell [you] anything until we want to do so"'.<sup>156</sup>

Published on 29 September 1972, the Franks Report called Section 2 a 'mess', stating that 'people are not sure what it means, or how it operates in practice, or what kinds of action involve real risk of prosecution under it'.<sup>157</sup> Under the Act, lamented Franks, the line between authorised and unauthorised communication was imperceptible until it was transgressed. Even top mandarins, when asked to qualify exactly how and when an offence was committed, failed to give a concise explanation. 'I do find it very difficult to define that line', conceded William Armstrong.<sup>158</sup> 'The net result' – to quote the Press Council – was 'that both journalists and civil servants spend their lives walking through an ancient minefield. Most of the mines are now dud, but one may at any moment blow up in their faces'.<sup>159</sup> Franks attacked Section 2's 'catch-all' provision, saved only from absurdity by the sparing (yet highly arbitrary) exercise of the Attorney General's discretion to prosecute. According to the Committee, Section 2 was surrounded by the 'taint' of espionage, redolent of spies and traitors, and of catching people, including journalists, who had no thought of harming their country. The Report proposed progressive and ameliorative reforms. Its main recommendation was that Section 2 should be repealed, and replaced by a new statute, christened the Official Information Act (OIA). More tightly drawn, the OIA would protect only information related to defence, security, foreign relations, currency reserves, law and order, and the affairs of private citizens. The test of criminality would be whether the unauthorised disclosure would 'cause serious injury to the interests of the nation', while the maximum penalty on conviction would be two years' imprisonment, a fine, or both.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, p. 37.

<sup>158</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 3, p. 121.

Despite acknowledging the shortcomings of Section 2 ('It is a weakness that the Act which deals with spies and traitors should be applied to disclosures by journalists and others with no question of imperilling the safety of the state'),<sup>160</sup> HMG considered the OIA 'undesirable' and opted to leave the existing statute in place. This decision was reasoned on a number of levels. Notwithstanding 'the occasional controversy', claimed the Home Secretary, Section 2 worked well while the requirement that the Attorney General's consent had to be obtained for prosecution was a safeguard against unjustified action.<sup>161</sup> (It would be interesting to know what Jonathan Aitken would make of Carr's glib phrase, 'the occasional controversy'.) By abandoning Section 2, he went on, every government would lose 'whatever deterrent effect' it had on those with access to official information. Civil servants who had career prospects to lose, not to mention the chance of an OBE or knighthood on retirement, were not the problem. As the Franks Committee explained:

A civil servant who is regarded as unreliable, or who tends to overstep the mark, and to talk freely, will not enjoy such a satisfactory career as colleagues with a better judgement and greater discretion. He may fail to win promotion, or he may be given less important and attractive jobs.<sup>162</sup>

The danger was 'disgruntled employees'<sup>163</sup> under notice or nearing retirement, to whom the carrot of job security and promotion was irrelevant, but the stick of Section 2 was a significant restraint. Carr was initially concerned that HMG would find it extremely difficult to reconcile a 'kick-it-around-until-you-lose-it'<sup>164</sup> policy with its election pledge to 'review the operation of the OSA so that government is more open and more accountable

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<sup>159</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 2, p. 316.

<sup>160</sup> TNA CAB 130/66, R. Maudling, 3 February 1973.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 1, para 58.

<sup>163</sup> TNA CAB 130/66, R. Maudling, 3 February 1973.

<sup>164</sup> This delightful phrase can be found in C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long* (London, 1984), p. 500.

to the public'.<sup>165</sup> Surely this would be seen as unacceptable backsliding and subject ministers to a barracking from the opposition benches? His fears, however, would soon pass. On 8 March 1973, in a meeting to consider Franks' proposals, it was suggested that neither Parliament nor the press had 'showed marked enthusiasm' for change. Without discernible pressure for action, therefore, it was remarkably easy for the OIA to become rather like Penelope's Web, endlessly woven by day and unpicked again by night.

The Franks Report nevertheless revealed some alarming home truths. It re-emphasised, in the words of the *Evening Standard*, that 'there [was] a growing alienation between the Government and the people'.<sup>166</sup> According to countless submissions, deference to the right of the state to operate in secret was at an all-time low, as was confidence in the capacity of officials to remedy injustice and support the public interest. Heath became incredibly concerned that secrecy in Whitehall was preventing HMG – 'by any reasonable definition a radical one which has taken major new initiatives in a number of controversial fields'<sup>167</sup> – from getting the credit for its success. 'Our policies will not succeed', he wrote, 'unless the public clearly understands our intentions and objectives'.<sup>168</sup> What was called for was a 'radical change' in the attitudes to the 'art and science' of presenting government policy.<sup>169</sup> The ability to get the right message across was essential if HMG was to counteract the increasing tendency of journalists to editorialise, trivialise and personalise major issues.<sup>170</sup> Heath's call-to-arms adumbrated what became known as 'Open Government' – a term which meant a lot of different things to a lot of different people. William Whitelaw, Lord President of the Council, perhaps best articulated the government's definition during a speech to the National Young Conservative Conference on 5 February 1972. Open

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<sup>165</sup> TNA CAB 130/661, 'Report of the Departmental Committee on Section 2', Minutes of Meeting, 8 March 1973.

<sup>166</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (London, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 4, p. 45.

<sup>167</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Open Government', Miscellaneous Note.

<sup>168</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Public Presentation of Government Policy', Note by the Prime Minister, CP (72) 70, 3 July 1972.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Government, declared Whitelaw, did not mean opening up high-level policy discussions between ministers and their officials; nor did it involve 'flying kites' or encouraging non-attributable leaks.<sup>171</sup> Whitelaw was also quite clear that 'a government must govern' and not every issue should be debated publicly in order to attain a consensus. Open Government, rather, was about presenting more information in a more 'straightforward and positive way'; it was also about providing more facts and, where possible, the assumptions on which the government based its policies and chose one course of action over another.<sup>172</sup>

In Whitehall open government was instinctively coterminous with irresponsible liberalism. On this occasion, the thankless task of returning fire was allotted to Robert Armstrong, then Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. 'I believe the principle – that all facts and analyses used by HMG should be published *in toto* unless powerful arguments are adduced for secrecy in a particular case – is too extreme and not workable', wrote Armstrong in suitably stentorian tones.<sup>173</sup> Armstrong deployed the age-old argument that open government, like so many administrative improvements, could only be achieved at a price – namely more manpower and more money. In each case the value of more information would have to be weighed against the cost of 'getting it, processing it and publishing it'.<sup>174</sup> Armstrong cautioned against the publication of 'working papers' or longer-term 'think pieces'; such devices, he claimed, would inhibit freedom of expression, candour of advice and efficient dispatch of business. Heath, however, would not succumb to mandarin pressures. While recognising that open government represented a 'substantial

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Extract from a Speech by the Rt. Hon. William Whitelaw MP, Lord President of the Council, Speaking at the National Young Conservative Conference', 5 February 1972.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Open Government', R.T. Armstrong, 6 February 1972.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

departure from previous practice', he was determined to 'connect' with the people and achieve 'higher standards in this field'.<sup>175</sup>

So what was agreed upon? As well as underlining that Green Papers should accompany every major policy initiative, Heath charged the Central Office of Information with producing a weekly bulletin in which full texts of all major government statements and announcements, news, and important statistical series, were printed. Three times a year, HMG would publish a larger periodical, 'akin to the journals of learned societies',<sup>176</sup> discussing defence, economic and social affairs. The purpose of this publication was to provide a platform for specialist pieces of work, which were 'caviar to the general' but did not warrant Green Paper treatment.<sup>177</sup> Articles would be written both anonymously by departments and, in a new step, by named civil servants on subjects of a 'technical' nature. Heath also advocated the publication of an annual White Paper adumbrating the Government's expenditure and budgetary strategy. Central to the Prime Minister's new dissemination plan was a desire to explain issues with the appropriate choice of language. Too many statements, whether made in Parliament or issued directly to the press, were pitched at the wrong level of sophistication and contained too many long words, obfuscatory idioms and 'officialese'. Heath challenged Whitehall to dispense with its 'customary' prose – 'not designed to influence those outside the government service' – and draft in a style more acceptable to a wider public.<sup>178</sup>

The Prime Minister, much to the chagrin of the lobby, was determined to downgrade the long-standing tradition of unattributable briefings. Heath was deeply suspicious of lobby hacks and sought to get his message across by inviting ministers to make more statements on the record. This involved setting up weekly press conferences (under the

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<sup>175</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Public Presentation of Government Policy', Note by the Prime Minister, CP (72) 70, 3 July 1972.

<sup>176</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, R.T Armstrong to E. Heath, 28 April 1972.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Public Presentation of Government Policy', Note by the Prime Minister, CP (72) 70, 3 July 1972.

auspices of the Prime Minister's Press Office), where ministers would be asked to respond to questions of 'current interest within their responsibility'.<sup>179</sup> Ministers were also encouraged to participate more regularly in current affairs programmes, both televised and radio, in order to comment on particular events or policies. Officials were naturally concerned that televised appearances would 'lead more to the portrayal of immediate and actual events than to the exposition of policies or discussion of issues'.<sup>180</sup> Armstrong also warned that 'the selection and balance of coverage is often influenced by anti-authoritarian prejudice in the producers'.<sup>181</sup> Ministers, therefore, were schooled in what to say and how to say it; they were given strict instructions to discourse from a prepared script and to avoid, at all costs, being drawn into an unrehearsed debate.<sup>182</sup> So-called 'talk-in' broadcasts, where members of the public were invited to submit questions, presented the biggest problem. In certain cases, therefore, departments would arrange for an anonymous member of staff (confidently regarded as 'our people') to 'phone-in' under the guise of a 'learned listener' in order to ask pre-approved enquiries.<sup>183</sup>

Heath's open government initiative also helped to break down the facelessness of the civil service. On 17 January 1973, during a televised press conference on incomes policy, William Armstrong sat alongside his premier. By doing so, he made what he later acknowledged to have been a profound error of judgement, inviting as it did accusations of complicity in party politics. Indeed, Armstrong's perceived over-association with Heath's government earned him the sobriquet, 'Deputy Prime Minister'. Less controversially, senior civil servants began to appear on radio programmes, including *Talking Politics* and the BBC Radio 4 series, *No, Minister*. In 1973, a televised news-broadcast showed civil

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<sup>179</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, R.T. Armstrong to E. Heath, 28 April 1972; TNA PREM 15/1682, 'Public Presentation of Government Policy', Note by the Prime Minister, CP (72) 70, 3 July 1972.

<sup>180</sup> TNA PREM 15/1682, R.T. Armstrong to E. Heath, 28 April 1972.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> TNA PREM 15/1130, 'Activities Involving the Use of Official Information or Experience', Miscellaneous Note.

<sup>183</sup> MRC MSS 415 Box 90, 'Press Comments and Regulations with the Press', General Secretary to E. Sugden, 18 December 1975.

servants at work, drawing favourable comment in the press. By the mid-1970s, Fleet Street was routinely reporting senior appointments and promotions, while designated 'Whitehall-Watchers' carried out interviews with and 'pen-portraits' of the top bureaucrats.<sup>184</sup> It was not until the 1980s, however, that the civil service really began to drop its mask. During the Spycatcher and Westland Affairs, certain civil servants 'trode the boards as never before',<sup>185</sup> drawn into the political arena and pronouncing very openly on public issues.

## Conclusions

In the period of this thesis, secrecy was par for the course among the bureaucracies of Whitehall. By and large, civil servants cut a low profile, while the ethic of discreet reserve was one of the basic working criteria. With few documents that bespeak core principles, such as a code of practice, the reasons for this secrecy are neither clear-cut nor universally applicable throughout the service. To compound our difficulties, the service was an intensely culture-bound organisation, underpinned by near invisible patterns of behaviour, traditions and values. What is clear is the following. All civil servants, irrespective of grade, adhered to the basic constitutional principles of anonymity and neutrality. Like doctors or lawyers, obligated never to breach the confidences of their clients or patients, civil servants were entrusted to keep the secrets to which they became privy in the course of their work. From day one, all civil servants operated under the spectre of the OSA, which influenced their every move and had no scruples about its capacity to impose lengthy custodial sentences. Practices of vetting, as well as quotidian security routines, held symbolic capital and hardened the secret spine of every bureaucrat. The psychology of individual civil servants almost certainly played a part. Many would have been 'peacocks' with no whistle to blow, but who were attracted by the allure of being a secret keeper; others, inspired by memories of wartime service, would have been 'John Bull' types, extremely unwilling to

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<sup>184</sup> See Theakston, *Civil Service*, p. 35.

<sup>185</sup> Hennessy, *Cabinet*, p. 188.

discuss their patriotic and public-spirited endeavours. It would be dangerous, however, to treat the civil service as a homogenous unit. Secrecy was often more prevalent in certain cultural pockets or bounded domains. The Higher Civil Service, by virtue of its close proximity to ministers and policy formulation, begets great secrecy and resembles a religious order. Unlike the lower strata of officials, who learnt secrecy by the carrot and stick of promotion and the OSA, formal rules in the case of mandarins often did not apply. Reticence was already instinctive to a class of men with common kinship, who had been groomed for high office and to whom closed-shop decision making was a gentlemanly game. What they learnt over time was how to exercise it.

By the mid-1970s, as public opinion demanded greater accountability, and ministers sought to improve their relations with the public, the civil service wrestled with the challenge of open government. The publication of Green Papers and other consultative documents, which would have been inconceivable in earlier decades, indicated a basic questioning of traditional values. Generally speaking, however, mandarins were completely indifferent to the growing apartheid between the rulers and ruled, and exhibited an obstreperous distaste for greater transparency. Real-life Sir Humphreys were generationally and culturally hostile to the idea of government in a goldfish bowl. Proposals to reform the OSA, and to increase effective scrutiny of Whitehall policymaking, were met with the backhanded compliment, 'How very courageous of you Minister'. In 1975, therefore, it can be said that the senior civil service was still steeped in a culture of secrecy. As it is said in Whitehall, 'only the names had changed'.



## CHAPTER THREE | HARRY 'CHAPMAN' PINCHER: SLEUTHING THE SECRET STATE

Chapman Pincher's activities and revelations have been a source of embarrassment, particularly in the defence field, for years.<sup>1</sup>

*Ministry of Defence Leak Enquiry, September 1976.*

Once a project comes to be discussed in the MOD and in the Ministry of Aviation, he is often able to get wind of it.<sup>2</sup>

*Sir Laurence Helsby, 29 June 1966.*

The Cold War confirmed the precipitous arrival of the investigative journalist, probing into secret areas and making a front-page splash of defence affairs, security matters and anything that whiffed of political scandal. Probably best known as the author of *Their Trade is Treachery* (1981), which alleged that the former Director-General of MI5 Sir Roger Hollis had been a Soviet spy, the greatest scoop-merchant of them all was Harry 'Chapman' Pincher, defence correspondent for the *Daily Express*.<sup>3</sup> From 1945, until his retirement in 1979, Pincher disinterred many explosive stories from the darkest corners of the secret state and revealed them in his soi-disant 'Column of Disclosure'. Often teeming with secrets, Pincher's widely read 'exclusives' invariably relied on information obtained from high-placed sources. Although Pincher naturally refused to identify his informants ('Even in Fleet Street', remarked Foreign Office official J.W. Russell, 'dog does not eat dog unless offered very substantial bait'),<sup>4</sup> he openly admitted to cultivating an intimacy with sources unavailable to most journalists. 'My friends in Whitehall', he told the BBC in June 1967, 'keep me informed of what is going on'.<sup>5</sup> While much has

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA) DEFE 68/223, 'Enquiry into Report by Chapman Pincher', D/Sy (PE), September 1976.

<sup>2</sup> TNA PREM 11/1195, L. Helsby to H. Wilson, 29 June 1966.

<sup>3</sup> C. Pincher, *Their Trade is Treachery* (London, 1981); P. Hennessy, 'Thatcher Says Inquiries Failed to Incriminate Sir Roger Hollis', *The Times*, 27 March 1981, p. 1; P. Hennessy, 'Canadian Evidence of 1945 'Mole' in London', *The Times*, 16 October 1981, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> TNA PREM 11/3475, J.W. Russell, 9 June 1961; C. Pincher, *Inside Story: A Documentary of the Pursuit of Power* (London, 1978), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> TNA PREM 13/1809, 'Extract from 24 Hours, BBC1 22:30', 13 June 1967.

been written on Pincher's later obsession with Hollis – itself a corollary of the 1980s 'mole-hunting' phenomenon – a significant and surprising lacuna is his career as journalist. E.P. Thompson's memorable polemic, 'A State of Blackmail', first published in the *New Statesman* on 10 November 1978, has long remained the only substantive scholarly assessment.<sup>6</sup> Thompson attempted to understand the provenance of Pincher's stories. His first hypothesis was that Pincher might be a charlatan: no official had ever given him information, and all the 'exclusives' were 'empty bags', invented for the purpose of self-aggrandisement. More likely, argued Thompson, was that Pincher had been 'less an operator than the tool of other operators', used to communicate off-the-record planted leaks from the state.<sup>7</sup> The purpose: to 'confuse, disinform and manage opinion in Britain'.<sup>8</sup> More sinisterly, claimed Thompson, it was probable that Pincher had been spoon-fed information in pursuit of distinctly right-wing objectives. Too many stories, he argued, betrayed the hallmarks of private or political vendettas. The aim: 'to defame the Parliamentary Labour Party, particularly Cabinet Ministers, and the Left generally throughout the country'.<sup>9</sup> This was – needless to say – the 'old class war continued by other means'.<sup>10</sup> One should remember, of course, that Thompson's political outlook was diametrically opposed to Pincher's.

In 2008, it is now possible to rediscover Pincher's most explosive stories and their reception in Whitehall, in the National Archives. This chapter, which has benefited from an interview with Pincher himself, proposes that he was – first and foremost – the people's watchdog with little sympathy for undue secrecy. Convinced that Whitehall was afflicted with what he called 'suppressomania' – 'a belief that anything is an official secret until it is officially released' – for over thirty years Pincher relentlessly pushed back the parameters of state secrecy and bridged the cleft between the exercise of political authority and the extent to which that authority was

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<sup>6</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'A State of Blackmail', in E.P. Thompson (ed.), *Writing by Candlelight* (London, 1980), pp. 113–33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

accountable to the public.<sup>11</sup> Right-of-centre, but appealing to an eclectic readership, the *Express* was a perfect match for Pincher such was its reputation for cutting through political armour. His scoops, it will be shown, occasioned much anger and resentment in Whitehall. Officials turned over in their minds the question of how and when he got his information. Leak enquiries were made; potential contacts were followed; prosecution was occasionally threatened. Ultimately, however, departments never once caught him or his contacts with their hand in the cookie jar. 'If I was a source of Chapman Pincher's information', wrote Jack Macafee (Director of Naval Security) in December 1971, 'I would feel very happy that [he] would safeguard me as efficiently as he does all his other work, and I would have no fears of anyone finding out'.<sup>12</sup>

Even today, understanding the provenance of Pincher's stories remains extremely difficult, for which a number of possibilities exist. What is clear from talking to Pincher is the following. Firstly, as an avid reader who maintained 'an excellent filing system',<sup>13</sup> he was incredibly adept at accumulating and splicing together otherwise unimportant scraps of information. By then injecting the necessary phronesis, or practical wisdom, these disparate elements often resembled a scoop. Secondly, in an exercise of deliberate provocation, he would routinely publish 'empty bags' in the hope of sparking a government response. As he told the Franks Committee in 1971, 'If you do it cleverly, most of the time you can fly your kite...until you get a scoop'.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, Pincher was an 'ambush journalist' *par excellence*, capable of goading even the most tight-lipped of crown servants into making statements. Fourthly, through his military service in the Second World War, Pincher met all sorts of people who would later hold arterial positions in both Whitehall and Westminster. Through them, as well as their underlings, he entered the 'charmed circle' and was given tit-bits of news. Throughout his career, Pincher was a good mixer, equally at ease with both the gentleman and

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<sup>11</sup> Pincher, *Inside Story*, p. 206; TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.

<sup>12</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, J.L.A. Macafee to H.E. Davies, 21 December 1971.

<sup>13</sup> TNA DEFE 68/223, 'Enquiry into Report by Chapman Pincher', D/Sy (PE), September 1976.

<sup>14</sup> TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.

players of post-war government. Many of his contacts were naturally groomed on the circuit of London Clubland. Although himself not a 'champagning journalist', Pincher was a frequent habitué of the Écu de France, the Savoy, the Dorchester and Kettner's, and secured countless stories over bibulous lunches and absorptive social evenings. It should also be emphasised that many scoops were probably secured through accident as much as design. 'My life', he conceded upon first meeting me, 'has been an enormous succession of lucky streaks'.<sup>15</sup>

So who exactly were his most prized sources? In his autobiography, *Inside Story*, Pincher suggested several names. These included: Admiral Sir Raymond Lygo (then Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff); Sir Richard Way (then War Office Permanent Secretary); and Sir Ronald Ellis (then Head of Defence Sales).<sup>16</sup> Another 'close friend', Harry told me, was Sir William Cook, who served as Deputy Director of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston and later became Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser at the MOD.<sup>17</sup> Despite pressing Pincher, it has not been possible to link any one of these individuals to a particular story. It should become clear, however, that these were precisely the type of 'contacts' that might have provided an exclusive. On the allegation that Pincher was an 'embedded journalist', used for deliberate leaks and disinformation strategies, archival evidence is patchy and one can only surmise that on certain occasions this was true.

Responsive, in part, to the conceptual manoeuvres of the 'biographical turn', this chapter also aims to reconstruct Pincher 'in context' and use his career as a window onto press censorship, departmental leak procedure and media-state relations in-the-round. Central to what follows will be the role of the D-Notice Committee, reformed in 1946 after a period of 23 years hibernation. Under the stewardship of Rear-Admiral George Thomson, 1946-1963, the voluntary system of self-censorship worked well and was respected by the press. As the Radcliffe Inquiry explained in 1962, 'He passed into the post of Secretary after some four years as Chief Press Censor and he brought to his

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Pincher, *Inside Story*, p. 57, p. 125, p. 317.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

task great experience, a very wide knowledge of the ramifications of the press, and an exceptional measure of goodwill'.<sup>18</sup> Biographers have emphasised how Thomson had a 'remarkable facility' for making friends in Fleet Street; as David Woodward argues, he trusted journalists with whom he was involved, and as a result they came to trust him.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the original press censors, retired officers who enjoyed barking out orders, Thomson employed a commonsense approach. Rather than go through the rigmarole of liaising with the Committee direct, he invited journalists simply to 'ring him up whenever they wrote something hot'.<sup>20</sup> Instead of suppressing a story indefinitely, he often would encourage pressmen to 'future' an item, in other words delay publication for a more expedient moment. As will be shown, however, by the early 1960s the system was fast withering on the vine. Part of the problem, as several scholars have noted, was the gradual erosion of the gentlemanly 'club spirit' and 'oil of social deference' that had hitherto kept it operative.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, the Committee was increasingly seen to operate less as honest broker, but more as a government poodle, cloaking executive shortcomings.

### 3.1 1945 – 1964

Pincher joined the *Express* as a freelance science correspondent in the summer of 1945. As a standing scientific officer in the army, liable to reprisals under the OSA, he initially began writing articles under the cover of 'Express Science Reporter'. Only in July 1946, having completed his Service employment, did he dispense with his pseudonym and adopt the grandiloquent sounding 'Chapman' to enrich the byline. A trained biologist, with a basic understanding of nuclear physics and electronics, he was initially assigned

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<sup>18</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Obituaries, 'Sir George Thomson: Chief Press Censor', *The Times*, 26 January 1965, p. 14; Obituaries, 'Rear-Admiral Sir George Thomson', *The Times*, 30 January 1965; D.R. Woodward, 'Thomson, Sir George Pirie (1887–1965)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36501>] (17 July 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>21</sup> A. Palmer, 'The History of the D-Notice Committee', in C. Andrew and D. Dilks (eds), *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1984), esp. pp. 238–47; C. Ponting, *Secrecy in Britain* (Oxford, 1990), esp. pp. 29–34.

to find stories about the atom bomb. Pincher knew all too well that a 'nuclear beat' was likely to enrage the authorities. Atomic matters were effectively 'born secret': that is, utterly taboo from the moment of their inception, and strictly no-go areas for journalists. Pincher, however, who was looking for a scoop or two in order to make a name for himself, did not let this dissuade him. The circumstances surrounding his breakthrough scoop illustrate the auspicious position of Lord Beaverbrook who, as *Express* proprietor and erstwhile Minister of Production, was at once both a journalist and a political animal with access to privileged sources of information. In September 1945, Beaverbrook arranged for Pincher to inspect the supposedly declassified *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes*.<sup>22</sup> An official history of the Manhattan Project, written by the Princeton physicist Henry de Wolf Smyth, the Report formed the basis of 'Safe = Atom', which revealed 'fresh facts' about the Hiroshima bomb.<sup>23</sup> It suddenly transpired, however, that publication of the Smyth Report had been delayed – Pincher had secured a world scoop. Notwithstanding criticism from American 'cousins', the article, lamented the MOD, had contributed to a more general feeling that 'censorship has lapsed' and 'there was no method of restraining the press'.<sup>24</sup> A further corollary of Pincher's article, argued Rear-Admiral Thomson, was that editors were now reluctant to resurrect the D-Notice system if requests for non-publication went beyond the three fighting services.<sup>25</sup> This contrasts with Alasdair Palmer's assessment that the 'need to cloud construction of the bomb' provided an 'easy justification' for reconvening the Committee.<sup>26</sup>

From the outset, Pincher recognised that membership of the chummy, patriarchal world of London Clubland was the *sine qua non* of success. In late 1946, during a convivial evening at Player's Theatre with Sefton Delmer (then chief foreign correspondent for the *Express*), Pincher was introduced to Peter 'Wilfred' Burchett, an Australian journalist who had served with American forces at Tinian airbase, the site

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007; H. Smyth, *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes: The Official Report on the Development of the Atomic Bomb under the United States Government, 1940-1945* (Princeton, 1945).

<sup>23</sup> C. Pincher, '75.lb, Safe + 75.lb, Safe = Atom', *Daily Express*, 28 September 1945, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> TNA CAB 126/302, Cpt. Clarke to J.F. Jackson, 9 November 1945.

<sup>25</sup> TNA CAB 126/302, G.P. Thomson to J.K. Gardiner, 25 October 1946.

from which the atomic bombs were launched against Japan.<sup>27</sup> Burchett, it emerged in conversation, had been briefed by the base controller General Kenny in various aspects of the Manhattan project, including bomb production rate and certain technical minutiae. Pincher immediately sought guidance about the feasibility of publishing this information. Remarkably, confirmed Admiral Thomson, 'nothing could be done'; neither D-Notices nor the OSA could be applied to articles discussing American subjects.<sup>28</sup> On 2 November 1946, therefore, Pincher published 'Atom Secrets Out'.<sup>29</sup> The article, in giving what were described as 'authentic details' based on 'authoritative facts', claimed that the Americans possessed 96 functional bombs; that the all-up weight of each warhead was 4 tons; and that the battery plant at Hanford was producing 6 bombs per month with 8 in store. General Leslie R. Groves, head of the US atomic programme, was 'seriously disturbed'; Anglo-US relations in the field of atomic energy were already strained with the passage of the McMahon Act in August 1946, which forbade the transnational interchange of nuclear secrets.<sup>30</sup> Dean MacKenzie, spokesman for the Canadian Atomic Energy Board, interpreted the story as a 'straight bit of questionable scooping', a flagrant transgression of the international agreement to formalise all releases vis-à-vis the bomb.<sup>31</sup> 'If it had been designed to aggravate already strained lines of co-operative effort with our neighbours, it could not have been more effective', he railed.<sup>32</sup> To the chagrin of Atlantic allies, HMG nevertheless refused to take legal action, suggesting that 'an indication of official disquiet' would tend to give the article greater prominence, and might be construed as implying that the information therein was accurate.<sup>33</sup> Many years later, Pincher ascertained that he had been 'damn close' with his

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<sup>26</sup> Palmer, 'D-Notice Committee', p. 240.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> C. Pincher, 'Atom Secrets Out: America has 96', *Daily Express*, 2 November 1946.

<sup>30</sup> TNA CAB 126/302, Joint Services Mission (Washington) to Cabinet Office, 2 November 1946.

<sup>31</sup> TNA CAB 126/302, Cabinet Office to Joint Services Mission (Washington), 19 March 1947.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> TNA CAB 126/302, Cabinet Office to Joint Services Mission (Washington), 8 November 1946.

descriptions: 'No wonder the old sods [at Aldermaston] used to read my articles to see what they were going to do next!'<sup>34</sup>

Pincher was not the only journalist stirring up trouble at this time. Indeed, as Hugh Dalton (then Chancellor of the Exchequer) discovered to his cost, even the most trusted of hacks could cause problems. Between 3:00pm and 3:15pm on 12 November 1947, just moments before announcing his budget speech to the House, Dalton passed through the Members' Lobby where he had a 'chance meeting' with John Carvel, lobby correspondent of the *Star*.<sup>35</sup> Carvel, who was 'on the alert for news' and had been 'loitering' in the lobby for twenty minutes, enquired about the Budget. To this request Dalton made a premature and unpremeditated disclosure – a disclosure he had no right to make: freeze on tobacco; penny on beer; and something on dogs and football pools but nothing on horses. Believing that he had received the forecast 'without any embargo' (Dalton later conceded that Carvel was a 'friend' and his state of mind was 'unguarded'), Carvel divulged the information to his editor, A.L. Cranfield, who ran a 'Stop-Press' delineating the principal points.<sup>36</sup> The source of the information, albeit unattributable, was obvious and Dalton was forced to resign. Before the resultant Select Committee, called to investigate the circumstances of the leakage, Dalton was advised by Norman Brook *not* to suggest that he had accompanied his indiscretion with the warning to Carvel that it was 'off the record', since this would deprive the erstwhile Chancellor of the excuse that had given the information 'in a moment of excitement'.<sup>37</sup> The episode served as a salutary warning to all those who used the lobby. Thereafter, a tacit distinction was drawn between 'professional' conversations and conversations made during the course of 'social' interaction, when it was axiomatic that nothing was said for publication.

By the late 1940s Pincher was causing much consternation within the aeronautical industry. In October 1947, he joined a series of press visitations to St. Eval,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>35</sup> TNA PREM 8/435, *Report from the Select Committee on the Budget Disclosure* (London, 11 December 1947).

<sup>36</sup> News, 'Stop Press on Star – Penny on Beer', *Star*, 12 November 1947.

<sup>37</sup> TNA PREM 8/435, N. Brook to C. Attlee, 18 November 1947.



where RAE-Vickers was conducting flight trials of new rocket-propelled aircraft. Already informed on the 'scientific aspect' of the experiments by Henry Lockspeiser, Chief Scientist to the Ministry of Supply, correspondents were permitted to take photographs as well as interview the pilot so as to cover the story from the 'human angle'.<sup>38</sup> Prior to the trial, the pilot had been briefed by the aerodrome's Commanding Officer, and was instructed to 'be very circumspect' in his replies, and to side track technical questions into 'harmless fields of informative matter of public interest'.<sup>39</sup> The Air Ministry therefore was confident that no reference would be made as to the plane's behaviour. Nonetheless, on 17 October 1947, Pincher revealed that the trials had 'failed completely'; according to scientists the aircraft, which had been expected to break the sound barrier, never exceeded the subsonic speed of 600 mph, a velocity routinely achieved by the antiquated jet meteor.<sup>40</sup> 'There is no specific item, which, in itself, could be described as undesirable', asserted Squadron Leader C.B. Peel, 'but what is disturbing is the fact that the information should have been published at all'.<sup>41</sup> Leak enquiries concluded that Pincher probably overheard some 'loose talk' at the Information Directorate meeting on 15 October.<sup>42</sup> (This deduction, Pincher assured me, was 'absolute ball'.)<sup>43</sup> To the dismay of officials, Pincher followed this exposé with the equally destructive allegation, on 11 August 1948, that construction of the new air research station near Bedford had fallen two years behind schedule.<sup>44</sup> Although the subsequent investigation revealed that Pincher had in fact entered the compound on 5 August (seeking an interview with 'some person in authority' and 'quoting a telephone number as a reference'), no site personnel were judged to have disclosed information.<sup>45</sup> The article was a perfect example of Pincher stalking horses with make-believe stories;

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<sup>38</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, 'Vickers Experimental Rocket Aircraft Trials', Deputy Director of Intelligence to Air Officer Commanding Chief, HQ Coastal Command, 13 June 1947.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.; TNA AVIA 65/2340, L.P. Keen to Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, 31 July 1947.

<sup>40</sup> C. Pincher, 'Faster than Sound Flight Fails', *Daily Express*, 17 October 1947.

<sup>41</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, 'Leakage of Information: Supersonic Model Trials', C.B. Peel, 17 October 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>44</sup> C. Pincher, 'The Super-Speed Plan is Running Pretty Slow', *Daily Express*, 11 August 1948.

so 'grossly misleading' was the content, the Air Ministry was compelled to restore public confidence, and issued a comprehensive disavowal in the press.<sup>46</sup>

Pincher continued to rile the Ministry of Supply with a steady proliferation of exposés.<sup>47</sup> 'We have been turning over in our minds', declared S.S. Cherry, 'this journalist has been a thorn in our flesh for a very long time'.<sup>48</sup> Although the Security Section had managed to flush out one of his 'more important' informants, it was widely believed that Pincher was still in 'direct contact' with numerous officials and might even be gaining entry into research plants under a false name.<sup>49</sup> On 1 April 1949, therefore, the Ministry dispatched a Top Secret communiqué ('we should be grateful if you would destroy this when read') to all Storage Depots directing police to 'take particular care in checking the identity of visitors'.<sup>50</sup> On 31 May 1949, MI5 was asked to check security systems, prepare dossiers on scientists, and 'shadow' a few staff while they were off duty.<sup>51</sup> Yet the disclosures persisted. Narrating the events of a Bank Holiday picnic, Pincher claimed on 2 August 1949 to have stumbled across blueprints, housed in a 'deserted Works Unit Hut' on Hampshire Heath, for 'two important defence projects'.<sup>52</sup> He followed this, on 22 September, with details of the Microbiological Research Facility at Porton Down, Wiltshire.<sup>53</sup> 'An unprotected area', confirmed the Ministry, 'it would [have been] comparatively easy for Pincher to pose as a contractor's representative and gain access'.<sup>54</sup> While both articles infringed D-Notice No. 5 (which prohibited the press from publishing details of Atomic Research

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<sup>45</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, 'Leakage of Information: Investigation by Air Ministry Constabulary', 18 August 1948.

<sup>46</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, Miscellaneous Note, DCRF, 11 August 1948.

<sup>47</sup> C. Pincher, 'Atom Chief: I Resign', *Daily Express*, 11 August 1947; C. Pincher, 'Secret Atom Deal Lucky for Some', *Daily Express*, 8 January 1948; C. Pincher, 'Guided Rockets at 19<sup>th</sup> Hole', *Daily Express*, 27 August 1948; C. Pincher, 'The Navy to be Refitted with US Power Units', *Daily Express*, 14 October 1948.

<sup>48</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, S.S. Cherry to W.R.C. Penny, 8 December 1948.

<sup>49</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, W.R.C. Penny to W.D. Wilkinson, 15 October 1948;

<sup>50</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, Est 4 (Sec) to A.J.D. Gerdes, 1 April 1949.

<sup>51</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, 'Report over MI5 Prevention of Leaks in the Light of *Daily Express* Exposé', 31 May 1949.

<sup>52</sup> C. Pincher, 'Now Who Left the Secret Plans on View?', *Daily Express*, 2 August 1949; TNA AVIA 65/2340, R.F. Fenn to Est 4 (Sec), 2 August 1949.

<sup>53</sup> C. Pincher, 'Here is £1,000,000 Worth of Top Secret Exposed', *Daily Express*, 22 September 1949.

Establishments), by pooling information from published sources, careless remarks and intelligent conjecture, Pincher had once again 'succeeded in safely skating over very thin ice'.<sup>55</sup> All that could be done was to furnish security personnel with Pincher's particulars in the faint hope that he might be fool enough to misrepresent himself: height (5ft. 10 inches), build (medium), face (thin and angular), hair (light brown), age (looks about 35), eyes (grey), complexion (fresh), dress (smart and prefers grey), car registration number *et al*.<sup>56</sup> According to Pincher, the entrance to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Foulness, in Essex, had a photograph of him bearing the message: 'A Person of Evil Intent'.<sup>57</sup>

By the late 1950s, Pincher commanded the heights of Fleet Street, making many friends in government along the way. In April 1957, he published a spoof story, (allegedly) in league with defence staffs, revealing that imminent hydrogen bomb testing in the Pacific was to be postponed on account of technical hitches.<sup>58</sup> Disinformation was designed to deter Japanese anti-nuclear campaigners from entering the test site to prevent the explosion. The deception worked: the world's media picked up on the story; the protestors kept their distance; and Britain detonated its bomb – as planned all-along – on 15 May. Yet he also made enemies. On 3 November 1958, he published 'New Nuclear Row Blows Up', which disclosed that Britain possessed approximately 30 atomic bombs.<sup>59</sup> 'I think this time he has really gone too far', declared the Air Minister, George Ward.<sup>60</sup> In a remarkable private note to the Minister of Defence, Duncan Sandys, Ward advocated that 'special action' should be taken to 'watch Chapman Pincher's movements'.<sup>61</sup> For Sandys, however, enlisting MI5 for surveillance purposes was a step too far: 'I do [not] think it would justifiable to ask the Home Secretary (R.A Butler) to have Pincher watched, having regard to all the risks

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<sup>54</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, J.A. Jagers to D.A. Shirlaw, 22 September 1949.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA AVIA 65/2340, H.P. Chadwick to Est 4 (Sec), 4 August 1949.

<sup>56</sup> TNA AVIA 65/2340, J.A. Jagers to D.A. Shirlaw, 22 September 1949; TNA AVIA 65/2340, Ministry of Supply (Atomic Division) to J.A. Jagers, 10 October 1949.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Pincher, *Inside Story*, p. 177.

<sup>59</sup> C. Pincher, 'New Nuclear Row Blows Up', *Daily Express*, 3 November 1958.

<sup>60</sup> TNA DEFE 13/169, G.R. Ward to D. Sandys, 4 November 1958.

that he would find out and embarrass the government publishing news in a sensational way'.<sup>62</sup> Sandys conceded that Pincher was a master at 'covering up his tracks' and authorised a new wave of inter-departmental circulars warning staff to exercise the 'greatest caution' when dealing with him.<sup>63</sup>

Pincher's prickly relationship with Harold Macmillan's Conservative government came to a head in spring 1959. On 1 May, pursuant to a 'discreetly' worded statement by R.A. Butler, many newspapers discussed space research projects.<sup>64</sup> However, while most stories erroneously suggested that Britain would embark on its own programme, Pincher alone relayed the 'exact decision' taken by Cabinet on 30 April to rent – or 'thumb a lift from' – US manufactured satellites.<sup>65</sup> Macmillan was incensed:

Can nothing be done to suppress or *get rid* [emphasis added] of Mr Chapman Pincher? I am getting very concerned about how well informed he always seems to be on defence matters. It is really serious if a Cabinet secret cannot be kept for more than 2 days.<sup>66</sup>

Regulation leak enquiries yielded no evidence of indiscretion. This was hardly surprisingly; leak procedures, argued the Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook, were simply 'useful from time to time to keep the machine fully alive to the importance of security'.<sup>67</sup> Brook surmised that a Minister had probably violated his collective responsibility in order to whip-up public support for an independent space initiative.<sup>68</sup> Although he did not know it, Brook's hunch that departmental politics had taken precedence over high-politics was correct: '[...]', Pincher explained to me, 'dropped something to me just to annoy [...]'.<sup>69</sup> In an absorbing 'Note for the Record', 30 June

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> TNA DEFE 13/169, D. Sandys to G.R. Ward, 1 December 1958.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> TNA PREM 11/2800, N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 1 May 1959.

<sup>65</sup> C. Pincher, 'Britain Does a Space Age Deal with the US: Now Rent-a-Rocket', *Daily Express*, 4 May 1959; TNA PREM 11/2800, H. Macmillan to D. Sandys, 4 May 1959.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> TNA PREM 11/2800, 'Note for the Record', 30 June 1959.

<sup>68</sup> TNA PREM 11/2800, N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 1 May 1959.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

1959, Brook confirmed that Pincher had a great number of influential acquaintances; he lived next-door to Sir Frederick Brundett, Civil Service Commissioner, and was a close friend of Sir William Penney, presently a member of the Atomic Energy Authority.<sup>70</sup> By consorting with such people as these, and piecing together minutiae from apparently insignificant or 'safe' bits of information, Pincher was able to engineer convincing articles. (Brook's instinct was again spot-on: 'Sir Frederick, who loved my book on farm yard animals and was eager to promote his ideas in the *Express*, often supplied me with information.')<sup>71</sup> While some articles were clearly 'embarrassing', Brook rejected the notion that Pincher was either 'a danger to the nation', or a conduit for deliberate leaks: 'It is believed generally that he knows far more than he gives away in his stories – one must distinguish between a sort of respectable chap like Pincher and the less reputable [journalist]'.<sup>72</sup>

The D-Notice system relies on the press and departments of state agreeing on a mutually acceptable definition of the 'public interest'. By the early 1960s, however, this push-and-pull process was becoming increasingly fraught with difficulty and seldom produced a satisfactory outcome for either side. A good example of this came in July 1961. Fearing Iraqi military intervention in Kuwait, following the latter's independence on 19 June, the War Office planned to re-deploy British troops from Cyprus to a safe-zone on the Kuwait-Iraqi border. This was to be done by air, despite Turkey and Iran refusing over-flight permissions. Quite justifiably, officials considered non-disclosure of this covert redeployment absolutely essential, on the grounds that unnecessary publicity might endanger the aircraft and lead to a 'dubious reception' for British troops.<sup>73</sup> There were, moreover, serious political overtones to such an operation. Thomson did 'everything within his power' to try to persuade the press side of the Committee to accept a D-Notice.<sup>74</sup> The *Express* – despite its 'many faults and sins' – initially agreed to stay quiet: '[Its] offices', stated the Foreign Office Director of Public

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<sup>70</sup> TNA PREM 11/2800, 'Note for the Record', 30 June 1959.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>72</sup> TNA PREM 11/2800, N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 1 May 1959.

<sup>73</sup> TNA PREM 11/3474, War Office to N. Brook, 4 July 1961.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Relations, 'are at least run by people with a modicum of intelligence and knowledge of the world'.<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, however, refused to be gagged. It was impossible, they argued, to conceal the routing of troop movements; such information would be freely available in the foreign press and it was not prepared to be twenty-four hours behind the rest of the world's media. 'No invoking of guns heavier than Thomson would have helped', declared a War Office memorandum.<sup>76</sup> At 11:00pm on 4 July, upon learning that *The Times* was running the story, the *Express* followed suit; on 5 July both newspapers detailed the silent redeployment of the Second Parachute Battalion to Kuwait.<sup>77</sup> The Foreign Office was incandescent with rage, lambasting *The Times* for its 'disgraceful, cheap, thoughtless and unpatriotic story', and recommending that they 'get it good and proper in the neck'.<sup>78</sup> Harold Evans denied that his newspaper had behaved irresponsibly; and, in testament to the dog-eat-dog world of contemporary journalism, explained that the *Express* had in fact made the 'biggest splash'.<sup>79</sup>

The press's faith in the utility of the system was dealt a further blow in August 1961 when HMG attempted unsuccessfully to stop the press from revealing that the duplicitous British agent, George Blake, was being prosecuted for espionage. Pincher, who covered the affair at the time, saw this as a deliberate attempt to 'prevent the public scandal of a fantastic security blunder and to save the face of the Foreign Office'.<sup>80</sup> To make matters worse for the Committee, by early 1963 Rear-Admiral Thomson had retired, being succeeded by the ribald, hard-drinking Colonel 'Sammy' Lohan (pronounced 'Lawn'). The Radcliffe Inquiry, which reported in April 1962, had made it very clear that the 'critical question for the future [was] the personality of the Secretary'.<sup>81</sup> The success of the system, it went on, had hitherto been achieved because

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<sup>75</sup> TNA PREM 11/3474, Foreign Office of Director of Public Relations to H. Macmillan, 4 July 1961.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Defence Correspondent, 'RAF Javelins Standing By', *The Times*, 4 July 1961; Staff Reporter, 'Secret of the Sky Men', *Daily Express*, 4 July 1961.

<sup>78</sup> TNA PREM 11/3474, Foreign Office Director of Public Relations to H. Macmillan, 4 July 1961.

<sup>79</sup> TNA PREM 11/3474, H. Evans, 5 July 1961.

<sup>80</sup> C. Pincher, 'Press Gag: Premier to be Quizzed', *Daily Express*, 2 August 1961.

<sup>81</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Security Procedures in the Public Service* (London, April 1962), Cmnd. 1681, p. 33.

of the 'special qualifications' of Thomson himself. Unfortunately, as will now be discussed, Lohan had none of these qualifications.

### 3.2 The D-Notice Affair

The D-Notice Affair – an episode Harold Wilson would retrospectively consider 'one of the costliest mistakes of our near six years in office'<sup>82</sup> – represented a watershed for the interface between HMG and Fleet Street. Triggered by Pincher's revelation in February 1967 that GCHQ regularly intercepted and vetted thousands of private cables, the Affair evolved into a campaign for press freedom, brought personal obloquy upon Wilson himself and very nearly spelt the end for the D-Notice Committee.<sup>83</sup> The Affair remains particularly memorable for the wild schemes and cockamamie ideas of the very press-conscious Labour Prime Minister. Wilson's first mistake was to accuse the *Express* of ignoring two D-Notices placed upon the story. 'Nonsense', responded the newspaper's editor, Derek Marks; every journalist in Fleet Street echoed his rebuttal.<sup>84</sup> His second mistake was to reject very publicly the judgement of Lord Radcliffe's Committee of Inquiry into whether Pincher had deliberately disregarded the gentleman's agreement. As Wilson later admitted, this decision 'succeeded in uniting the press – though not on my side'.<sup>85</sup> In a final twist, the Prime Minister would blacken the name of the incumbent D-Notice Secretary, Colonel Lohan, to the point of resignation.

The rationale for Wilson's hardhanded tactics is a matter of enormous conjecture. Barbara Castle, then Minister of Transport, provided the unsatisfactory conclusion that the Prime Minister had simply 'gone off his rocker'; George Wigg, the Paymaster General, lamented that the controversy 'had not been completely understood, even by those passionately engaged in it'.<sup>86</sup> As a memoirist, Wilson was equally non-committal, stating that he was 'preoccupied with the kind of thing [that]

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<sup>82</sup> H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London, 1971), p. 373.

<sup>83</sup> C. Pincher, 'Cable Vetting Sensation', *Daily Express*, 21 February 1967.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in 'A Question of Character', *Time*, 7 July 1967.

<sup>85</sup> Wilson, *Labour Government*, p. 478.

<sup>86</sup> B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-70* (London, 1984), p. 268; TNA FCO 73/76, G. Wigg, 26 July 1967.

could put lives at risk'.<sup>87</sup> Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay, in their lurid and conspiratorial interpretation of the affair, suggest that Wilson was transfixed with the 'GCHQ-NSA subtext'.<sup>88</sup> The Prime Minister, the argument goes, was bulldozed by GCHQ and the Foreign Office to protect Operation Shamrock, the corresponding – but legally impermissible – American cable-vetting programme. To do this, it was necessary to divert media discourses towards a heated debate about D-Notices. For Pincher himself, Wilson's behaviour marked the 'final stage' in the Prime Minister's personal campaign to 'get [Lohan] out of Whitehall'.<sup>89</sup> Wilson apparently suspected that Lohan was an MI5 stooge who, in league with Sir Martin Furnival Jones (then Director-General), was intent on toppling HMG with smear campaigns.<sup>90</sup> Ten years after the affair, having finally 'buried the hatchet' with the *Express*, Wilson allegedly apologised to Pincher, claiming 'it was my fault – I was after Lohan from the start'.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, under the provisions of the 30 Year Rule, files related to the affair were prohibited from general release whilst officials were kept largely incommunicado. On 13 June 1967, the Foreign Office instructed staffs: 'You should decline to make any comment whatsoever on this subject and may take the line that you have no knowledge of it other than what has been stated publicly'.<sup>92</sup> Fortunately, with records finally entering the National Archives in 1998, it is now possible to provide a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of the main battle lines and contours. Wilson's chief concern, it will be argued, was a determination to strike at the *Express* and its great scoop-gatherer Chapman Pincher. Pincher's resourcefulness in unearthing Whitehall-rocking exclusives had been a constant source of embarrassment to the Labour Government, whose leader took every minor contretemps as if it were a cataclysm. As early as 1965, the Prime Minister and George

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<sup>87</sup> Wilson, *Labour Government*, p. 365.

<sup>88</sup> S. Dorril and R. Ramsay, *Smear! Wilson and the Secret State* (London, 1992), p.143.

<sup>89</sup> Pincher, *Inside Story*, p. 240.

<sup>90</sup> *Smear* claims that Lohan was brooding over a story that a Labour Minister was engaged in an illicit affair with a Communist femme fatale. (S. Dorril, *Smear*, esp. pp. 142-4.)

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>92</sup> TNA FCO 26/122, 'Guidance: No. 140', 13 June 1967.



Wigg, 'Harold's Rasputin',<sup>93</sup> had laid 'trip wires' in the hope that Pincher would commit one too many incursions into the secret state.<sup>94</sup> Cable vetting gave Wilson the perfect opportunity to settle some old scores. The attack on Pincher can also be interpreted as a proxy attack on Fleet Street as a whole. Several scholars have suggested that Wilson harboured a mania, or 'persecution complex', with newspapers. According to Ben Pimlott and Matthew Creavy, the D-Notice Affair was the 'Prime Ministerial equivalent of kicking the cat' – a displaced psychological reaction to wider anxieties and fears about the press.<sup>95</sup> This section will also build on the argument that Wilson had long been determined to terminate the career of Sammy Lohan. As well as being a staunch right-winger, the D-Notice Secretary was a fully paid-up MI5 informant; this alone was reason-enough for Wilson to unseat him. Regrettably it is still impossible to gauge the exact burden placed on Wilson by Britain's Intelligence Community; any assessment that the 'tail wagged the dog' remains an unsubstantiated one.

Wilson's relationship with Pincher soured long before the Affair. As leader of the opposition, Wilson made a formal complaint to the Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, alleging that the Tory administration had been masterminding Pincher's articles in order to discredit the Labour Party ahead of the forthcoming General Election. 'Like many politicians', retaliated Pincher in July 1964, 'he basically resents the right of newspapers to disclose official information which could be embarrassing when he becomes Prime Minister'.<sup>96</sup> Wilson's hostility intensified on 13 January 1965. Ignoring related D-Notices, Pincher leaked details of the MOD's plan to cancel RAF jet programmes, including, controversially, the futuristic Tactical Strike/Reconnaissance 2 (TSR2) aircraft.<sup>97</sup> He also provided a fairly accurate estimation of what each abandoned

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<sup>93</sup> Castle, *Diaries*, p. 268.

<sup>94</sup> P. Hedley and C. Aynsley, *The D-Notice Affair* (London, 1967), p. 52.

<sup>95</sup> B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), p. 446; M. Creavy, 'A Critical Review of the Wilson Government's Handling of the D-Notice Affair 1967', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14:3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 209-27.

<sup>96</sup> C. Pincher, 'This Leak Business: Why Press Freedom must be Defended', *Daily Express*, 25 July 1964.

<sup>97</sup> C. Pincher, 'Healey's Plan to Save £800', *Daily Express*, 13 January 1965.

project would save the taxpayer. Sir Henry Hardman, Permanent Under-Secretary at the MOD, considered the figures 'sufficiently close' to the Top Secret proposals put to Ministers to suggest that Pincher had had 'dealings' with senior defence staff.<sup>98</sup> Pincher himself professed to have inferred the information whilst lunching with Sir Geoffrey Tuttle of the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC). This admission, believed Hardman, was 'almost certainly' an 'attempt to bluff us about the source of his story'.<sup>99</sup> The resultant leak enquiry, while finding no evidence of any official having been guilty of impropriety, discovered that Pincher had telephoned George Wigg shortly after midnight on 14 January, where he mentioned 'detailed financial arrangements' obtained from an import/export agency in the city.<sup>100</sup> This information was read once more as 'Pincherian' subterfuge trying to throw officials off the scent. In the light of this indiscretion, Wilson set in motion a 'long overdue review' of the Committee's arrangements, starting with the reissue of all 'live' Notices in the form of a 'loose-leaf booklet'.<sup>101</sup>

Pincher's band of informants continued to circulate undetected through the body politic. On 12 May 1965, Major Geoffrey Blundell-Brown, an acquaintance of Pincher, noticed that Richard Crossman, Minister for Housing, had carelessly left a sheaf of Cabinet papers behind at Pruniers Restaurant. Instead of handing the documents over to the police, Blundell-Brown, who 'hated Labour's guts',<sup>102</sup> gave them to Pincher. Upon inspecting them – Pincher later told the Franks Committee – 'my hair stood on end'.<sup>103</sup> Unaware of Pincher's involvement, Wilson initially found the episode amusing: 'Thank heavens you weren't dining with Christine Keeler my dear boy!'<sup>104</sup> George Wigg, however, who had recently been chosen to spearhead Labour's new

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<sup>98</sup> TNA PREM 13/576, H. Hardman, 15 January 1965.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> TNA PREM 13/576, L. Helsby, 18 January 1965; TNA PREM 13/576, 'Questionnaire on RAF Aircraft Programme Leak', 19 January 1965; TNA PREM 13/576, H. Hardman to L. Helsby, 16 February 1965.

<sup>101</sup> TNA CAB 21/6077, Ministry of Aviation to H. Hardman, 21 January 1965.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>103</sup> TNA HO 292/22, 'Transcript of Oral Evidence Given on 14 December 1971 by Mr Chapman Pincher', 17 March 1972.

security initiative, was typically garrulous in conspiratorial style explaining that 'nothing could be more inconvenient' than the revelation that a Cabinet Minister had been 'guilty of a lapse of security'.<sup>105</sup> Wigg telephoned Pincher at once calling for 'charity, Harry, charity you old bugger'.<sup>106</sup> Although the *Express* decided not to run a story on the content of the papers (this would constitute a clear infringement of the OSA), on 13 May Pincher duly alluded to Crossman's faux pas and Wilson was later subjected to a fusillade of questions from Tory backbenchers. While Crossman himself refused to feel persecuted (indeed the story ironically helped to diminish his public image as 'an acidulated adding-machine' devoid of human frailties),<sup>107</sup> the affair left the Labour front bench 'thirsting for [Pincher's] professional blood'.<sup>108</sup>

Pincher was not the only journalist getting under Wilson's skin. On 21 January 1965, in an article for *The Listener*, Anthony Howard attacked the Prime Minister's tendency to channel his dealings with the press exclusively through the Parliamentary Lobby. By doing so, Howard argued, the Lobby had become analogous to the Vatican Swiss Guard – 'ornate and decorative but impotent and futile'.<sup>109</sup> HMG immediately defended its trusted conduits, emphasising that lobby correspondents were 'experts in parliamentary affairs', and thus wrote with 'knowledge instead of hearsay'.<sup>110</sup> Howard then threw down the gauntlet by setting himself up as Fleet Street's inaugural 'Whitehall Correspondent'. The job of the 'Whitehall Correspondent' was to unearth government secrets. Scoops were to found in 'the places where real power lies, including Whitehall, the most neglected beat in British journalism'.<sup>111</sup> Wilson interpreted this as a declaration of war. In Cabinet, on 22 February, the Prime Minister described Howard as a 'very dangerous man doing a very dangerous job', since his 'object in life' would be to ferret round Whitehall in search of departmental clashes and

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<sup>104</sup> R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume 1 Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London, 1975), p. 217.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Crossman, *Diaries I*, p. 226; Interview with Mrs Anne Crossman, 19 December 2005.

<sup>108</sup> Hedley and Aynsley, *D-Notice Affair*, p. 52.

<sup>109</sup> A. Howard, 'The Lobby Correspondent', *Listener*, 21 January 1965.

<sup>110</sup> TNA PREM 13/501, 'Lobby and "Whitehall Correspondent"', C. Raphael, 22 January 1965.

differences.<sup>112</sup> For Sir Laurence Helsby, Head of the Home Civil Service, Howard's appointment heralded a deliberate attempt to penetrate the veil of administrative secrecy that covered the advice given by civil servants to ministers.<sup>113</sup> Wilson's response was to mount a blockade against Howard personally. On 25 February, a letter went round to all ministers and permanent secretaries promptly banning them from talking to Howard, even on an unattributable basis. Officials were reminded that the role of 'Whitehall Correspondent' connoted no special status; Howard was an ordinary reporter whose dealings with departments should be restricted to Public Relations Officers.<sup>114</sup> By July, so securely had the government machine gone into lock-down, Howard had been forced to break off his campaign. Wilson would later boast that he had 'seen off' the animal with 'his tail between his legs'.<sup>115</sup>

In the run up to the D-Notice Affair, Wilson – to quote Barbara Castle – was 'getting pathological about leaks'.<sup>116</sup> In February 1966, he issued a strongly worded circular reminding all senior crown servants of their obligation to total secrecy: 'The essence of the transaction of governmental business is the maintenance of a relationship of trust and confidence between all those who are engaged in it'.<sup>117</sup> For Richard Crossman, devotee of collegial governance, this was tantamount to Wilson bestriding Whitehall like a President: 'As long as Harold himself feels that anything he tells a journalist is briefing, and anything any other Minister does is leaking, we're not going to have a very constructive discussion'.<sup>118</sup> In June 1966, despite recognising that a 'renewed oral warning' would be less 'invidious', Wilson approved Burke Trend's suggestion to subject Ministers to exactly the same leak enquiries – questionnaires *et al.*

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<sup>111</sup> Howard, 'Lobby Correspondent'.

<sup>112</sup> Castle, *Diaries*, p. 15; TNA PREM 13/501, 'Note for the Record', 21 January 1965.

<sup>113</sup> TNA PREM 13/503, L. Helsby to H. Wilson, 26 July 1965.

<sup>114</sup> TNA PREM 13/501, D. Mitchell to H. Wilson, 22 January 1965; TNA PREM 13/501, 'Relations with the Press', L. Helsby, 25 February 1965.

<sup>115</sup> Cited in J. Margach, *The Abuse of Power: The War between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (London, 1978), p. 154.

<sup>116</sup> Castle, *Diaries*, p. 189.

<sup>117</sup> TNA PREM 13/1182, 'Cabinet Procedure: Precautions against Unauthorised Disclosure of Information', Note by the Prime Minister, February 1966.

<sup>118</sup> Crossman, *Diaries I*, pp. 328-9; R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume 2 Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons* (London, 1976), p. 120.

– as their official advisers.<sup>119</sup> This represented the first in a series of gradual reforms to the inter-departmental leak procedure. On 3 August 1966, believing that ‘we have tended to look too much at individual occurrences and too little at trends and patterns’, Helsby charged MI5 with undertaking all routine analysis of suspected leaks.<sup>120</sup> Departmental heads were also encouraged to distinguish, before calling foul, the ‘real’ from the ‘apparent’ leak.

Published on 21 February 1967, ‘Cable Vetting Sensation’ was not, as the *Economist* pointed out, ‘one of [Pincher’s] greatest scoops’.<sup>121</sup> The interception of foreign communications traffic was publicly enshrined in Section 4 (1) of the age-old OSA (1920):

Where it appears to a Secretary of State that such a course is expedient in the public interest, he may, by warrant under his hand, require any person who owns or controls any telegraphic cable...to produce him...the originals and transcripts, either of all telegrams, or of telegrams of any specified class or description.<sup>122</sup>

Moreover, as Matthew Creavy argues, ‘if [the] tale lacked exceptional novelty, it also lacked exclusivity’;<sup>123</sup> Pincher’s source – a telegraphist (Robert Lawson) formerly employed by Commercial Cables and Western Union – had also been shopping the story around the offices of the *Daily Mail* and the London University Student Union magazine, *Sennet*. What made the article so explosive was the fact that Pincher had shrewdly conflated the issue of telephone tapping with the larger Orwellian fear of intrusion into privacy. The 1960s had seen a proliferation of discourses concerning repressive surveillance practices and scopic regimes. For this reason, ‘it read’,

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<sup>119</sup> TNA PREM 13/3072, B. Trend to H. Wilson, 8 June 1966; TNA CAB 164/847, ‘Inter-Departmental Leak Procedure’, W. Armstrong, 5 March 1970.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 164/847, L. Helsby to B. Trend, 3 August 1966.

<sup>121</sup> *Economist*, 4 March 1967, p. 806.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in Creavy, ‘Critical Review’, p. 213.

<sup>123</sup> Creavy, ‘Critical Review’, p. 213; Reporter, ‘Secrets Check on Cables’, *Daily Mail*, 21 February 1967; TNA PREM 13/1816, ‘Unofficial Attempts to Gag Press Fail Narrowly’, *Sennet*, 28 February 1967.

complained David Winnock MP, 'like something from 1984'.<sup>124</sup> C.J.H. Keith, working for the British Embassy in Madrid, described the article as written in 'napalm instead of ink'.<sup>125</sup> Wilson, who by chance had been scheduled to answer a parliamentary question about D-Notices on the same day, derided Pincher's 'sensationalised and inaccurate' story, suggesting that two D-Notices (27 April 1956 and 30 October 1964) had been knowingly breached, an infringement about which the *Express* had been 'repeatedly warned'.<sup>126</sup> Ironically, only weeks before, Wilson had been required to present Pincher with the award of 'Reporter of the Decade'.

The *Express* was quick to refute Wilson's allegation. On 20 February, claimed Pincher, he had met with the D-Notice Secretary at the Écu de France. Over lunch, Lohan had placed two D-Notices on the table, but suggested that one of them did not apply and the other was 'so bloody marginal we can put it away'.<sup>127</sup> In Whitehall, on 22 February, Lohan was summoned to give his version of events to Sir James Dunnett, Permanent Secretary at the MOD. According to Lohan, GCHQ, the Foreign Office and MI5 had made it explicitly clear to him that 'matters of national security were at stake'.<sup>128</sup> Given, therefore, that there was a 'good deal more to [the] story than was first apparent', he insisted that he and Pincher meet in person. Pincher's account of the luncheon, claimed Lohan, was a total 'distortion' of what transpired. Lohan acknowledged that he had momentarily put aside both the D-Notices, but did this 'in order not to hold up conversation'.<sup>129</sup> Regrettably, it was clear that Pincher had taken this to mean that the D-Notices had no relevance whatsoever. (Pincher would later add

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<sup>124</sup> Cited in TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Unofficial Attempts to Gag Press Fail Narrowly', *Sennet*, 28 February 1967.

<sup>125</sup> TNA FCO 26/122, C.J.H. Keith to Joint Information Policy and Guidance Department, 21 June 1967.

<sup>126</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. 3pm, 21 February 1967'; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 741, 21 February 1967, cols 1432-3. The first D-Notice referred to 'secret intelligence or counter-intelligence methods and activities in or outside the United Kingdom'. The second referred to 'the various methods used in the interception of foreign communications for secret intelligence purposes'. (TNA FCO 73/76, 'Lord Chancellor's Speech on the D-Notice System', 6 July 1967.)

<sup>127</sup> C. Pincher, 'Wilson and the Express: A Charge Refuted', *Daily Express*, 22 February 1967.

<sup>128</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Minute: Lohan', 22 February 1967.

<sup>129</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, S. Lohan to J. Dunnett, 22 February 1967.

an interesting footnote to his infamous luncheon with Lohan by suggesting that MI5, under instructions from Wilson, had installed bugging equipment behind the banquet seats of the Écu de France. The Prime Minister, therefore, knew perfectly well what had taken place during the lunchtime conversation.)<sup>130</sup>

With Lohan's testimony implying that Pincher had been at fault, Wilson notified Edward Heath, leader of the Opposition, that he 'could not let the matter rest'.<sup>131</sup> In Parliament, on 23 February, he announced that an inquiry should be set up to examine the affair, with a view to indicting the *Express* under the OSA. This task, he suggested, should be carried out under the auspices of the D-Notice Committee itself.<sup>132</sup> Denouncing the Prime Minister's proposal to wield the voluntary association as brokerage for disputes between HMG and Fleet Street, Lee Howard, editor of the *Mirror*, tendered his resignation from the Committee.<sup>133</sup> Howard's abdication, declared *The Spectator*, was a 'real hack' on the 'shins' of Wilson, who had long considered the *Mirror* as 'the hooker in the socialist pack'.<sup>134</sup> Wilson eventually acquiesced to an inquiry administered by a Committee of Privy Councillors. Chaired by Lord Radcliffe, the Committee would include Selwyn Lloyd and Emanuel Shinwell, chosen in part because they were both former Ministers of Defence. By early June, with the Committee's Report still unpublished, Pincher wrote to John Drew, an Assistant Under-Secretary at the MOD. Here Pincher complained that he had twice had to 'put off his holiday' while waiting for the Committee's verdict.<sup>135</sup> He also interpreted the delay as a deliberate attempt by HMG to find a suitable moment for its publication. It is now clear from declassified Prime Minister's files that Wilson had taken a very keen interest in the production of the Report. On 16 May, with the Committee's preliminary findings committed to draft, Wilson called Lord Radcliffe to Chequers where the two would discourse *à deux*. Loath to accept that press reaction would be 'something of a

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<sup>130</sup> C. Pincher, 'Bugs in the Banquette', *Spectator*, 22 August 1998.

<sup>131</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. 3pm, 21 February 1967'.

<sup>132</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Statement by the Prime Minister', 23 February 1967.

<sup>133</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, L. Howard to S. Lohan, 24 February 1967.

<sup>134</sup> D. McLachlan, 'One D'd Thing after Another', *Spectator*, 3 March 1967.

three day wonder', Wilson pleaded with Radcliffe to 'omit the [Report's] conclusions' which, as well as acquitting the *Express*, were articulated in unmistakably 'black and white' terms.<sup>136</sup> Radcliffe nevertheless stood firm; Wilson, he suggested, was 'exaggerating' the Report's political significance whilst the 'facts of the incident' would not corroborate an imputation that the *Express* had been 'unscrupulous', 'irresponsible' or hostile to the 'spirit of the D-Notice system'.<sup>137</sup>

Published on 13 June, the Committee's Report exonerated both Pincher and the *Express*. 'We conclude [that] it would not be right to say the article amounted to a breach of the D-Notices'.<sup>138</sup> In Fleet Street, Wilson was cast as a man traduced, while Pincher was lauded as a journalist who had confronted the Establishment and secured a memorable victory. At a celebratory dinner put on by Sir Max Aitken (then *Express* proprietor), the degree of schadenfreude was palpable, with every journalist and editor toasting Wilson's misfortune.<sup>139</sup> The Committee's Report provided – what Crossman called – a 'fascinating exposition of stoogery and idiocy'.<sup>140</sup> On the evening before the story broke, the Foreign Secretary (George Brown) was told by Denis Greenhill, then Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), that a 'hot one' was brewing in the offices of the *Express*. Brown – who was out to dinner and three sheets to the wind – then telephoned Max Aitken in the hope of torching the story. Aitken was not, as Brown had assumed, at the *Express*. Also inebriated, Aitken was speaking in a porter's box from the Garrick Club. Unfortunately, as Brown was using an open line, he was unable to impress the security implications of the case. To make matters worse, Aitken was not in the company of his editor, Derek Marks, and 'had no idea' to what the

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<sup>135</sup> TNA PREM 13/1814, J.A. Drew, 12 June 1967.

<sup>136</sup> TNA PREM 13/1817, 'Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and Lord Radcliffe, 16 May 1967'.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors Appointed to Inquire into D-Notice Matters*, (London, 1967), Cmnd. 3309.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>140</sup> Crossman, *Diaries II*, p. 380.



Foreign Secretary was referring.<sup>141</sup> The conversation nevertheless concluded with Brown somehow convinced that he had killed the story. This 'Fred Karno' moment exposed the lack of rigorous mechanism at the heart of the D-Notice system.

Although the Report's notoriety was ultimately short-lived ('to judge by the postbag of No. 10', recalled Wigg, 'it put the public to sleep'),<sup>142</sup> Wilson refused to let the matter rest, and issued a hard-hitting White Paper dissociating the government from Lord Radcliffe's findings. Approved in Parliament through a strictly party-line vote of confidence, the White Paper made several inflammatory claims. Firstly, that the article fell within the ambit of D-Notices; secondly, that Pincher had caused grave damage to national security – 'the consequences of which cannot even now be fully discussed'; and thirdly, that the *Express* must bear 'direct responsibility' for what happened.<sup>143</sup> Wilson's decision to publish the White Paper alienated his Cabinet. 'As a piece of apologetics', wrote Richard Crossman in his diary, '[it] is extremely unconvincing and will do Harold untold harm'.<sup>144</sup> What angered ministers was the fact that Wilson had made the decision without consulting them. Discussions had been circumscribed in a ring-fence, comprising Gerald Gardiner (then Lord Chancellor), Wigg and Brown. Prime Ministerial footwork, moreover, precluded any 'chance of Cabinet amending it'; as well as engulfing ministers in a 'vast amount of reading late the night before', Wilson scheduled a lengthy foreign policy deliberation on Rhodesia, thereby leaving only thirty minutes to discuss his White Paper.<sup>145</sup> For Crossman, the securing of Cabinet imprimatur without proper collective discussion was tantamount to a 'presidential line'.<sup>146</sup> Wilson's tactics also saw him cross swords with the higher civil service. On 28 May, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, had pleaded with the

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<sup>141</sup> Lord Radcliffe, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors Appointed to Inquire into D-Notice Matters*, (London, 1967), Cmnd. 3309. I am grateful to Rear-Admiral Nick Wilkinson for clarifying the particulars of this confusing episode.

<sup>142</sup> G. Wigg, *George Wigg* (London, 1972), p. 348.

<sup>143</sup> *The Government's Response to the Radcliffe Report* (London, 1967), Cmnd. 3312; TNA PREM 13/1809, 'Extract from BBC2 News, 11:15pm', 13 June 1967; TNA PREM 13/1809, 'Extract from ITN News Bulletin, 8.55pm', 13 June 1967.

<sup>144</sup> Crossman, *Diaries II*, p. 380.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

Prime Minister to put the White Paper to a series of ministerial roundtables.<sup>147</sup> Rejecting this out-of-hand, Wilson went on to inform Trend that he would be 'somewhat intolerant of intervention by the official machine once we move into the political phase'.<sup>148</sup>

The press wholeheartedly condemned the White Paper and withdrew their support for the Prime Minister. 'It was the only occasion I can recall where all the newspapers, however competitive, presented a united front against the Whitehall machine', declared Pincher in 2007.<sup>149</sup> Lord Radcliffe – 'in effect the number 1 on the List of the Great and the Good'<sup>150</sup> – was someone whom the media respected. Wilson's action, asserted the *New Statesman*, was comparable to 'rejecting the referee's decision'.<sup>151</sup> 'Every dog is allowed one bite, but a different view is taken of a dog that goes on biting all the time', warned the *Privateer*.<sup>152</sup> Ignoring the continued protests of his Cabinet ('Lohan must not be made the fall-guy', implored Crossman),<sup>153</sup> Wilson then switched his attack to the hapless D-Notice Secretary. In Parliament, on 22 June, he announced that Lohan had not been positively vetted; had misled the Radcliffe Committee; and had foolishly allowed an 'alcoholic aura' to impair his dealings with Pincher at the Écu de France.<sup>154</sup> Wigg then 'rubbed salt into Lohan's wounds' by publishing his evidence to the Radcliffe Committee.<sup>155</sup> How accurate were Wilson's allegations? On the status of Lohan's security clearance, the Prime Minister was disingenuous on two counts. Firstly, he held back the detail that in 1955, while serving as a Major in the Army, Lohan had been put through a 'modified form' of positive vetting.<sup>156</sup> Although outdated by 1967 standards, it was positive vetting nonetheless.

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<sup>147</sup> TNA PREM 13/1819, 'Note of a Telephone Conversation between the Prime Minister and Burke Trend, 1:15pm, 28 May 1967'.

<sup>148</sup> TNA PREM 13/1818, H. Wilson to B. Trend, 29 May 1967.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>150</sup> P. Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The Office and Its Holders Since 1945* (London, 2000), p. 313.

<sup>151</sup> *New Statesman*, 16 June 1967, p. 1.

<sup>152</sup> 'Blue Pencil and Red Dagger: The New Threat Aimed at the Heart of Britain', *Privateer*, 1:5, pp. 1-2.

<sup>153</sup> Crossman, *Diaries II*, p. 394.

<sup>154</sup> S. Lohan, 'Slandered out of Business', *Spectator*, 30 June 1967, pp. 763-5.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>156</sup> TNA PREM 13/1814, L. Helsby to H. Wilson, 16 June 1967.

Secondly, Wilson failed to mention that it had been the 'consistent and unanimous view' of both MI5 and departmental security experts that the post of D-Notice Secretary 'did not warrant positive vetting'.<sup>157</sup> Heath, who was invited to thumb-through all the correspondence, recognised immediately that Wilson had omitted vital elements of Lohan's vetting history: 'Nothing that we have seen leads us to believe that [the] Colonel was unreliable from a security point of view'.<sup>158</sup> The allegation that Lohan had deceived the Radcliffe Committee was not entirely unsound. According to Selwyn Lloyd, speaking to Pincher some years later, Lohan had faked the details of a number of important documents: 'As soon as we began to take evidence we knew who was telling the truth'.<sup>159</sup> On the charge that Lohan had been drunk, Wilson probably embellished the truth, since the word in Fleet Street was that both men could not have been more sober on this occasion. According to Pincher, speaking in 2007, Lohan had consumed an *apéritif* (possibly a dry martini) and two glasses of house-wine.<sup>160</sup>

So what compelled Wilson to disclose these damning imputations? While there is no evidence, as Stephen Dorril suggests, that Trend 'encouraged Wilson in Lohan-bashing in the hope of distracting attention away from the...intelligence sub-text',<sup>161</sup> declassified files give strong clues as to the Prime Minister's motivation. For various reasons, Wilson wanted Lohan sacked. Firstly, like many in Whitehall, Wilson believed that Lohan was doing a job that was quite beyond him. A heavy drinker, inveterate gossip, and known for his 'irregular relations' with various women, Lohan was clearly unsuited to the task of protecting national security. (According to the Radcliffe Committee, Lohan had bragged so regularly about his sexual 'powers' that one witness doubted whether his 'performance' could match his braggadocio.)<sup>162</sup> Secondly, Wilson was convinced that Lohan, a former Section Chief with the Special Operations Executive, was colluding with MI5 in order to bring down the Labour Government.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, E. Heath to H. Wilson, 5 July 1967.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Dorril, *Smear*, p. 144.

<sup>162</sup> TNA PREM 13/1814, L. Helsby to H. Wilson, 16 June 1967.

The Prime Minister's anxieties were heightened on 16 June when Helsby informed him that, 'The Security Service had been paying a retainer for [Lohan's] services in bringing them small pieces of information from Fleet Street'.<sup>163</sup> The retainer, disguised as an 'entertainment allowance', was believed to be worth £1,500 per annum.<sup>164</sup> Lohan was also a founding member of the Knightsbridge-based Special Forces Club, well known for its connections to MI5. Indeed, the club's dining room and bar, suggests a corpus of literature, was where the conspirators behind the so-called Wilson Plot hatched their putsch.<sup>165</sup> However, as the Prime Minister hinted at in Parliament, his main problem was Lohan's 'over-close association' with Pincher. The possibility that Lohan was supplying the great scoop-gatherer with anti-Labour smears had been the subject of several inquiries. The most recent, carried out in early June by Charles Morris (Wilson's Parliamentary Private Secretary), concluded that 26 articles – covering a multiplicity of issues from 1964-1967 – '*might*' have been based on 'unattributable briefings' from the D-Notice Secretary.<sup>166</sup> Wilson also believed that Lohan owned a key to Pincher's flat where he would 'entertain loose women' and enjoy nights of bacchanalian revelry.<sup>167</sup> 'On one occasion', Pincher told me, 'Sammy used my St. James' flat for a bird; he left it in such a bloody mess that I never did it again'.<sup>168</sup> Although Lohan strongly denied Wilson's allegations, his position as Secretary had become untenable and he duly resigned on 17 June, claiming to have been 'slandered out of business'.<sup>169</sup> One can't help but feel a shred of sympathy for Lohan. Friendly relations with journalists were a prerequisite for the conciliatory job of reconciling discord between Westminster and Fleet Street. His professional closeness with Pincher arguably amounted to little more than keeping close to a kicking horse. It was no accident, moreover, that Fleet Street's

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Rear-Admiral Nick Wilkinson, former D-Notice Secretary, 21 November 2007.

<sup>165</sup> D. Leigh, *The Wilson Plot: How the Spycatchers and their American Allies Tried to Overthrow the British Government* (London, 1988).

<sup>166</sup> TNA PREM 13/1816, 'Press Disclosures', C. Morris to G. Wigg.

<sup>167</sup> TNA PREM 13/1820, L. Helsby to H. Wilson, 16 June 1967.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>169</sup> Evening News Reporter, 'Get an Office Boy says Lohan', *Evening News*, 14 June 1967; 'Positive Clearance', *The Sunday Times*, 18 June 1967; TNA PREM 13/1814, S. Lohan to J. Dunnnett, 17 June 1967.

Labour-supporting newspapers all portrayed Lohan as a drunken flibbertigibbet. On 9 June, Wilson had telephoned Hugh Cudlipp, Chairman of the *Daily Mirror*, mischievously asking him to downplay the idea that the Secretary 'had been victimised'.<sup>170</sup>

By early July, Wilson finally started to restrain himself from destructive polemics. In a loose handwritten minute, he acknowledged that 'government servants should not have been instructed to lie [publicly]', and ruled that Ministers should 'say no more' on the affair.<sup>171</sup> Wilson's new posture of magnanimity crystallised with the Lord Chancellor's conclusion on 6 July that 'the government accept, without hesitation, responsibility for the defects in the D-Notice system and errors made by officials'.<sup>172</sup> Lohan, he opined, should not have been made a scapegoat; the Secretary had been directed 'to say as little as possible [to Pincher] about the actual operations in question', whilst the Foreign Office had deliberately excluded him from key meetings. The Lord Chancellor also rejected the accusation that Lohan was a sottish buffoon addicted to abnormal practices. He was – as one member of the Chancellor's Inquiry rhapsodised – 'a jolly good character [that] really might be incorporated in the next James Bond film'.<sup>173</sup> A Civil Service Tribunal, established to investigate Wilson's criticisms, was less complimentary to the former Secretary. While emphasising that 'there was never any doubt[ing] his loyalty to his country', the Tribunal found that Lohan had made 'several errors of judgement' and had allowed his long association with Pincher to develop in a way that adversely affected his ability to discharge the exceptional weight of responsibility that fell on him.<sup>174</sup> For Lohan, the Tribunal was a 'Kangaroo Court', organised in the name of political expediency.

Over the following months, as the etiquette of public discourse required, HMG subjected the D-Notice system to an institutional autopsy. The Lord Chancellor was in

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<sup>170</sup> TNA PREM 13/1819, 'Note of a Telephone Conversation between the Prime Minister and Hugh Cudlipp, 8:00pm, 9 June 1967'.

<sup>171</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, Handwritten Minute, H. Wilson.

<sup>172</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, 'Lord Chancellor's Speech on the D-Notice System', 6 July 1967.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

no doubt that 'a new start should be made'.<sup>175</sup> It was against this background that Wilson held a series of 'off-the-record' meetings with the Committee's press representatives. Official grievances were twofold. Firstly, existing D-Notices did not afford sensitive intelligence operations 'the protection they deserved'; secondly, the chumminess of the Committee's operators was not a rigorous method of protecting matters of national security.<sup>176</sup> The Prime Minister suggested that the Secretary should be drawn from Fleet Street; he would be a person in whom the press had complete confidence and who, in concert with official regulations, could be fully cleared from a security point of view. Selecting a Secretary from outside official circles, moreover, obviated any suspicion that the Committee was being manipulated for political purposes. Press members, especially those representing Conservative newspapers, questioned the workability of any scheme which was contingent on a senior civil servant successfully dispensing advice on what was or was not 'in the national interest'.<sup>177</sup> The D-Notice Affair, asserted Michael Berry (the *Sunday Telegraph*), had ensured that the press would no longer pander to an officially inscribed interpretation of the public interest.<sup>178</sup> Discussions reached a breakwater. Ministers, countered Wigg, did not claim the right to call 'national security' cynically in aid against genuine free expression; but they did ask that their sincerity should be accepted and respected.<sup>179</sup> The incentive for reform, however, could not be halted indefinitely. Substantive changes were initially threefold: the new Secretary (Vice Admiral Sir Norman Denning) should be 'au courant' with all the facts that lie behind any D-Notice request; he should have a deputy; and he should be relocated to a secure office within the

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<sup>174</sup> TNA PREM 13/1815, 'Civil Service Tribunal Investigating Complaints by Colonel Lohan', 8 August 1967.

<sup>175</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, 'Lord Chancellor's Speech on the D-Notice System', 6 July 1967.

<sup>176</sup> TNA PREM 13/1813, 'Note of a Meeting with Representatives of the Press, No. 10, 21 June 1967'.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, M. Berry to G. Wigg, 27 July 1967.

<sup>179</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, G. Wigg to M. Berry, 26 July 1967.

MOD.<sup>180</sup> Hitherto the Secretary had 'hot-desked' between Belgrave Square (Thomson's preferred locale), Shellmex House and the Écu de France.

Contrary to Wilson's parliamentary admission that he intended to 'liberalise' existing D-Notices, the Notice enveloping Britain's Intelligence Services was reconstituted on 22 September 1967 to encompass an even broader range of offences. D-Notice No. 10, which included the preamble that services must operate in 'conditions of secrecy', forbade publications concerning:

Secret activities (both domestic and foreign); identities, whereabouts and tasks of intelligence operatives; addresses and telephone numbers of the intelligence services; organisational structures, communication networks and numerical strength; details of police assistance; and features of the manner in which intelligence methods (for example telephone tapping) were applied in practice.<sup>181</sup>

In 1971, as well reducing the number of D-Notices from 14 to 12, it was decided that each Notice should be prefaced with an 'introduction' setting out the principles underlying the system.<sup>182</sup> The internal deliberations preceding this decision illustrated the breakdown in trust between the press wing of the Committee and official delegates. Press representatives, asserted L.J. Dunnett (MOD), had been 'extraordinarily stupid and difficult' about the wording of the introduction; they were, he continued, an 'extra childish set of people who still did not understand what D-Notices are all about'.<sup>183</sup>

'I can think of no other event that so resembled Watergate', claimed Chapman Pincher in 2007: 'Like Nixon, Wilson thought he could surreptitiously manipulate political events, but was ultimately exposed by media action'.<sup>184</sup> Though Wilson survived the Affair, which he later confessed in an apparent personal epiphany was his worst self-inflicted wound, his authority was permanently undermined and his press relations

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<sup>180</sup> TNA PREM 13/1813, 'Record of a Meeting at No.10, 7 September 1967'.

<sup>181</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, 'New D-Notice No. 10: British Intelligence Services. Replacing D-Notice of 27 April 1956', T. Cochrane, 22 September 1967.

<sup>182</sup> TNA DEFE 24/431, D-Notices and Revisions.

<sup>183</sup> TNA DEFE 23/65, L.J. Dunnett to Law Officer's Department, 20 May 1971.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

severely damaged. Every newspaper carried leading articles denouncing the Prime Minister's personal crusade against the *Express*. The D-Notice Affair, it might be argued, was the fulcrum of Wilson's mainstream political career. Thereafter, he would develop an even more neurotic self-absorption towards the views of journalists, and become sadly vulnerable to the counsel of media sceptics and people of conspiratorial mien. The Affair very nearly killed the D-Notice system. The Committee's Secretary, the blundering Sammy Lohan, was forced to resign, while the danger of protecting national security in cosmopolitan watering holes was laid bare. For Pincher, the Affair was the high water mark for his own audacious brand of politically charged investigative journalism, earning him plaudits as one of the greatest hacks of his generation. 'My career was on a peak', Pincher told me: 'I had taken on the Establishment at the highest levels and had defeated them'.<sup>185</sup> While many journalists might have feared reprisals and kept a low profile in consequence, Pincher was now more determined than ever to expose Downing Street horrors to the public gaze, fortified by a trademark confidence that brooked no dissent:

I was never worried about repercussions – not a jot. The Affair stimulated by determination to unearth official secrets and expose them.<sup>186</sup>

Ominously, having worked with the D-Notice Committee for many years, Pincher decided never to use the system again: 'I was so incensed by the attempt to smear my reputation that I severed all connections'.<sup>187</sup> As Section 3 will now discuss, armed with his cattle-prod invective and 'screw-'em-all' mentality, this decision would make Pincher a very dangerous proposition indeed.

### 3.3 1967 – 1975

The final phase of Pincher's career in journalism saw the great scoop-gatherer consolidate his reputation as an ornery right-winger. After the D-Notice Affair, Pincher

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.



was unapologetic about his conservative agenda, and gave no quarter to the Labour Party elite, especially Wilson. On 24 June 1967, he made a great splash of Charles de Gaulle's decision to cancel the £250m Anglo-French project to build a variable-geometry fighter, or 'Swing-Wing', as a European counterpart to the American tactical strike aircraft, the F-111.<sup>188</sup> Pincher had already discussed the sensitive subject with the MOD Controller of Public Relations. The PR Controller, having agreed a 'defensive line' with Downing Street, informed Pincher that neither the MOD nor No. 10 could comment.<sup>189</sup> In his article, however, Pincher had given details of a private note sent from Pierre Messmer, the French Army Minister, to UK Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, on 16 June. The message explained that for reasons of cost the French had decided to pull out of the project. This disclosure further embarrassed the government, since Wilson would now have to justify, without preparation, yet another crushing blow to Britain's ailing aircraft industry, already reeling from the TSR2 aftermath. The Prime Minister was particularly aggrieved because Pincher had informed the MOD that he was doubtful whether he would use the story. Pincher's account, considered the Cabinet Office, was 'so close to the mark' that there seemed little doubt that a leak had occurred.<sup>190</sup> The resultant enquiry put forward several theories as to the source of Pincher's information. Group Captain Williams, Downing Street Security Officer, suggested that Pincher might have intercepted telephone calls between the MOD and the British Embassy in Paris. There were, argued Williams, 'absolutely no existing facilities' for protecting the security of cross-channel communications.<sup>191</sup> More likely was that Pincher had received the information from a senior right-wing contact in the BAC. Wilson's decision to cancel the TSR2 in 1965 had made the Labour Government deeply unpopular among the BAC hierarchy; it was not inconceivable, therefore, that someone was looking to stir up trouble.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> C. Pincher, 'French Say: We Can't Afford Swing-Wing', *Daily Express*, 24 June 1967.

<sup>189</sup> TNA PREM 13/1790, 'The *Daily Express*', MOD Controller of Public Relations, 20 June 1967.

<sup>190</sup> TNA PREM 13/1790, 'Collapse of Anglo-French Swing-Wing', E.M. Abbot to M. Halls, 10 July 1967.

<sup>191</sup> TNA PREM 13/1790, Group Captain Williams, 13 July 1967.

By late 1967, Pincher had become the ultimate gadfly journalist, persistently annoying and provoking HMG with leaks. On 20 September, following a private note from Burke Trend, Wilson warned his Cabinet about the dangers of irresponsible talk. 'Informed' and 'experienced' journalists like Pincher, underlined the Prime Minister, were incredibly adept at 'piecing together small scraps' of information and should therefore be avoided at all costs.<sup>192</sup> In March 1968, concerned that junior ministers were particularly vulnerable to the underhand tactics of political hacks, Trend advised Wilson to restrict the circulation of Top Secret papers to senior government members.<sup>193</sup> Unfortunately for Wilson, as the following episode illustrates, Pincher's primary sources at this time were in Whitehall, not Westminster. On 30 October, he used classified information obtained from a 'senior Whitehall source' to suggest that the Minister for Technology, Tony Benn, had allowed development of the 'prestige aircraft' Concorde to run terminally behind schedule.<sup>194</sup> The article referred to technical troubles, specifically a problem of weight; to an increase in cost, quoting a figure of £620m; and to an attempt by James Callaghan (then Chancellor) to secure French abandonment of the project. Benn took great umbrage and instituted departmental leak procedure. Once again, however, investigations proved completely fruitless.<sup>195</sup> 'This ghastly leak procedure ritual is becoming more and more farcical', lamented Burke Trend.<sup>196</sup> The work it involved was a 'waste of time and effort', and almost certainly contributed to a demoralising of civil servants who had a tendency to assume that Ministers had in fact been responsible.

In February 1968, following a further bout of nugatory leak enquiries (all naturally related to Pincher), Wilson set up an 'Official Committee on Security' to review existing protocol for unearthing leaks. The Committee explained that current practice involved two stages:

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<sup>192</sup> TNA PREM 13/3072, 'Security of Ministerial Discussions', B. Trend to H. Wilson, 20 September 1967.

<sup>193</sup> TNA PREM 13/3072, B. Trend to H. Wilson, 13 March 1968.

<sup>194</sup> C. Pincher, *Daily Express*, 30 October 1967.

<sup>195</sup> TNA CAB 164/520, R.H. Melville to L. Helsby, 1 November 1967; TNA CAB 164/529, P.H. Gore-Booth to R. Melville, 15 December 1967.

1. Preliminaries (i.e., the decisions made before carrying out an enquiry);
2. Procedure (i.e., the investigation itself).

Recent experience had confirmed that 'Procedure' attracted the most 'contempt' and 'cynical odium'.<sup>197</sup> It was imperative, therefore, never to activate 'Procedure' until the appropriate 'Preliminaries' had been conducted. To prevent the 'trail growing cold', preliminaries should be completed within a week of the first evidence of a leak, preferably within two or three days. The Committee also advocated that departments pursue more oral questioning, an exercise to which MI5 could be consulted whenever suspicion was aroused by an individual's response.<sup>198</sup> In March 1970, Sir William Armstrong, Head of the Civil Service, carried out a further review. Although seldom capable of 'bringing offenders to book', Armstrong was disinclined to abandon leak enquires altogether, suggesting that they deterred others from offending and averted criticism that HMG did not take security seriously.<sup>199</sup> His recommendations were twofold. Firstly, dedicate more resources to a few 'in depth' investigations rather than spread-eagling efforts thinly over a larger number of cases. Secondly, make greater use of professional interrogators. This would involve training security staff in interrogation techniques – 'of a gentlemanly sort, of course'.<sup>200</sup> Both strategies, argued Armstrong, would help to distinguish between 'deliberate leaks' and those arising from careless or loose talk. Perhaps predictably, with Pincher still at large, officials would not have to wait long to test the success of their procedural tinkering.

On 12 November 1971, Pincher leaked details of Admiral Sir William O'Brien's 'Haul Down' report, circulating in Whitehall following his retirement as Commander-in-Chief of the Western Fleet.<sup>201</sup> As well as being highly critical of the secret decision to apportion Navy planes to the RAF, the Report constituted a devastating indictment of

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<sup>196</sup> TNA CAB 164/520, 'Draft Letter', B. Trend to R.H. Melville, 7 November 1967.

<sup>197</sup> TNA CAB 164/847, 'Paper for the Official Committee on Security Procedure for Inquiries into Leakages', 13 February 1968.

<sup>198</sup> TNA CAB 164/847, 'Leak Procedure: Note of a Meeting', 23 February 1968.

<sup>199</sup> TNA CAB 164/847, 'Leak Procedure', W. Armstrong to B. Trend, 7 April 1970.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> C. Pincher, 'Haul Down Report', *Daily Express*, 12 November 1971.

the erstwhile Labour government's failure to equip the Navy with new strike missiles and aircraft-carriers. Publishing this blistering attack, to borrow E.P. Thompson's phrase, was tantamount to 'launching a leaking oil tanker upon troubled waters, in the hope of polluting the electoral beaches'.<sup>202</sup> Although the First Sea Lord, Peter Hill-Norton, granted that much of the article was 'pure invention' presented 'mischievously out of context', it was nevertheless suitably homologous to O'Brien's report of 21 October to warrant an investigation.<sup>203</sup> During a telephone conversation with O'Brien on 11 November, Pincher had denied that he had seen the document in question, and suggested instead that he had inferred the story from the 'grapevine'.<sup>204</sup> While not constituting evidence on which Whitehall could act, the 319 completed leak questionnaires were far more detailed and candid than previous responses; twelve officers even flirted with self-incrimination by admitting that they personally knew Pincher.<sup>205</sup> Theories as to Pincher's source went in several directions. The most likely hypothesis was that Pincher had received a 'lunch-time briefing' from a 'friend' or 'paid helper' in the MOD.<sup>206</sup> The need for Pincher to corroborate the accuracy of this briefing would explain his phone call to O'Brien on 11 November. An informant entrenched within the organisation would also account for the fact that Pincher had apparently been 'tipped-off' about the results of the enquiry. It was also suggested that Pincher might have overheard 'bar gossip', since several pubs around Whitehall were frequented by Naval Officers, known to 'talk shop'.<sup>207</sup>

A more alarming possibility was that the story had come from John Coote, General Manager of the *Express*. As a retired Naval Captain, who had just been put up for the 'RAG' (Army and Navy Club in St. James Square), Coote moved in the right

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<sup>202</sup> Thompson, 'A State of Blackmail', p. 117.

<sup>203</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, P. Hill-Norton, 12 November 1971; TNA DEFE 68/145, W.H. Davies, 16 November 1971.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, 'Report on Questionnaires Received'; TNA DEFE 68/145, H.E. Davies, 30 December 1971.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, J.M. Wilson, 22 November 1971.

circles and could easily have heard whispers or unguarded remarks.<sup>208</sup> The enquiry also underlined how Pincher had perfected the art of 'ambush' journalism. 'One has to be permanently on one's guard because every piece of conversation is loaded', commented Commander Montanaro, who admitted to having 'lunched' with Pincher 'on several occasions'.<sup>209</sup> William Armstrong became so concerned that journalists, such as Pincher, were 'snaring' unwitting officials that he issued a circular to departments reminding them to exercise extreme caution when dealing with the press. His note emphasised that 'any unusual hospitality' offered by journalists should be 'politely refused'.<sup>210</sup> It also underlined that staff should always consult their respective Public Relations Branch before accepting an invitation to meet with a journalist.

By the late 1960s, although maintaining an interest in defence matters, Pincher's primary 'beat' was espionage and he became the dean of Fleet Street spy watchers publishing several high-profile exposés on Britain's intelligence services and their uncomfortable relationship with the Labour Party. Harry's switch to intelligence was in part making virtue out of necessity. Many of his original contacts from the MOD were retiring and, as a result, there was real danger that he would enter the first autumn of his career. More importantly, Pincher realised that intelligence had become one of the fastest growing areas of public concern. By the early 1970s, as the nascent television age unfolded, the *Express's* circulation had nosedived below two million copies per day, compared to roughly 4.3 million in 1960. Unravelling the riddles of espionage, therefore, was seen as a means of kickstarting dwindling sales. While there is absolutely no truth in the claim that he worked for either MI5 or MI6 ('Any suggestion of that and I'll bloody sue'),<sup>211</sup> it is clear from files now available at the National Archives that Pincher was used, now and again, to ventilate stories on their behalf. Pincher himself has readily kneaded this conviction: 'Almost all of those stories were given to me deliberately by officers of those organisations because they had instructed

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<sup>208</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, 'Report on Questionnaires Received'.

<sup>209</sup> TNA DEFE 68/145, J.L.A. Macafee to H.E. Davies, 21 December 1971.

<sup>210</sup> TNA DEFE 19/187, W. Armstrong, 23 November 1971.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

me to do so'.<sup>212</sup> The first illustration of Pincher receiving privileged information was on 16 May 1968 when he published, 'Danger...We Have No Satellite Spies', which claimed that, in an age of spiralling costs, HMG had decided to rely on the Americans for the lion's share of its Signals Intelligence.<sup>213</sup> At first blush, claimed Michael Halls (Wilson's Principal Private Secretary), the article was 'characteristic of the Pincher effort': that is to say, it was highly likely that he had drawn on published information, and then 'written this up in a typically tendentious and hostile way'.<sup>214</sup> On subsequent reading, Halls nevertheless found it difficult to believe that Pincher had not been in contact with intelligence staff. The article had made 'clearly intentional references' to secret codewords for satellite intelligence gathering, including 'keyhole' and 'talents'. By referring to such unmentionables, suggested Halls, Pincher was alerting HMG to the fact that he was now in league with sections of the intelligence community. In the light of the D-Notice Affair, however, legal action was regarded as unthinkable: 'The last thing in the world [we] should do', asserted Halls, 'is to get the Prime Minister involved with the *Express* and Pincher – we have had enough of that'.<sup>215</sup>

During the 1970s, as his penetration of the secret world grew deeper and deeper, Pincher had the chutzpah to use his newfound information to throw brickbats at the Labour Party. On 30 July 1970, in 'Give Our Spies Cloaks and Daggers Again', Pincher accused the outgoing Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, of making three damaging changes to British Intelligence.<sup>216</sup> Firstly, slashing funding to £10,250,000 per annum, a 'quite inadequate' amount for maintaining a corps of 'top-class' agents both domestically and abroad. Secondly, drastically cutting staff numbers in a futile bid to streamline the organisations. And thirdly, demoting MI6 from its status as an independent agency to an ancillary branch of the Foreign Office; this decision, argued Pincher, was the most serious alteration because it breached the principle that intelligence should be aloof from departmental allegiance. According to Pincher,

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<sup>212</sup> C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long* (London, 1984), p. 534.

<sup>213</sup> C. Pincher, 'Danger...We Have No Satellite Spies', *Daily Express*, 16 May 1968.

<sup>214</sup> TNA PREM 13/2367, M. Halls to W. Armstrong, 16 May 1968.

<sup>215</sup> TNA PREM 13/2367, M. Halls to W. Armstrong, 7 June 1968.

<sup>216</sup> C. Pincher, 'Give Our Spies Cloaks and Daggers Again', *Daily Express*, 30 July 1970.

Wilson made these changes without consulting Parliament and against the advice of defence chiefs. While conceding that not everything in the intelligence world was perfect ('far from it'), Burke Trend denounced the article as a 'malicious' work, almost certainly devised to provoke a response from the departing Labour Prime Minister.<sup>217</sup> Curtailing the Secret Vote was no more than an economy proportionate to the savings that other departments had been required to effect; a reduction in staff reflected the diminution in scale of Britain's presence abroad; whilst the allegation that MI6 had been downgraded was untrue. MI6, strictly speaking, had always been an appendage of the Foreign Office. 'C', wrote Trend, was 'fairly nettled' by the article since its estimation of the Secret Vote was remarkably accurate. Despite *prima facie* evidence of a leak, however, it was decided not to 'give rise to the flies which [Pincher] was casting' over Whitehall.<sup>218</sup>

A final example of an article aided by non-officially derived information from intelligence contacts was 'James Bond Gets a Pay Cut', published on 4 November 1974. According to Pincher, every branch of the UK intelligence community was to be downsized as part of Labour's Defence Review, leading to a 'substantial reduction' in the resources available to counter the KGB.<sup>219</sup> Pincher also claimed that the extent of Marxist influence on government policy had become a 'major preoccupation' of the security service. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir John Hunt, described the article as a 'mixture of inaccuracy, gossip and speculation, larded with politics'.<sup>220</sup> Urgent investigations nevertheless confirmed that Pincher had been spotted carousing with MI5 officers round the bar of The Senior. Harold Wilson, who considered the allegation that Ministers were under Marxist influence as 'worthy of contempt',<sup>221</sup> was convinced that HMG should issue a 'flat denial'.<sup>222</sup> Hunt persuaded him against this. A denial would make HMG a hostage to fortune by breaching the convention never to comment

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<sup>217</sup> TNA PREM 15/174, B. Trend, 6 August 1970; TNA PREM 15/174, B. Trend to W. Armstrong.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> C. Pincher, 'James Bond Gets Pay Cut', *Daily Express*, 4 November 1974.

<sup>220</sup> TNA PREM 16/270, J. Hunt to R. Armstrong, 4 November 1974.

<sup>221</sup> TNA PREM 16/270, J. Hunt to R. Armstrong, 7 November 1974.

<sup>222</sup> TNA PREM 16/270, R. Armstrong to J. Hunt, 5 November 1974.

on intelligence matters. Moreover, once ministers started denying Pincher's 'canards and speculations', it would be assumed that those which were not denied were true.<sup>223</sup> Hunt provided the Prime Minister with defensive lines, in the event of awkward parliamentary questions. These included:

1. You should not believe what you read in the press, particularly from this source;
2. All Pincher's stories are ill-informed speculation;
3. When the Government has taken decisions they will be announced in the House of Commons – not the *Daily Express*.<sup>224</sup>

It is natural to ask whether any of Pincher's exposés were related to the Wilson Plot. The Wilson Plot is a portmanteau term for a series of *unfounded* allegations that a rogue right-wing faction of MI5 attempted to overthrow the Labour Prime Minister, so convinced were they that Wilson was a Soviet agent. It is claimed that this faction used their 'sympathetic' contacts in Fleet Street to spread anti-Wilson propaganda in advance of a *coup d'état*. While not corroborating any suggestion of a co-ordinated attempt by MI5 to stage a putsch, the archival evidence presented in this section seems to indicate that Pincher had been used as a conduit for 'inspired' leaking. One can surmise that what was required of him, in the main, was to ward off government plans to reduce funding for the intelligence agencies, at a time of economic downturn when cuts were being made across Whitehall.

## Conclusions

Chapman Pincher retired from career journalism in 1979. During the 1980s, he developed a penchant for conspiracy theory, one of the most dangerous occupational diseases of the long-serving political hack. By pursuing Roger Hollis and cultivating MI5 reactionaries such as Peter Wright, he found himself ridiculed by the academic community, and regarded as a pariah among people he once called friends. It would be profoundly unfair, however, to judge Pincher's record on the basis of an anticlimactic

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<sup>223</sup> TNA PREM 16/270, J. Hunt to R. Armstrong, 7 November 1974.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.



and mildly self-immolating Indian summer. Gumshoe, ferret, detective: whatever the epithet, for over thirty years Pincher rendered great service to the breaking down of secrecy, and it was a service perhaps never fully appreciated by people at the time, or since. Throughout his career, Pincher had to overcome countless obstacles put in his way by the Whitehall machine, from the D-Notice Committee to the OSA, as well as the personal attention of a Prime Minister, hell bent on bringing him down. Attempts to rein in his activities often bordered on the comical, with departmental 'mugshots', for example, likening him to a bandit in the Wild West. At the risk of sounding sycophantic, whereas other journalists might have kept their heads down and their mouths closed, Pincher beat the system and provided the public with unprecedented insight into the secret corridors of power. His antics also did much to expose the inherent flaws and Kafkaesque dealings of the D-Notice system. Pincher ignored D-Notices at will, revealing in the process how governments attempted to manipulate the system to prevent political embarrassment.

As early as 1947, officials had become totally deluded as to the ways Pincher secured his information. This consternation continued throughout his career and, with no evidence to build a case, destroyed any hope of prosecuting him. He often relied on nothing more than his own deductions and journalistic legerdemain. An educated man, who could read retentively with great speed, Pincher had the skill to make something out of nothing. His scientific background gave him a unique advantage over many journalists in this respect. As Pincher himself says, 'The authorities were suddenly confronted with a freak like me that had a basic understanding of atomic energy, electronics, and rockets, and could use this to good effect'.<sup>225</sup> Coloured with detail, and often interspersed with sharp-tongued political judgements, most of his stories came from willing contacts. A sociable fellow, who moved effortlessly in exalted circles, Pincher had a jaw-dropping ability to get information through the backdoor of Whitehall. Many contacts were groomed over private lunches and discreet tête-à-tête interviews; others came to Pincher in the hope of settling political scores. Nevertheless,

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<sup>225</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

when it came to the Establishment he was in it, but not afraid to attack it. When examining Pincher's disclosures today, with the enormous benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to claim that any of the stories had a major detrimental impact on national security. Most were related to executive shortcomings and the arbitrary use of political power. However, if we put ourselves in the shoes of contemporaries, to whom the promiscuous publicising of nuclear matters and the like was extremely taboo, we can well imagine why certain people in Whitehall became angered. In the final analysis, whether one agrees with his political views or not, the student of government secrecy cannot disregard Chapman Pincher – the grandee of investigative journalism. In 1945, few journalists dared to make newspaper sensations about defence or espionage, while editors balked at the thought of challenging the mantra of national security. By 1975, thanks in large part to the work of Pincher, governments could no longer serenely ignore the possibility of press intrusion when going about their business.

## CHAPTER FOUR | THE RIDDLE OF THE FROGMAN: THE CRABB AFFAIR, SECRECY AND COLD WAR CULTURE

It is reported in today's *Evening News* that Crabb is a prisoner in Russia. If this is true, may I suggest that you return him to England immediately and thereby help to strengthen the goodwill created by the recent Russian visit. If your next goodwill delegation were to come in an ordinary liner you would be able to invite all the frogmen and secret agents in Britain to inspect her thoroughly, thereby removing secrecy. They might even scrape the barnacles off, if any, and celebrate with vodka – or better still, orange squash.

*R.H. Lambert, Foreign Office, to Russian Ambassador, 29 June 1956.<sup>1</sup>*

The fate of Commander Lionel Crabb remains an enduring mystery of the Cold War. Nicknamed 'Buster', after the American swimmer turned actor, Crabb was an experienced and daring naval diver. In 1944, having spent most of the war removing limpet mines from the bilge keels of British warships in the Mediterranean, he was awarded the George Medal for 'gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty'.<sup>2</sup> Demobbed from full time service in 1948, but determined to 'get m' gills back',<sup>3</sup> Crabb continued to work as a freelance frogman, most notably diving on the sunken RN submarines, *HMS Truculent* (1950) and *HMS Affray* (1951), to search for survivors; neither operation was successful. On 19 April 1956, during the state visit of the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and his Foreign Minister Nikolai Bulganin, Crabb was dispatched to scrutinise the hull of the Russian cruiser *Ordzhonikidze*, docked in Portsmouth harbour. An underwater inspection, believed his MI6 sponsor, might reveal details of asdic (sonar) devices, armour-plating, submarine detection gear, screw dimensions and other features betraying the ship's offensive potential, speed and manoeuvrability.<sup>4</sup> When the frogman failed to return, the Admiralty tersely announced, after an admitted delay of ten days, that Crabb was 'presumed dead as a result of trials with certain

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA) FO 321/122885, R.H. Lambert to Russian Ambassador, 29 June 1956.

<sup>2</sup> TNA ADM 1/14531, R. Gleadowe to L. Crabb, 31 January 1944.

<sup>3</sup> M. Pugh, *Commander Crabb* (London, 1956), p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> Reporter, 'Frogman Did Secret Work', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1956; Reporter, 'Red Sailor: I saw Frogman', *Daily Mail*, 5 May 1956.

underwater apparatus'.<sup>5</sup> By early May, with the Admiralty statement exposed as a smokescreen, Crabb's mysterious disappearance had become something of a *cause célèbre*, as journalists and parliamentarians strove to discover what had really happened. As details of MI6 involvement were unearthed, HMG retreated behind a wall of silence, a strategy consistent with the doctrine of plausible deniability and the age-old tacit convention to disavow all knowledge of intelligence operations. In Parliament, facing a fusillade of questions, the Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, announced that 'it would not be in the public interest to disclose the circumstances in which Crabb met his death'.<sup>6</sup> The Foreign Office concurrently issued a circular insisting that staff 'should decline to elaborate on what Eden said in the House'.<sup>7</sup> 'Officialdom', lamented Sydney Knowles, Crabb's closest companion, had "'washed their hands" of this loveable pirate'.<sup>8</sup>

Whitehall has fought a long campaign to ensure that much of the Crabb affair remains secret. Official indifference has been matched by outright obstruction. In 1978, claiming authority under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act, which permits the retention of documents deemed too sensitive to release, Ministers reneged on the Thirty Year Rule, by decreeing that the full archive on Crabb's death would not enter the domain until 2031.<sup>9</sup> The MOD maintains the risible story that it cannot release its own files on the mission because they are among hundreds suspected of being contaminated with asbestos dust in storage. The Russians have similarly refused to re-open the case and the potentially all-knowing KGB archive remains closed. Deprived of source material – both domestic and 'from the other side of the hill' – most historians have steered well clear of the subject; neither Christopher Andrew nor Richard Aldrich, in their magisterial histories of British Intelligence, devote more than a few passing paragraphs.<sup>10</sup> In consequence, the affair has become synonymous with the

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<sup>5</sup> Reporter, 'Top Frogman Dies in Secret Test', *News Chronicle*, 30 April 1956.

<sup>6</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 150, 9 May 1956, cols 1225-30.

<sup>7</sup> TNA FO 321/122885, H. Hohler, 9 May 1956.

<sup>8</sup> S. Knowles, 'Preface', in J.B. Hutton, *Commander Crabb is Alive* (London, 1968), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, R.A. Devreux to Head of OS (AR), 24 January 1978.

<sup>10</sup> C. Andrew, *The Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), pp. 495-6; R.J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 521, pp. 523-4.

pejorative 'airport bookstall school' of intelligence historiography, where conclusions rest upon a rather perilous scaffolding of inference and supposition. However, while the larger embargo has since been extended to 2057, a full 100 years after Crabb's disappearance and long after all those concerned are deceased, the Freedom of Information Act has, mercifully, yielded new material.<sup>11</sup> Foremost among the declassifications include: the Top Secret Report of Sir Edward Bridges, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, into how the operation was authorised and carried out; the transcripts of evidence given to the inquest into Crabb's death; and a series of Cabinet correspondence with the BBC over a proposed Crabb documentary.<sup>12</sup> Although the merits of the Act are often married to a concern that declassification constitutes a more elaborate form of information control, in which departments not only 'clean' but take literary licence with documents, there is little doubt that the new files allow us to reshape what we know, or thought we knew, about the affair.

Rather than attempt to solve this particular spy story (something that many would construe as career suicide), this chapter seeks to use the Crabb affair both as a touchstone for the growth and effectiveness of government secrecy, but also as an optic onto the relationship between, and attitudes to, Whitehall and the intelligence services. I should like to suggest that secrecy in this case proved hugely counter-productive. Secrecy carried the affair into the political mainstream and triggered wild rumours of a cover up. In an effort to dampen the proliferation of 'exotic' accounts, which, left unbridled, posed an acute danger to hopes of thawing the Cold War, Eden was forced to issue damaging denials – especially with regard to his intelligence services that normally did their work by stealth and blushed to find its fame. When it emerged that Ministers had in fact cloaked MI6 incompetence in the mantle of the 'public interest', the official falsehood signalled an injunction not to trust discredited departments of state, and was made to appear more crooked than the blunder it had tried to conceal. For Eden,

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<sup>11</sup> T. Kelly, 'How Navy Chiefs Abandoned the Real James Bond on a Spy Mission', *Daily Mail*, 27 October 2006; J.F. Rojas, 'Mysterious Death of the Real James Bond was Hushed-up', *Independent* 27 October 2006; D. Ward, 'Cold War Papers Reveal Cover-up over Diver's Mysterious Death', *Guardian*, 27 October 2006.

readily insecure in the nascent arena of media-driven politics, the affair was a climacteric and occasioned much anger and embarrassment. The twin demerits of failing to prevent such a foolhardy espionage attempt and then disguising it by way of a pall of secrecy and dissimulation was read in Fleet Street as further evidence of his leadership inadequacies. Eden had already been dealt a cold douche of reality in January 1956 when the traditional Conservative mouthpiece, the *Daily Telegraph*, accused the Prime Minister of lacking the 'smack of firm government'.<sup>13</sup> I should also like to consider Crabb's place within Cold War culture. Crabb waged the Cold War twice over – as a frogman who dived against the Russians in 1956, and again as a key weapon of propaganda, resurrected by the Western culture industry, most famously in the film *The Silent Enemy* (1958), to shape both elite and popular attitudes to the Cold War and the Soviet adversary. For a conflict 'which was more a war of words than a shooting war',<sup>14</sup> Crabb's popular cultural formation cannot therefore be easily dismissed.

#### 4.1 Disappearance

Let us firstly sketch out the overall contours of the affair. The fact that Crabb was missing, presumed dead, was acknowledged by the Admiralty on 29 April, accompanied by the claim that he had not returned 'from a test dive in Stokes Bay'.<sup>15</sup> Journalists quickly realised that the frogman's disappearance was likely to capture the popular imagination. As a war hero, Crabb was the perfect 'human interest' story, at once removed from the soporific pleasures of party political 'news'. Following the development of the aqualung and other staple diving accoutrements (large fins, shiny wetsuits and masks), the 1950s had witnessed an unprecedented fascination with the 'rapture of the great depths', and its popularity was confirmed by an explosion of boys own-adventure yarns, charting the amphibian pursuits of treasure-hunters, pearlers and

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<sup>12</sup> E. Bridges, 'The Report of an Enquiry on an Intelligence Operation against Russian Warships', 18 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007); TNA ADM 1/29240; TNA CAB 163/207.

<sup>13</sup> D. McLachan, 'The Firm Smack of Government', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1956.

<sup>14</sup> P. Major and R. Mitter, 'Culture', in S. Dockrill and G. Hughes (eds), *Cold War History* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 240.

<sup>15</sup> Reporter, 'Top Frogman Dies in Secret Test', *News Chronicle*, 30 April 1956.

combat swimmers.<sup>16</sup> Yet Crabb's involvement in any aquatic assignment also aroused suspicion. Although a confident and distinguished frogman ('his true métier was under the waves of the world's oceans'),<sup>17</sup> at 46, and a notoriously heavy smoker, Crabb was not in the best physical condition. The refusal of naval authorities to conduct a full search for the body, coupled with the fact that ten days had elapsed before the statement had been made, established further non-sequiturs.<sup>18</sup> By declining to expand on its original statement, the Admiralty became a hostage to fortune, as scores of reporters descended upon Portsmouth determined to unearth conspiracies of silence. Crabb, it was soon discovered, as well as a spectral companion known only as 'Mr Smith', had lodged at the Sallyport Hotel, before checking out early on 19 April.<sup>19</sup> Two days after Crabb's disappearance, Stanley Lamport (Chief of Portsmouth Criminal Investigation Department) had visited the Sallyport and removed four pages from the hotel register, which included the names of Crabb and Smith as well as the address 'Attached Foreign Office', now known as the stock cover for MI6 operations. The plot thickened on 4 May when a Soviet naval attaché claimed that a watchman onboard the *Ordzhonikidze* had seen a frogman surface alongside the vessel.<sup>20</sup>

Although the attaché stressed that no action had been taken against the diver ('we were in a British port and there was nothing we could do'),<sup>21</sup> his revelation, coupled with the suspicious expurgation of the hotel daybook, encouraged a wave of talebearing both about what happened to Crabb and exactly what he was doing in the water. Most newspapers speculated that the frogman had been sent to the *Ordzhonikidze* to conduct a secret inspection. Identifying 'blisters', for example, would

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<sup>16</sup> C. Simpson, *Come Away Pearler* (London, 1952); R. White, *Secret Sea* (London, 1955); R. Uhl, *Treasures in the Depths* (New York, 1955).

<sup>17</sup> Knowles, 'Preface', p.10.

<sup>18</sup> Reporter, 'Frogman Dies on Secret Test', *Daily Mail*, 30 April 1956. Unconvinced by official reports – '[something] is being hidden by the organisation that sent him to dive' – Knowles spent two days exploring the murky waters of Portsmouth harbour until a serving naval officer enigmatically advised: 'Don't dive. Crabbie is not there'. (Reporter, 'I Know What Crabb Did', *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1956.)

<sup>19</sup> Reporter, 'CID Probes Last Days on Frogman Crabb', *Daily Herald*, 3 May 1956; J.P. Gallagher, 'Frogman Crabb's Last Hours', *Sunday Dispatch*, 6 May 1956.

<sup>20</sup> Reporter, 'Red Sailor: I Saw Frogman', *Daily Mail*, 5 May 1956; Staff Reporter, 'We Saw a Frogman say Russians', *Daily Express*, 5 May 1956.

<sup>21</sup> Staff Reporter, 'We Saw a Frogman Say Russians', *Daily Express*, 5 May 1956.

establish whether the cruiser housed the latest anti-sonar equipment – code-named ‘Agouti’ – which reduced the effect of ‘cavitation’, the noise made by underwater propulsion.<sup>22</sup> Another theory was that Crabb had been ordered to thwart a right-wing émigré group, intent on assassinating the Russian leaders by affixing an explosive device to the cruiser’s keel. Rear-Admiral Thomson, Chairman of the D-Notice Committee, was quoted as saying on 5 May: ‘The possibility of a daring frogman attaching a limpet mine was a security risk that had to be guarded against’.<sup>23</sup> Other political hacks interpreted the affair as a ‘sensational publicity stunt’ conceived to boost the sales of a forthcoming book, film or underwater device.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Marshall Pugh’s biography *Commander Crabb* was due to reach bookshops in the autumn, while pre-production had already begun on its filmic companion *The Silent Enemy*.

On the question of Crabb’s fate, the press generated the ‘stuff that spy novels are made of’, filtering their accounts through a fictional diet of Erskine Childers and Ian Fleming. Engendered by a fascination with technological gimmickery, once relegated to the realm of science fiction but now shaping the overall tenor of the Cold War, *The Daily Express* concocted stories involving state-of-the-art equipment. These were: that Crabb had been pinioned by a magnetic anti-frogman device until he had drowned; that he had been trapped in a television cable and died of oxygen asphyxiation; that he had been rendered cataleptic by asdic dome emissions; or that he had been electrocuted when a prototype flash-camera short-circuited.<sup>25</sup> Other newspapers suggested that underwater sentries had killed Crabb; to avoid mutual embarrassment, the body had been buried at midnight, with full naval honours, in a Portsmouth cemetery.<sup>26</sup> Mimicking tales of alien abduction, more beguiling was the report that he had been shanghaied by enemy frogmen and taken into the cruiser via a ‘wet compartment’,

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<sup>22</sup> Reporter, ‘Frogman Did Secret Work’, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1956; Reporter, ‘Red Sailor: I Saw Frogman’, *Daily Mail*, 5 May 1956.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in N. Mews, ‘Crabb’s Last Dive’, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 November 1969.

<sup>24</sup> W.A. Crumley, ‘Six Amazing Stories’, *Daily Express*, 4 May 1956.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* In January 1975, the Admiralty received a letter from an anonymous clairvoyant, claiming that Crabb had been ‘pushed into a long cavity chamber’ where he eventually ‘passed into spirit consciousness through suffocation’. (TNA ADM 1/29240, Anonymous Clairvoyant to The Secretary, British Admiralty, Portsmouth, 15 January 1975.)



where he had haemorrhaged British naval secrets under the influence of truth drugs. Now in Russia, he would eventually emerge, like Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, as a potent weapon of Soviet propaganda. The idea of a chamber below the waterline from which amphibian warriors could operate unseen was not devoid of verisimilitude. Based on reality wartime adventure, *The Frogman* (1951) climaxed with a team of Japanese divers descending from the silhouette of a surface vessel, whilst the film adaptation of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) possessed many uncanny parallels.

It is a platitude for the press to claim that it writes the first draft of history. During the Crabb affair, however, most journalists acknowledged that their tales of skulduggery were pure conjecture, cobbled together on the fly and devoid of empirical verification. The efflorescence of sensational spy stories was partly bound up with market forces. Exceptional reports of intrigue, exceptionally presented, brought greatly increased sales, if only temporarily. Their success rested, in part, on the belief that there was always a hidden landscape behind the façade. To would-be James Bonds, attracted by the excitement of secret agency, and thirsty for the vicarious thrill of going it alone against the nation's enemies, such stories also offered escapism from their ordinary lives. It would be wrong, however, to assume that Fleet Street was only striving to maximize circulation. The cultural turn in Cold War history has demonstrated how the transmission of serious political messages often requires an entertaining format. Generally speaking, press coverage of the Crabb case carried an orthodox agenda, stressing Khrushchev's ideological hostility towards the West and his intention of spreading the spectre of international communism contrary to the canons of 'de-Stalinisation', announced in February 1956. Since the nine-day tour of the Russian Presidential delegation had commenced on 18 April, the Labour-supporting papers, such as the *Daily Mirror*, had attempted in vain to derail Eden's diplomatic efforts, denouncing the Russian guests over the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and publishing extracts from Khrushchev's stridently anti-capitalist speeches. The goodwill visit was intended to moderate the Cold War; but the possibility of underwater hit squads patrolling Portsmouth harbour, and a cruiser leavened with sundry fiendish devices, brutally exposed the insincerity of 'peaceful-co-existence'. Death by Soviet

technological innovation, moreover, might be seen as a coded attack on 'freeze' campaigners who were calling for a moratorium on arms proliferation.

The broad and immediate press campaign compelled Eden to launch a counter-assault. Although constitutional praxis dictated that public systems of accountability, including Parliamentary debate, did not apply to the secret services, Eden astonished the House on 9 May with the declaration: 'What was done was done without the authority or knowledge of Her Majesty's Ministers. Appropriate disciplinary steps are being taken'.<sup>27</sup> Eden's decision to spotlight needless attention on the piratical actions of his intelligence community was intriguing and unprecedented: surely such an Augean stable was best left undisturbed? When confronted with similar press speculation over UFOs, successive American administrations had refrained from official comment, in order to fend off public probing into the contentious precinct of defence technology development. The idea of an intelligence agency refusing to interface with the core executive was fertile ground for Hugh Gaitskell, Leader of the Labour Party, who had long paraded stories of secret misrule and dirty tricks. Paralysed by a deluge of criticism, the embattled Prime Minister treated the House to a sermon on the tenets of command premiership, ruling that 'there are certain issues which are the responsibility of the Prime Minister himself'.<sup>28</sup>

With Parliamentary debate suspended (refusal to answer a question on the grounds of 'public interest' prohibits further enquiries raised under Standing Order), political discourse became further consumed by mistrust and accusation. Seldom in the history of contemporary journalism have all newspapers closed ranks against a Prime Minister as they did in this case. The *News Chronicle* saluted Eden 'for a performance of stunning maladroitness'.<sup>29</sup> *The Times* accused him of shirking Ministerial responsibility and failing to keep a 'tight-hand' on his secret adventurers; 'No Authority

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<sup>27</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 150, 9 May 1956, cols 1225-30.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*; For debates surrounding 'Prime Ministerial Government' see R. Crossman, *Inside View: The Godkin Lectures at Harvard University 1970* (London, 1972). Harold Macmillan would later contend that 'Gaitskell behaved very badly'. As an aspirant to Downing Street 'he ought to know better than discuss espionage and the Secret Service'. (P. Catterall, *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957* (London, 2003), p. 557.)

<sup>29</sup> J. Cameron, 'The Cloak and Dagger Boys have Dropped a Clanger', *News Chronicle*, 11 May 1956.

For Dive By Commander Crabb', howled the one-inch, front-page headline.<sup>30</sup> The insubordination of *The Times* must have been particularly galling for the beleaguered Prime Minister who, as D.R. Thorpe argues, 'came from that class and generation which believed [it] to be the principal newspaper of record'.<sup>31</sup> Critical of the operation's handling ('for boneheaded clumsiness it would be matchable only if John Buchan were scripting the Goon Show'),<sup>32</sup> journalists made the case for a full enquiry into Britain's intelligence services, suggesting that they behaved as 'laws unto themselves',<sup>33</sup> utterly insulated not only from democratic opinion but from Ministerial supervision. (Indeed, as several 'unofficial' histories of Cold War Intelligence now reveal, there was more than a scintilla of uncomfortable truth in this assessment.)<sup>34</sup> The press's *en bloc* hostility to the intelligence community was itself a watershed: historically journalists had been prepared to accept that the exigencies of national security had to come first and instinctively refused to probe into secretive areas or publish trenchant exposés. On 11 May, Eden again paid a heavy price for excessive secrecy when the Kremlin admitted to receiving a confidential note from the Foreign Office, which confirmed that Crabb's 'approach was completely unauthorised'.<sup>35</sup> The Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*, which had hitherto declined to comment lest it should puncture Russian attempts to build bridges with Britain, castigated Eden's 'shameful' espionage whilst *Izvestiya* lamented that the incident would 'only play into the hands of Cold War supporters'.<sup>36</sup>

On 14 May, with the press inflaming untutored minds with tales of executive incompetence, Eden returned to the House and announced that facilitating peaceful

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<sup>30</sup> Correspondent, 'No Authority for Dive by Commander Crabb', *The Times*, 10 May 1956.

<sup>31</sup> D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden* (London, 2003), p. 444.

<sup>32</sup> J. Cameron, 'The Cloak and Dagger Boys have Dropped a Clanger', *News Chronicle*, 11 May 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Correspondent, 'No Authority for Dive by Commander Crabb', *The Times*, 10 May 1956; N. Monks, 'Just How Secret is the Secret Service?', *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1956; Correspondent, 'Secret Service Blunders: Inquiry Demanded', *Sunday Dispatch*, 13 May 1956.

<sup>34</sup> C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long* (London, 1984); S. Dorril and R. Ramsay, *Smear! Wilson and the Secret State* (London, 1992); S. Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Reporter, 'Russians Tell about the Frogman', *Daily Herald*, 12 May 1956; C.F. Melville, 'Frogman – Britain Tells', *Evening News*, 12 May 1956.

<sup>36</sup> TNA FO 321/122885, *Pravda*, (trans.) 11 May; TNA FO 321/122885, Moscow Embassy to the Foreign Office, 12 May 1956.

coexistence precluded a fuller statement.<sup>37</sup> Although seasoned socialist firebrands predictably inveighed against Downing Street's management of the case (Eden, protested Richard Crossman, had a responsibility to explain the Admiralty communiqué of 29 April, which was now proven to have been at variance with the belated apology given to the Kremlin), the House accepted Eden's dictum that there should be 'not one word more to say' about the operation, and approved by 316 votes to 229 the veil of secrecy which the Prime Minister deemed necessary.<sup>38</sup> The failure of the dogs to bite was a consequence of their deep respect for secret service taboos. Public pillorying of intelligence practitioners was anathema to those congenitally taught to preserve the fiction that both MI5 and MI6 had no official peacetime existence. 'Either we have a secret service or we do not', declared Conservative backbencher Sir J. Hutchinson, 'let us [not] persuade it to do a striptease act and cast aside one veil after another'.<sup>39</sup> The profession, lamented Lieutenant-Colonel Cordeaux, was already threatened by those 'cashing-in' on their knowledge of secret work in the form of film rights, newspapers articles and best-sellers.<sup>40</sup> As the etiquette of parliamentary discourse required, therefore, the riddle of the frogman would remain unsolved.

## 4.2 Conspiracy and Popular Culture

The Crabb affair resurfaced a year later when, on 9 June 1957, the body of a decapitated frogman was discovered drifting off Pilsey Island, a sandbank 7 miles east of Portsmouth. On 10 June, Dr. Donald Plimsoll King, consultant pathologist, conducted an autopsy at Chichester Public Mortuary. Although his examination confirmed that the composition of the corpse reflected someone who had been in the water 'for at least fourteen months', King found no clues to cause of death and nothing helpful on the diving suit, such as serial numbers, to make positive identification.<sup>41</sup> Margaret Crabb, whose marriage to the commander had been dissolved three years earlier, also failed to

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<sup>37</sup> Parliamentary Correspondent, 'The Commander Crabb Affair', *The Times*, 15 May 1956.

<sup>38</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 153, 14 May 1956, col. 1785.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1783.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1776.

<sup>41</sup> News, 'Headless Body in Harbour', *The Times*, 10 June 1957, p. 6; News, 'Body Believed Cdr. Crabb's', *The Times*, 11 June 1957, p. 8.

identify the body. Buster's feet, she explained, were unusual because he had large 'hammer' toes that 'rose off the ground'; the toes that she inspected were not deformed.<sup>42</sup> 'Quite honestly', announced G.F.L. Bridgman (Chichester Coroner), 'we know little more than we did before'.<sup>43</sup> To assist identification the West Sussex Constabulary called several new witnesses. Eric Blake, managing director of the swim-suit manufacturer Heinke & Company, proposed that the outfit recovered from the sea was 'identical' to the commercial Italian suits he had routinely supplied Crabb, unusual because they possessed a neck seal without a hood.<sup>44</sup> Sydney Knowles – who now claims that he was cajoled by MI5 to provide a false testimony – revealed that Crabb had a permanent scar on his left knee, sustained in 1945 as both divers were thrown against the barbed wire of the American vessel, the John Harrison, by the wash of a passing tug.<sup>45</sup> On 26 June, in view of this new evidence, the inquest was finally held. The pathologist's report, originally inconclusive, had been drastically revised; as well as attesting to deformation of the feet, it now acknowledged a scar and put greater emphasis on the sartorial property of the suit.<sup>46</sup> Despite recording an open verdict, in which cause of death was undetermined, Bridgman concluded that a sufficient 'chain of coincidences' had been established to certify the cadaver as that of Crabb.<sup>47</sup> On 5 July 1957, with no active servicemen in attendance, the macabre body was buried at Milton Cemetery, Portsmouth: 'officially the last chapter in the Commander Crabb affair had been written'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Reporter, 'Mrs Crabb Unable to Identify Frogman', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1957; TNA ADM 1/29240, 'Evidence to Inquest: Miscellaneous Note, 1957'; West Sussex Record Office (WSRC) POL W/C6/2, 'Statement of M. Crabb, 10 June 1957.'

<sup>43</sup> News, 'Body Believed Cdr. Crabb's', *The Times*, 11 June 1957, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, 'Evidence to Inquest: Eric Blake'; News, 'Frogman Suit 'Not Admiralty Type'', *The Times*, 13 June 1957, p. 10. Lieutenant William McLanachan, who had been dispatched from HMS Vernon, also endorsed the opinion that the rubber garment was of commercial provenance. (WSRC POL W/C6/2, 'West Sussex Constabulary: Statement from William Young McLanachan, 11 June 1957.')

<sup>45</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, 'Evidence to Inquest: Sydney Knowles'; WSRC POL W/C6/2, 'Statement of Sydney Knowles.'

<sup>46</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, 'Evidence to Inquest: Miscellaneous Note, 1957.'

<sup>47</sup> News, 'Dead Frogman Cdr. Crabb', *The Times*, 27 June 1957, p. 7; WSRC POL W/C6/2, 'Summing Up by Bridgman.'

<sup>48</sup> Hutton, *Commander Crabb is Alive*, p. 92.

Unofficially, however, the case was far from closed. Why had Mr Smith not been called to the inquest; how did the pathologist, an experienced medical practitioner, originally fail to notice that the left knee had suffered laceration; and, most importantly, how did Crabb die? It was certainly convenient that the body was missing its head and hands, which could have provided conclusive identification. Such anomalies would fascinate conspiracy theorists for the next fifty years. The most enduring explanations have gone in several directions. The most plausible is that Crabb died of respiratory failure; his closed-cycle re-breather, which could have sustained an occlusion, was considered unsafe below 33 feet and, as the *Ordzhonikidze* drew around 25 feet, it is likely that he went even deeper.<sup>49</sup> Fuelled by a distinctly British mingling of treachery and paranoia, by far the most popular explanation to the uninformed public at large was that Crabb had not died, but defected. Caught snooping under the cruiser, taken prisoner and then transported to Moscow, he had been given a simple choice: join the Red Navy or be shot for espionage.<sup>50</sup> Bernhard Hutton, the conspiracy theorist-in-chief, would argue that Crabb had been the victim of a complex double-cross. The Russians, claimed Hutton, were terrified at the prospect of a 'frogman gap' and wanted Crabb, a leading expert on underwater warfare, to instruct their own inept naval diving programme. Mr Smith, while carrying MI6 imprimatur, was in fact Moscow's notional 'fifth man', sent to lure Crabb into the water where he was promptly captured by frogmen. Afforded durability by the genuine defections of Burgess and Maclean, and given a further semblance of realism by comparisons with the legendary wartime double-bluff Operation Mincemeat, defection myths contend that the real Crabb became Lieutenant Lev Lvovich Korablov, and that a Soviet submarine had slipped overboard a 'man who never was' on British authorities.

While each thread of evidence is spun with a near irresistible patina of authenticity, defection stories are ultimately the products of dubious 'cognitive mapping', in which arguments have been derived from a mishmash of mutually

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<sup>49</sup> N. Mews, 'Crabb's Last Dive', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 November 1969.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; News, 'German Report on Crabb Denied', *The Times*, 20 January, 1967, p. 8; C. Rundle, 'Diver Lives, says Ex-Fiancée', *Western Daily Press*, 14 September 1974.

competing, unprovenanced sources.<sup>51</sup> Bernhard Hutton, a writer MI5 branded a 'self-styled intelligence expert' and 'near charlatan', relies heavily on a photograph of a Russian naval officer, alias Korablov, bearing the slightest of resemblance to the frogman spy.<sup>52</sup> Although Margaret Crabb considered Hutton's evidence genuine ('if this is not my former husband, he must have a double'),<sup>53</sup> most commentators have denounced the picture as complete fabrication, suggesting that the individual was too young and clean-cut. The following message, which was discovered on 5 June 1957 by 'a young lad' in a bottle opposite Mill Farm Caravan Site, has been used by several writers to corroborate the theory that Crabb had been incarcerated onboard the *Ordzhonikidze*.

27 5 56. [Sic] dear finder directly you find this please contact [blank] I am being held captive [blank] russian warship crabbe [sic] PLEASE HELP THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.<sup>54</sup>

While recognising that stress might have caused an orthographic slip, the fact that Crabb's name is spelt incorrectly, coupled with the very deliberate deletion of MI6 contact details, tends to confound the credibility of the source. It is telling, however, that no government has ever publicly refuted Hutton's conclusions or issued a D-Notice to prevent publication. Indeed, by allowing conspiracy theorists to popularise the belief that Crabb had been kidnapped and went on to live a double life, Ministers deftly challenge the notion that Britain ever sponsored underwater skulduggery, contrary to the rules of diplomatic hospitality. *Izvestiya* even suggested that Hutton's evidence, 'a disgusting spectacle', was the result of a sustained British disinformation effort designed to cover up 'traces of dirty work'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> P. Knight, 'The Hidden Agenda of Manifest Destiny', in P. Knight (ed.), *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Post-war America* (London, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> WSRC POL W/C6/2, W.H. Pithers to T.C. Williams, 3 May 1967. Photograph reproduced in Hutton, *Commander Crabb is Alive*. In June 1960, the West Sussex Constabulary, in collaboration with MI5, created a file on Hutton, pooling the author's various requests for information: 'One never knows', argued Bridgman, 'when a bit of information is going to come in useful'. (WSRC POL W/C6/2, G. Bridgman to A. Hoare, 10 December 1960.)

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Hutton, *Commander Crabb is Alive*, p. 109.

<sup>54</sup> WSRC POL W/C6/2, Detective Inspector (Surrey Constabulary), 15 June 1957.

<sup>55</sup> Reporter, 'The Man Who Was', *Izvestiya*, 29 December 1960; News, 'Commander Crabb 'Not Alive in Russia'', *The Times*, 30 December 1960, p. 6.

How the media depicted Crabb was contorted throughout the Cold War. In a portrayal evocative of the fictional super-spy James Bond, Crabb was initially depicted as a hero of the NATO alliance, embodying ideological certainty, incredible bravery and warm-blooded heterosexuality.<sup>56</sup> In the hands of Marshall Pugh, an unashamed hagiographer, he was the ultimate 'pillow fantasy', a symbol of latter-day imperialism and playboy patriarchy. Crabb's patriotism – claimed Pugh – knew no bounds: once he apparently threatened to litigate against the sender of a letter who had placed the postage stamp – and therefore the monarch's head – upside down.<sup>57</sup> Released in 1958, *The Silent Enemy* depicted Crabb's derring-do against Italian frogmen in wartime Gibraltar. Played by Laurence Harvey, the quintessential 'kitchen sink' actor, Crabb is portrayed as the man who turned the tide of the war, albeit in the mould of a maverick, stepping on the toes of his Commanding Officers and getting the job done his way. The film, which acknowledges the co-operation of the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry, stands as the archetypal 'conversion narrative', designed to incite a consumerist audience which had 'gone soft' after the privations of the Second World War. On a subliminal level, it engages with Philip Wylie's survey of mores and behaviour, *Generation of Vipers*, which suggested how, in contrast to the supposed virility of the Soviet 'other', Western man had been emasculated by feminine impulses or 'momism'. In one scene, unable to secure an urgent meeting with the Admiral, Crabb berates the featherbedding of Third Officer Jill Masters: 'I came out to this blasted rock of yours to get on with the war, and if you think that a whole army of 'wrens', 'fannies', 'ats' and 'wafs' [sic] are gonna stop me from getting in there, you are very much mistaken'. In another, Crabb is instructed by the doctor to rest – only to respond defiantly, and with a whiff of hectoring self-confidence, 'I'll rest when it's dark'. It was here that the casting of Harvey, famed for his starring role as an 'angry young man' in *Room at the Top*, was most discernible and effective. His blunt, anti-establishment

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<sup>56</sup> The best 'biographies' of James Bond are: T. Bennett and J. Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London, 1987); J. Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (London, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> M. Pugh, 'My Friend: Frogman Extraordinary', *Daily Mail*, 7 May 1956.



persona was far removed from the gentlemanly, stiff upper-lipped war hero, played by the likes of John Mills, David Niven and Bernard Miles.

Popular culture, however, could flip easily between heroisation and demonisation. By the late 1960s, as détente started to take hold, spies were no longer seen with awe and wonder. In the literary world, Len Deighton's socially subversive cockney Harry Palmer and John le Carré's dowdy Chekhovian spymaster, George Smiley, were emblematic of a new breed of secret agent. Crabb, not unlike like his fictional counterparts, underwent a major character re-evaluation. Rumours of his defection, which reached a crescendo with the publication of Hutton's *Commander Crabb is Alive* in 1968, inspired a clear break with culturally manifest patterns of signification. In 1969, *The Sunday Times* presented Crabb as a composite of the Cambridge Five, stressing his emotional frostiness, hard-drinking and ideological pollution. In the newspaper's estimation, Crabb was a curmudgeonly 'pathetic figure', 'a poor surface swimmer', 'suicidal', 'nearly penniless' and 'frequently offensive'.<sup>58</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the frogman spy was also reconstituted as a sexual misfit. The Western media had long associated duplicity, real or alleged, with sexual deviance and moral laxity. This, of course, was a belief consecrated in the public imagination by the lurid activities of Burgess and Maclean. Crabb's sexual peccadilloes, claimed the newspaper, extended to a fondness for rubber garments and scuba fetishism: 'He liked to wear his diving suit under his street clothes or as casual wear for watching television'.<sup>59</sup> One might speculate that Whitehall was quite happy for Crabb to be made a laughing stock, because, like the perfect matador's cape, waving flamboyantly at a raging bull, it diverted the public eye away from the real issue of intelligence abuses.

#### 4.3 Operation Claret

Let us now turn more directly to the declassified files. An important compendium of Crabb's mission, known officially as 'Operation Claret', is provided by Edward Bridges'

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<sup>58</sup> N. Mews, 'Crabb's Last Dive', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 November 1969.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

report of 18 May 1956.<sup>60</sup> The report, which has been meticulously 'sanitised' of the initials of the secret intelligence service (i.e. MI6/SIS), firstly delineates the circumstances behind Crabb's dive against the Soviet flotilla. A 'consumer-orientated' operation, Claret was conceived in December 1954, when the Admiralty notified MI6 of its desire to possess information about the noise characteristics of Russian warships. Although sending men into Davy Jones' locker was 'more the kind of thing done by the Special Boat Service and the Royal Marine Commandos',<sup>61</sup> there was nothing unusual about the *character* of the operation proposed. Underwater espionage was an established part of the great game on both sides of the curtain. In 1955, for instance, when British warships visited Leningrad, a large number of Russian frogmen were detected in close proximity. (Visitors to the ships, mostly navy personnel and technicians, made constant efforts to break away from conducted parties; one guest was even caught red-handed with a paper parcel under his arm concealing a camera.)<sup>62</sup> Thus, as far as the Admiralty and MI6 were concerned, Britain was entitled to take full advantage of any corresponding opportunity. It should be emphasised that Claret was not a one-off venture but part of a rolling programme. In October 1955, as the *Ordzhonikidze's* sister ship, the *Sverdlov*, anchored in Portsmouth as part of the Spithead naval review, an underwater examination was carried out by MI6. To avoid blowback, in the event of failure, MI6 coaxed a freelance frogman out of retirement to act on their behalf. That third party, while past his prime, was Buster Crabb.

Buoyed by the success of the *Sverdlov* dive, the Admiralty held a series of meetings, between 22 February and 6 April 1956, to discuss the 'rare opportunity' for intelligence procurement afforded by the Khrushchev naval visit.<sup>63</sup> Crabb – now regarded as the quintessential 'false flag' – was again approached by MI6. In Downing

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<sup>60</sup> E. Bridges, 'The Report of an Enquiry on an Intelligence Operation against Russian Warships', 18 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007).

<sup>61</sup> P. Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying* (London, 2004), p. 231.

<sup>62</sup> E. Bridges, 'The Report of an Enquiry on an Intelligence Operation against Russian Warships', 18 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007). Visitors to the British warships had repeatedly 'broken away' from conducted parties; one guest was caught with a concealed camera whilst another, who had previously disclaimed knowledge of English, perspicaciously asked, 'how is your squid stabilised'?

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Street, however, the desire to mitigate Cold War tensions rendered Claret an unnecessary risk. On 12 April Eden issued a directive expressly forbidding 'anything of this kind on this occasion'.<sup>64</sup> How the operation still came to pass has long courted controversy. Chapman Pincher, who knew Nicholas Elliot, the MI6 officer in overall control of the dive ('we discussed the case many times – it was a straightforward cock-up'), claims that MI6 *knowingly* cut across the collective grain and that Claret was conducted in the belief that Ministers would 'never hear anything about it'.<sup>65</sup> A new body of work, led by Richard Aldrich and Philip Davies, suggests that MI6 had sought clearance but bureaucratic pathologies meant that Eden's instructions had not passed down the chain of command.<sup>66</sup> (Having just learned that his clergyman father had died, Michael Williams, the Foreign Office Adviser charged with authorising MI6 operations, was apparently so distressed that he approved the dive without recourse to key paperwork.) Bridges, perhaps predictably, absolves MI6 of any wrongdoing: evidently, on 10 April 1956, a conference was held, in which representatives 'gained the impression that clearance had been given'.<sup>67</sup> It could be argued that Elliot and his corpus of analysts – to borrow a term coined by the Senate Intelligence Committee in July 2004 – had succumbed to a 'collective groupthink', causing them to discount arguments that were at odds with their preconceptions about the operation?

According to Bridges' Report, Crabb and his MI6 controller, Mr Smith (believed to have been Ted Davies – a navy liaison officer from MI6), checked into the Sallyport on 17 April, a day before the Russian ships berthed in Portsmouth harbour. Joined by an officer from HMS *Vernon*, who had been assigned to give unofficial assistance, the following evening Crabb carried out a practice dive and appeared to be in 'good trim'. Crabb then took a characteristically blasé attitude to security and went on a bibulous spree with some friends in the neighbouring town of Havant. The whereabouts of the wartime hero, who was known to sport a monocle and carried a swordstick with a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.; Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, p. 556.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007; C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long* (London, 1984), p. 232, p. 234.

<sup>66</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 524; Davies, *MI6*, p. 231, Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, p. 556.

<sup>67</sup> E. Bridges, 'The Report of an Enquiry on an Intelligence Operation against Russian Warships', 18 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007).

handle carved in the shape of a crab, would not have gone unnoticed among local residents and created a paper-trail back to naval authorities.<sup>68</sup> On 19 April, just before 7am, Crabb commenced his fateful – and perhaps final – dive. Operating instructions were restricted to an inspection of the *Ordzhonikidze's* rudder and screws. The frogman carried enough oxygen for a ninety-minute dive, more than sufficient for the job. By 9:15am, with no sign of Crabb, the naval officer realised that a 'serious mishap' had occurred and performed a brief search of the area; he neither 'heard nor saw any sign' of abnormal activity from the Russians. Notified of the botched operation, MI6 took the decision not to conduct a full search for the body for fear that it would alert the Russians to their activity without there being any real hope of saving Crabb, who was weighted.

Hopes of burying all knowledge of the dive soon faded. Although 'not proposing to make any fuss about it', on 21 April the Commander of the *Ordzhonikidze* reported to Rear-Admiral Burnett, Portsmouth Naval Base Chief of Staff, that a frogman had been spotted by three of his seamen.<sup>69</sup> On 24 April, the friends with whom Crabb had spent the evening in Havant contacted the Admiralty seeking news of their companion. Faced, therefore, with the possibility of unregulated publicity, MI6 suggested that the 'only hope' of deflecting embarrassment to HMG would be to release its own carefully packaged version of events. On 25 April, MI6 convened a meeting with the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral John Inglis, and the Director-General of MI5, Sir Dick White, to discuss the favoured *modus operandi*. The top priority was to prevent the story from breaking while the Russians were still in England. Three conclusions emerged: that the Admiralty should release a cover story accepting responsibility for the operation; that Crabb's friends should be 'kept quiet'; and that the matter should not be put to a 'higher [Ministerial] authority'.<sup>70</sup> The Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff (Vice-Admiral William Davis), the Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir John Lang), and the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office (Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick) approved this plan on 27 April. On 29 April, at the height of the Cold War, the Admiralty began

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

'flying kites' for MI6. As well as Eden, neither the First Lord of the Admiralty, James Thomas, nor the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, was informed.<sup>71</sup> On the picture presented to them, both Lang and Kirkpatrick considered that the risk of a 'bad break' was small, and so decided to carry the responsibility without ministerial approval.

By the time Ministers finally learned the truth behind Crabb's dive (Eden was sweetly innocent of MI6 involvement until 4 May), an all-out press campaign was underway. The outcry from Fleet Street prompted the Foreign Office to draft a series of parliamentary counterblasts. HMG could, it was argued, uphold the story that Crabb ('an expert in shallow water diving') had been testing underwater apparatus; alternatively, Ministers could claim that Crabb had been sent to patrol the harbour, a procedure frequently followed by naval authorities in port.<sup>72</sup> Its moral compass defiled by self-interest, the Foreign Office even suggested making Crabb a scapegoat by propagating the insidious fantasy that he had ignored the protests of his assistant and, 'in the spirit of adventure', mounted an unauthorised expedition against the Russian vessel. Unpersuaded by the propitiousness of more official untruths, on 9 May, Eden steered a middle course in Parliament, exonerating the Admiralty on the one hand, and politely inferring MI6 malpractice on the other.

Privately, the beleaguered Prime Minister was incensed, not only with his maverick secret service, but also with the insouciant manner in which key civil servants notified Ministers of the bungled operation. Bridges refused to single out any one individual from the *dramatis personae* as deserving of special blame, attributing the delay to a jurisdictional misunderstanding in which neither the Admiralty nor the Foreign Office regarded its Department as being the prime-mover. 'The attitude of officials in each Department', he commented, 'was that they would tell their Minister as soon as the Minister in the other Department was told – but not before'.<sup>73</sup> ('Ridiculous', Eden scribbled in the marginalia of the Report.) Incandescent with rage, on 26 June the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> F. Dean, 'Alternative Answers to Parliamentary Questions about Commander Crabb', 7 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007).

<sup>73</sup> E. Bridges, 'The Report of an Enquiry on an Intelligence Operation against Russian Warships', 18 May 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007).

Prime Minister called the Foreign Secretary, the Minister of Defence (Walter Monckton) and the First Lord to Chequers, with the explicit intention of reprimanding guilty parties. Here Eden's abominable temper – 'one of the best kept secrets in Whitehall'<sup>74</sup> – boiled over. The British Ambassador to Moscow, Sir William Goodenough Hayter, would later testify to a 'frightful row'.<sup>75</sup> While retaining their jobs, both Lang and Kirkpatrick were dealt the smack of firm government, told in 'no uncertain terms' that it would have been right and prudent to acquaint Ministers at a considerably earlier stage than was done.<sup>76</sup> For John 'Sinbad' Sinclair, head of MI6, Claret was a 'boy-scout' blunder too many; in what many regard as a deliberate affront to the Service, Sinclair was replaced by Sir Dick White, Director-General of MI5. Operation Claret – a venture Sir Percy Craddock described as 'typical of the slapdash, buccaneering style of SIS at the time'<sup>77</sup> – also heralded a watershed for the way in which MI6 operations were carried out. Emphasising the need for closer Ministerial oversight, Eden set in motion a new enquiry (under the auspices of Sir Norman Brook and Sir Patrick Dean [Chairman of the JIC]), designed to measure 'the balance between military intelligence on the one hand, and civil intelligence and political risks on the other'.<sup>78</sup> According to the former MI6 alumnus, Richard Tomlinson, all new officers are taught about the Crabb affair as a cautionary tale. Eden's fears that the affair would usher in a renewed frostiness between Britain and Russia proved unfounded. According to Hayter, during a conference at the British Embassy in Czechoslovakia on 10 May, Khrushchev was 'effusively friendly' towards Western diplomats, and spoke of his willingness to cultivate a 'favourable atmosphere' with Eden who, unlike his irresolute colleagues, was someone the Russians

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<sup>74</sup> W. Clark, *From Three Worlds* (London, 1986), pp. 169-70.

<sup>75</sup> King's College London Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (KCL), Suez Oral History Project 7, 'Transcript of Interview with Sir William Hayter Conducted by Anthony Gorst and W. Scott Lucas'.

<sup>76</sup> J. Thomas, 'The Crabb Case', 25 June 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007); N. Brook, 'Note of the Discussion Held about the Action to be Taken on the Report of Sir Edward Bridges into the Frogman Incident', 26 June 1956. <<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>> (15 August 2007).

<sup>77</sup> P. Craddock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London, 2002), p. 266.

<sup>78</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 525.

'could trust and get on with'.<sup>79</sup> As events in the Middle East and Hungary hovered into view, the Crabb affair seemed remote and rounded-off, a failure of high-drama but small historical effect.

Most conspiracy theories hinge on the assumption that HMG engineered the outcome of the inquest into Crabb's death. Indications of official stage-management can now be found in declassified Admiralty files. On 19 June 1957, a week before the trial, the naval officer who had acted as Crabb's diving tender and dresser made a statement. The man – a 'personal friend' of the Commander – is widely believed to have been the last person to see Crabb alive.<sup>80</sup> His testimony gave a detailed record of Crabb's clothing: cotton vest, bathing trunks and rayon combinations underneath a distinctive two-piece diving suit. It claimed that Crabb had entered the water from King's Stairs, immediately south of the southern jetty in Portsmouth Dockyard, and about 80 yards from where the *Ordzhonikidze* was berthed. This, of course, clashed with the cover story that Crabb had been operating further along the coast in Stokes Bay. It also revealed that the officer had received explicit orders from his superiors not to conduct a full search for the missing frogman and to 'take no further part in the affair'.<sup>81</sup> Rear-Admiral Inglis became very concerned about what the officer might disclose at the inquest. His story, it was feared, would almost certainly implicate naval chiefs and expose them to charges of 'negligence, lack of humanity and error of judgement'.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, people might assume that the unnamed officer was in fact Mr Smith, leading to 'all kinds of enquiry from the press and other sources'.<sup>83</sup> Government lawyers initially concluded that it would be impossible to prevent the individual from giving evidence at the trial. It was hoped, however, that the police would be able to get him to and from the court without the press learning of his involvement.<sup>84</sup> To avoid 'undesirable speculation' at HMS Vernon about the officer's absence that day, the message would be spread around that he was taking 'some fictitious duty' or annual leave. To Inglis, however, the risk of the

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<sup>79</sup> KCL, Suez Oral History Project 7, 'Transcript of Interview with Sir William Hayter Conducted by Anthony Gorst and W. Scott Lucas'.

<sup>80</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, 'Transcript of Evidence', 19 June 1956.

<sup>81</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, J.G.T. Inglis, 21 June 1957.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

officer saying something untoward was still too great and, in consequence, he instructed the coroner 'not to ask for the appearance of any embarrassing naval witness'.<sup>85</sup> To represent the Admiralty, Inglis dispatched the suitably green organisation man, Gordon William Bostock, a temporary clerk in the Commanding Reserves Department: 'Bostock knows nothing of the background to the story', affirmed Inglis, 'and will not be able to answer any embarrassing questions even if they are asked'.<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.4 Backwash

During the early 1970s, as chilly relations segued into an age of global détente, HMG was not averse to clapping restrictions on potentially inflammatory sites of cultural production. As declassified Cabinet files reveal, the popular culture of the Crabb affair became a key area of contestation, and officials did their level best to ensure that its form did not map adversely onto the diplomatic landscape. On 9 February 1972, believing that 'the passage of time had rendered [the] incident harmless and not against national security', the BBC informed the MOD that it wished to make a television programme examining Crabb's disappearance.<sup>87</sup> The 30-minute broadcast, while consisting largely of published material, would attempt to 'break new ground' by drawing on evidence from an anonymous naval diver.<sup>88</sup> Departments unanimously opposed the venture. With Anglo-Soviet relations beginning, at last, 'to blossom a little', the principal objection was lodged by the Foreign Office who were disinclined to rekindle an episode of mutual ill-feeling.<sup>89</sup> The Russian press had since compared the incident to the American U-2 spy flight, when 'the Soviet Union was stabbed in the back' before the abortive Paris summit.<sup>90</sup> Any recapitulation of events, claimed the Admiralty, would almost certainly defame the image of MI6, whilst it was not

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<sup>84</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, 'The Crabb Case', J.G.T. Inglis, 17 June 1957.

<sup>85</sup> TNA ADM 1/29240, J.G.T. Inglis, 21 June 1957.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, D. Darlow to W. Jack, 9 February 1972.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 27 April 1972.

<sup>89</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, JIC (A) (72), 20 April 1972; TNA CAB 163/207, J. Davies, 19 April 1972.

<sup>90</sup> Reporter, 'The Man Who Was', *Izvestiya*, 29 December 1960; News, 'Commander Crabb 'Not Alive in Russia'', *The Times*, 30 December 1960, p. 6.



inconceivable that the Russians might learn something they '[did] not already know'.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, buried in CAB 163/207 is the revelation that Crabb was not the only frogman who attempted to reconnoitre the *Ordzhonikidze* in 1956 and that a naval team from HMS *Vernon* had performed a second, undetected dive.<sup>92</sup>

While the Cabinet Office began formulating its response, the Crabb affair re-emerged as front-page news with the publication in June 1972 of Harry Houghton's renegade memoir, *Operation Portland*. Therein the convicted Russian spy alleged that Crabb had been apprehended by underwater sentries, taken aboard and murdered after interrogation.<sup>93</sup> Although discernibly unreliable as history, Houghton's autobiography, declared Clifton Child (Head of the Cabinet Office Historical Section), was read in Whitehall with a 'sense of horror and revulsion', principally because it would encourage others to set the record straight.<sup>94</sup> After protracted discussions with the JIC, the Cabinet Office eventually sent a letter of protest to David Darlow, the BBC producer responsible. The letter impressed that the MOD would neither assist, nor endorse, the project; reminded producers that any script would be subject to official scrutiny; and underlined that the legal responsibility for improper disclosure would rest firmly with the BBC.<sup>95</sup> Darlow's documentary had in fact got off to a rather inauspicious start. In fear of jeopardising his Navy pension, and under duress from his wife who was apparently 'highly strung' at such a prospect,<sup>96</sup> the original navy contact had backed out of the picture.<sup>97</sup> By December 1972, however, the project had been revived. The BBC, reported Darlow, was now in touch with another naval officer who was willing to disclose that he had participated in an unrelated expedition mounted by a specialist

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<sup>91</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, R.J. Penney to DUS (B), 4 April 1972.

<sup>92</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, N. Denning to AUS (DS), 11 April 1972.

<sup>93</sup> H. Houghton, 'How Russian Undersea Sentries Caught Frogman Buster Crabb', *Sunday Express* 11 June 1972; H. Houghton, *Operation Portland* (London, 1972).

<sup>94</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, C.J. Child to N. Denning, 27 June 1972.

<sup>95</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, W. Cribbs to C.J. Child, 13 April 1972; TNA CAB 163/207, R.J. Penney to DUS (B), 4 April 1972.

<sup>96</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, JIC (A) (72) (SEC) 101, D.E. Chamberlain, 30 May 1972.

<sup>97</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, JIC (A) (72) (SEC) 112, D.E. Chamberlain, 3 July 1972; TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 13 February 1973.

team of divers from HMS *Vernon*.<sup>98</sup> Procuring intelligence of 'considerable value', the second operation found no evidence of underwater sentries, said by Houghton, to have been guarding the ship's hull.<sup>99</sup> The diver's testimony, envisaged Darlow, would make a film of 'real archival value' and discredit the 'grossly distorted version' put out by Houghton.

On 13 February 1973, the matter reached the desk of the Prime Minister, Edward Heath. In a private communiqué, marked 'Top Secret: UK Eyes Alpha', the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, explained: 'The BBC now know that, in addition to the operation by Crabb, a separate diving operation was planned by the Royal Navy against the Russian cruiser. They have also got wind of the fact that this second operation, although officially called off, nevertheless took place as an unofficial enterprise'.<sup>100</sup> Disclosure of the second dive, counselled Trend, would give the Russians an excuse to be obstructive about future naval visits and thus antagonise already 'chilly relations'. Heath agreed and, on 19 February 1973, directed the D-Notice Committee to exert pressure on the corporation. The BBC was duly informed that, 'No indemnity can be given for any naval officer, whether serving or retired, to divulge information. No official co-operation in the making of the programme is to be expected'.<sup>101</sup> MI5 also pursued a policy of intimidation against Darlow's naval informant. Since the individual was a serving officer, and would thus be in breach of the OSA if proven to have imparted information without authorisation, 'all sorts of pressure' was put on him 'to keep his mouth shut'.<sup>102</sup> The BBC nevertheless decided to go ahead with the documentary using its own resources and actors. On 20 March 1973, although divided about the wisdom of anything that smacked of forced censorship ('if it became known that an approach had been made, and had been rebuffed, curiosity and suspicion would merely be increased'), Trend recommended that one last attempt should be made to

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<sup>98</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, D. Darlow to K. Farnhill, 31 January 1973; TNA CAB 163/207, K. Farnhill to M. Herman, 30 January 1973; TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 13 February 1973.

<sup>99</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 13 February 1973; TNA CAB 163/207, D. Darlow to K. Farnhill, 31 January 1973.

<sup>100</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 13 February 1973.

<sup>101</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, K. Farnhill to D. Darlow, 19 February 1973.

<sup>102</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, Miscellaneous Note, D of Sec.

dissuade them.<sup>103</sup> On this occasion, however, the Foreign Secretary (Alec Douglas-Home) preferred to 'let events take their course'.<sup>104</sup> Home's decision to put the ball in Darlow's court proved inspired: the BBC has no record of the documentary ever being broadcast whilst details of the second dive failed to emerge until the publication of Nicholas Elliot's second volume of memoirs, *With My Little Eye*, in 1993.<sup>105</sup> As Elliot claimed, short of some extraordinary stroke of luck or malpractice, the circumstances behind the second dive, as well as the intelligence it procured, will never be disclosed.

## Conclusions

The evidence adduced over the course of this article has attempted to demonstrate how the Crabb affair intersects with a much wider discussion about secrecy, media-state relations, intelligence machinery and Cold War culture. The maelstrom into which the Eden administration was drawn in May 1956 can be seen as the direct corollary of excessive secretiveness. Secrecy spawned an endless stream of conjecture which, left unchecked, threatened to disrupt the diplomatic timetable. Its imagination sharpened by official stonewalling, Fleet Street's incendiary reaction was instrumental not only in forcing HMG to plug speculation with denials, but also in metastasising Crabb's disappearance into a broader scandal about the scope and nature of intelligence activities. Far-fetched tales did much to bring the work of MI6 into the open and symbolised the arrival of a less deferential breed of journalist, not averse to exposing the 'business' of espionage. Indeed, since the Crabb affair, it has become an unfortunate truism that success in intelligence remains hidden whereas failure is invariably disclosed in the public prints.<sup>106</sup> As well as driving a larger wedge between Eden and the press, the affair also hastened the inherent entropy within Britain's secret state, prompting a root and branch review of the means by which political clearance for MI6 operations was sought. Crabb's posthumous fame has certainly matched – if not

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<sup>103</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, B. Trend to E. Heath, 20 March 1973.

<sup>104</sup> TNA CAB 163/207, A. Douglas-Home to E. Heath, 23 March 1973.

<sup>105</sup> N. Elliot, *With My Little Eye* (London, 1993). Michael Herman also has no knowledge of the documentary ever being shown. (Interview with Mr Michael Herman, civil servant, 21 August 2007.)

exceeded – any that he won in his lifetime. The imagined Crabb was permanently immersed in the ideological co-ordinates of the Cold War and could be wielded by the culture industry as an intrepid British agent or an immoral Soviet quisling. The reconstituted portrait of Crabb as a drunken, sexual deviant was the best way of rationalising possible defection, and reflected a broader semiotic slide between communist and pervert in Cold War Britain. During détente, as evidenced by departmental opposition to the BBC documentary in 1972, it was not politically expedient for Cold War culture to run amok and officials did their best to withdraw Crabb from the cultural front line, and maintain the locking down of the ‘Whitehall machine’ in relation to the issue. Continued archival restrictions will probably dictate that whistleblowers will play a key role in opening up fresh vistas on this seemingly evergreen saga. Most recently, in November 2007, a retired Soviet sailor, Eduard Koltsov, alleged to a Russian documentary team that he had cut Crabb’s throat when he discovered the frogman fastening a mine to the *Ordzhonikidze’s* ammunition stores.<sup>107</sup> Koltsov’s revelation represents an altogether implausible footnote: blowing up the Russian leaders would have led to World War Three. Coming so soon after the Litvinenko spy row, and Britain’s decision in July 2007 to expel four Russian diplomats from its London Embassy, it should probably be read as Moscow refighting the past for present political agendas.

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<sup>106</sup> L. Scott, ‘Sources and Methods in the Study of Intelligence: A British View’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 22:2 (April 2007), pp. 185-205, esp. p. 191.

<sup>107</sup> P. Naughton, ‘Russian Claims he Killed ‘Buster’ Crabb, the Frogman who Inspired James Bond’, *The Times*, 16 November 2007. Mr Koltsov, who was 23 in April 1956, told a Russian documentary team: ‘I saw a silhouette of a diver in a light frogman suit who was fiddling with something at the starboard, next to the ship’s ammunition stores. I swam closer and saw that he fixing a mine.’

## CHAPTER FIVE | LIGHT IN DARK CORNERS: INTELLIGENCE MEMOIRS AND OFFICIAL HISTORY

The Second World War witnessed its fair share of success stories in the field of intelligence. Chief among them was the work of British codebreakers at Bletchley Park. From 1940, under conditions of absolute secrecy, a silent army of cryptographers started to intercept and decrypt the supposedly infallible German machine ciphers (Enigma); the resulting Special Intelligence – otherwise known under the collective cover name of Ultra – provided ‘information of the greatest importance and reliability concerning the activities and intentions of the enemy’.<sup>1</sup> Although some revisionists, such as Ralph Bennett, have since questioned its place as a primary element – ‘deception is nothing but the handmaid of operations with no independent life of [its] own’<sup>2</sup> – conventional wisdom dictates that Ultra played a decisive role in the Allied victory. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, believed that Bletchley Park cryptography ‘saved thousands of British and Americans lives and, in no small way, contributed to the speed with which the enemy was routed and eventually forced to surrender’.<sup>3</sup> Sir Harry Hinsley, official historian of British Intelligence in the Second World War, proposed that Ultra shortened the conflict by ‘not less than two years’ and probably by four.<sup>4</sup>

In 2008 the story of Bletchley’s penetration into Hitler’s communications empire is well known. Its success has become a common touchstone for popular culture – ‘celebrated in memoirs, dramatised in fiction and film’;<sup>5</sup> its gifted practitioners assume a shorthand for community, triumph over adversity, even the idea of Britishness itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA) CAB 103/288, JIC (45) 223 (0) Final, ‘Use of Special Intelligence by Official Historians’, 20 July 1945.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bennett, ‘FORTITUDE, ULTRA and the “Need to Know”’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 4:3 (July 1988), p.498; R. Bennett, ‘ULTRA and Some Command Decisions’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16:1 (January 1981), pp. 131-52.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in F.W. Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret* (Aylesbury, 1974), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> H. Hinsley, ‘The Enigma of Ultra’, *History Today*, 43:9 (September 1993), pp. 15-20.

Such is the importance of Bletchley Park in our national heritage, it is easy to forget that the Ultra secret was not revealed to the public until the mid-1970s, some three decades after the end of the Second World War. Published after 1945, the official histories of the conflict contained no references to, or mention of Bletchley Park. The ordinarily garrulous Winston Churchill, who by common consent masterminded cryptography's revival in 1940, was silent on the subject in his multi-volume *History of the Second World War*. Only in 1974, with the publication of Frederick Winterbotham's *The Ultra Secret*, did 'the greatest secret in warfare' finally emerge.<sup>6</sup> Such a degree of secrecy, as Peter Calvocoressi has argued, was a 'phenomenon that may be unparalleled in history'.<sup>7</sup>

Concealing Ultra, as well as a host of other intelligence-related secrets, was not an easy exercise and attracted a good deal of resentment from both within and outside Whitehall. Curious hacks and well-informed historians reserved particular contempt for governments seen to be airbrushing the historical record. Memoir writers too, eager to burnish their reputations by leaving a chronicle of their wartime experience and achievements, decried obscurantist policies. The decisions and deliberations underpinning this blackout have for a long time been closely guarded secrets. Today, however, documents available in the National Archives, complemented by oral history, permit a partial, if revealing reconstruction of the main contours. This chapter will put forward several arguments. Firstly, after 1945 governments became embroiled in ongoing concentrated efforts to protect their intelligence secrets from memoir writers. When vetting unwelcome manuscripts, an honest calculation of the benefits and risks of disclosure was made, reflecting genuine concerns about the protection of agents and methods. Secondly, the spectre of legal action, so readily threatened against journalists, rarely overshadowed the publication plans of the 'Great and the Good'. As Richard Aldrich argues, with privileged information in their metaphorical knapsacks, statesmen

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<sup>5</sup> D. Reynolds, 'The Ultra Secret and Churchill's War Memoirs', *Intelligence and National Security*, 20:2 (June 2005), p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> P. Calvocoressi, *Top Secret Ultra* (New York, 1981), p. 14.

and officials of the first rank became the most effective 'shock troops' against secrecy.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, as more and more insiders blew the whistle on their trade, Whitehall sponsored official histories to dampen public pressure for declassification of the intelligence archive. Official histories were also used to serve geo-political agendas. By the 1960s, communist scholars had effectively rewritten the history of the Second World War, claiming erroneously that Western forces had played little or no part in fermenting resistance throughout Axis-occupied Europe. History was no longer dead weight, but rather another battleground in the Cold War. Each country's war record had to be burnished bright; both M.R.D Foot's *SOE in France* (1964) and F.H. Hinsley's *Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War* (5 volumes, 1979-1990) were complicit in this process.

### 5.1 Signals Intelligence: The Secret of All Secrets

Governments have long been secretive about their cryptography – also known as Signals intelligence (Sigint). In 1919, Admiral Hugh Sinclair, Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI), emphasised that the work of the Navy's cryptographic bureau, Room 40, must remain hidden forever: 'It is just as important now as it ever was for our success to be unknown to any except those who have worked here and the few naval officers who have had the entrée in connection with their work'.<sup>9</sup> If it became more widely known that Britain had decoded wartime communications traffic, foreign governments would heighten the security of their cipher systems, and thus augment the difficulties of Room 40's peacetime successor, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC & CS). Sinclair's ruling was contested almost immediately. In 1920, Sir John Jellicoe, former Commander of the Grand Fleet and later First Sea Lord, published his first volume of memoirs in which he stated, quite untruly, that the Wireless Telegraphy set installed on the Admiralty building roof had successfully intercepted German signals

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<sup>8</sup> R.J. Aldrich, 'Policing the Past: Official History, Secrecy and British Intelligence since 1945', *English Historical Review*, 119:483 (September 2004), p. 923.

<sup>9</sup> TNA HW 3/13, 'Room 40', H. Sinclair, September 1919.

traffic.<sup>10</sup> The extent of disclosure could have been worse; Jellicoe, eager to showcase the intelligence contribution to the Battle of Jutland, had asked unsuccessfully to include certain intercepts forecasting the sortie of the German fleet.<sup>11</sup> Critics might have asked why, if the Admiralty possessed this source of information, better use was not made of it. Indeed, given the impressive yield of intercepts, most historians now agree that Jutland 'should have been the second Trafalgar'.<sup>12</sup>

Sigint indiscretions continued apace throughout the inter-war period. Room 40 was publicly referred to by Winston Churchill under whom, as First Lord, the work of naval cryptography had begun, and by Lord Balfour, under whom it was continued.<sup>13</sup> On 13 December 1927, Sir James Alfred Ewing, head of Room 40 from 1914-1917, startled the Admiralty by giving a lecture to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution entitled 'Some Special War Work'.<sup>14</sup> During his address, Ewing not only explained the initiation and development of naval intelligence but used the phrase 'The Ultra Secret', albeit in the context of the old Admirals' code at Trafalgar. Threatened with prosecution, but nevertheless 'certain that the narrative had enough historical value to justify its existence', Ewing relied on Lord Balfour, then Lord President of the Council, to convince Sir Barry Domville (then DNI) that legal action constituted a 'purely retrograde step'.<sup>15</sup> Soon facing another breach – *Room 40 OB* (1932) by Hugh Hoy – the new DNI, Sir Gerald Charles, moved for an injunction. *Room 40*, he argued, represented 'another link in the chain of Official Secrets Act contraventions'; allowing publication would make it impossible to prosecute any future disclosures pertaining to wartime cryptography.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there was no guarantee that Hoy's history would be the 'last step in the descent'; others might interpret publication as a green light to

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<sup>10</sup> TNA HW 3/13, 'Note: Sir J. Jellicoe, *The Grand Fleet* 1920.'

<sup>11</sup> TNA HW 3/13, 'Jellicoe's Memoirs', H. Sinclair, 27 February 1920.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; See P. Beesly, 'British Naval Intelligence in Two World Wars', in C. Andrew and J. Noakes (eds), *Intelligence and International Relations* (Exeter, 1987), p. 268.

<sup>13</sup> TNA HW 3/13, W. Clarke, January 1928.

<sup>14</sup> TNA HW 3/13 'Sir A. Ewing's Lectures', O. Murray, 12 January 1932; R.V. Jones, 'Alfred Ewing and Room 40', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 34:1 (1979), pp. 65-90.

<sup>15</sup> A. Ewing, *The Man of Room 40: The Life of Sir Alfred Ewing* (London, 1939), p. 246; TNA HW 3/13, Miscellaneous Note.



publish their own accounts.<sup>17</sup> The Director of Public Prosecutions, however, took a different view: *Room 40* was published, albeit with 'minor' deletions, in 1932. As well as carrying profound security implications, unofficial disclosures fashioned, what William Clarke, Head of GC & CS Naval Section, described in 1930 as 'an entirely erroneous and hackneyed idea of intelligence'.<sup>18</sup> Even officers of the Staff College were being brought up with 'a travesty of the facts'.

By the mid-thirties, however, in spite of increasing threats to British interests from Germany, Italy and Japan, Whitehall was beginning to break its silence on Great War Sigint. 'Any disclosure as to what was done in 1914-1918 can have no possible ill-effect', asserted Clarke in March 1936.<sup>19</sup> The antiquated cryptography of Room 40 was 'but child's play' in comparison with subsequent practice.<sup>20</sup> Alphabetical books, simple substitution cyphers, the possession of actual codebooks, had made codebreaking 'comparatively easy'. During the First World War, claimed Clarke, 'even the most inexperienced and untrained amateurs produced what appeared at the time marvellous results'.<sup>21</sup> During the 1930s, it was widely recognised by foreign powers that Britain had perfected the art of cryptography, and most had changed their cipher systems accordingly. Indeed, by 1934, the German government was known to be developing the new coding apparatus Enigma. Reduced security concerns benefited the memoirist. In 1936, for example, Admiral Bacon was allowed to include redacted Jutland signals in his *Life of Lord Jellicoe*.<sup>22</sup> The only remaining secret was how long a particular form of reciphering was safe: 'This', claimed Clarke, 'all nations would [still] like to know'.<sup>23</sup>

The Second World War foreclosed any possibility of greater openness. In the interests of national security, the London Controlling Section, Britain's foremost strategic military deception co-ordinator, ruled that all information regarding the use of

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<sup>16</sup> TNA HW 3/13, C.V. Usborne, 11 May 1932; H. Hoy, *Room 40 OB: Or How the War Was Won* (London, 1932).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> TNA HW 3/13, W. Clarke, 1 February 1930.

<sup>19</sup> TNA HW 3/13, W. Clarke 14 March 1936.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; TNA HW 3/13, 'Sir A. Ewing's Lectures', O. Murray, 12 January 1932.

<sup>21</sup> TNA HW 3/13, W. Clarke, 14 March 1936.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Sigint as an organised weapon of war should be classified Top Secret. In Whitehall, receipt of Ultra and knowledge of its existence was confined to approximately thirty war-related staff, and included only half a dozen of Churchill's thirty-five Ministers.<sup>24</sup> The Armed Services worked on a strictly 'need to know' basis; only small cells of officers – usually theatre commanders – handled Ultra material in operational zones and they were directed to explain its origin to subordinates by reference to an apocryphal agent buried within enemy headquarters. Official documents, both at home and abroad, used fake initials (such as CX/FJ, CX/JQ and CX/MSS) rather than the prefix Ultra.<sup>25</sup> In April 1944, with the invasion of France imminent, a Combined Intelligence Priorities Committee was established to oversee the removal of all Ultra-related documents found in the archives of liberated Europe. By August 1944, with German records exposed like rabbit's droppings in the bedlam of the Axis retreat, it was agreed that a Foreign Office archivist, with 'commonsense and training in interrogation', would accompany parties of troops with the task of safeguarding special intelligence records.<sup>26</sup> Those who worked at Bletchley Park meanwhile guarded their secret calling with unequalled zealotry and devotion. Indeed, during a visit to the Park on 6 September 1941, Churchill famously described his codebreakers as 'the geese that lay the golden eggs and never cackle'.

In spring 1945, with the war against Germany drawing to a close, the London Signals Intelligence Board – Britain's premier Sigint authority – began to identify chinks in the armour. In 1942, the War Office began writing history long before history itself had been played out, with the Chairman of the Committee for the Control of Official Histories, R.A. Butler, commissioning a broad range of both technical and popular

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See J. Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (London, 2003), pp. 190-6; C. Andrew, 'Churchill and Intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3:3 (July 1988), pp. 181-93.

<sup>25</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, 'JIC: General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', 20 July 1945.

<sup>26</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Security of Deception: Development up to Mid-January 1946', London Controlling Section; TNA FO 371/39171, M. Vyvyan to H. Jenkinson, 3 August 1944; TNA FO 371/39171, Anon. to Major Cave G2 Division Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, 10 August 1944.

studies of the war.<sup>27</sup> Encompassing civilian as well as military topics, the histories were to be beefed up with sensitive material, since Great War volumes were believed to '[omit] the essence of human nature' and be 'so dull that they have no public'.<sup>28</sup> In February 1942, Sir Keith Hancock, editor of the UK Civil Series, reported that: 'Ministries have without exception shown themselves eager to co-operate. They [have] a natural zeal to carry out government policy; a realisation that experience ought to be funded for the sake of the future; and a conviction that the work will have a practical value during the transition from war to peace'.<sup>29</sup> The London Signals Intelligence Board now feared that when official historians put captured German records alongside relevant British documents, it would be revealed to them that the Allies had been in possession of event-influencing information, which could not have been obtained from agents (Humint) or other means slower than Ultra.<sup>30</sup> The telltale sign would be the speed with which the Allies responded to Axis moves: the immediate re-routing of convoys to avoid U-boat attacks; the redeployment of field forces in the face of German dispositions; the counter-measures to negate Luftwaffe raids.<sup>31</sup>

In July 1945, the matter was passed to the JIC. Its report emphasised that most aspects of wartime deception should remain permanently hidden. These aspects included:

1. That Ultra formed the basis upon which Britain gauged the plausibility and the effect of strategic plans;
2. That deception was coordinated in every theatre of war;
3. That double agents were employed for misinforming the enemy.<sup>32</sup>

For GCHQ, disclosing the story of Ultra, and the intelligence it yielded, presented a particular set of issues. Firstly, 'enemies may arise in the future'; were they to know

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<sup>27</sup> TNA ADM 116/5558, R.A. Butler; TNA ADM 116/5558, 'Preliminary Histories of the War', Head of Military Branch, 10 November 1944.

<sup>28</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, M. Hankey to R. Howorth, 21 July 1941.

<sup>29</sup> TNA FO 370/692, 'Report: Progress of the Official Histories', K. Hancock, 18 February 1942.

<sup>30</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, Telegram, Cabinet Office to JSM (Washington), July 1945.

<sup>31</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, JIC (45) 223 (0) Final, 'Use of Special Intelligence by Official Historians', 20 July 1945.

what successes were achieved in the war as a result of Ultra, they could ensure that this source was not available again.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, 'no possible excuse must be given to the Germans [or Japanese] to explain away their complete defeat by force of arms'. If it became known that the plans of the Axis powers had been available to the Allies, the Germans could again claim that they were not 'well and fairly beaten' and thus potentially fuel fascist revanchism and 'defeat by betrayal' discourses.<sup>34</sup> The beneficiaries of Ultra had long conceded its possible 'stab-in-the-back' quality. In July 1944, having just received a particularly 'good morsel', the US 7<sup>th</sup> Army Intelligence Officer quipped: 'You know, this just isn't cricket'.<sup>35</sup> Although brushed off as fantasy by some critics ('it's just not how it works in real life'),<sup>36</sup> David Kahn has also suggested that the British were intent on peddling 'pre-owned' Enigma machines to Commonwealth countries and wished to continue reading the messages of the machines' new owners.<sup>37</sup>

Disclosure of the Ultra story also had the potential to disrupt western intelligence co-operation. During the war, despite official lip service to full collaboration, Britain had taken considerable umbrage at Allied security negligence and secretly withheld manifold decrypts from co-belligerents. Declassified Bletchley files demonstrate the degree of concealment. In November 1943 – 'dictated not by any lack of confidence in French personnel but because we have every reason to be distrustful of their Signals security' – French circulation was restricted to low-grade ciphers.<sup>38</sup> British fears were initially aroused by a captured enemy cryptanalyst who suggested that French codes in Syria had given the Germans 'a full picture' of the strength and organisation of Gaullist forces, as well valuable details of British troop movements. Britain also regulated its cipher exchanges with the Americans. In 1942-43, US mistakes

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<sup>32</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Security of Deception', Memorandum by Controlling Officers, 17 February 1946.

<sup>33</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, 'JIC: General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', 20 July 1945; TNA HW 3/29, 'Special Order', E. Travis, 7 May 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in S. Schoenherr, 'Code Breaking in World War Two', 13 March 2007.

<<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/ww2timeline/espionage.html>> (1 August 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mr Michael Herman, civil servant, 21 August 2007.

<sup>37</sup> D. Kahn, 'The Ultra Secret: Enigma Unwrapped', *The New York Times*, 29 December 1974, p. 5.

(misapplication of R/T field codes, excessive devotion to plain language, and persistent use of the 'compromised' Hapelin machine) had supplied 'a continuous stream of information to the German Intelligence Service'.<sup>39</sup> Thereafter Britain was very careful about what it supplied the US. What could be more damaging to Anglo-American co-operation in the Sigint field – let alone the broader 'special relationship' – than the revelation that Britain had surreptitiously held back decrypts in direct contravention of the landmark BRUSA (Britain/USA) Sigint exchange agreement of May 1943?

The risk of Ultra's disclosure from ministers, generals or cryptographers was considered small. Already initiated into a culture of secrecy, and hamstrung by their obligation to the OSA, staffs would require only polite reminders that 'the time limit for reticence about special intelligence never expires'.<sup>40</sup> Ultra was also unlikely to be 'blown' by journalists. Indeed, despite growing press attention to 'ruses de guerre', it was agreed not to issue a D-Notice instructing editors to refrain from divulging secret intelligence methods.<sup>41</sup> As the Director of Military Intelligence argued, a D-Notice would constitute a 'remedy worse than the disease', since it would be admitting to large numbers that organised deception had been carried out.<sup>42</sup> This decision was also rationalised on the grounds that the D-Notice system was far too 'leaky' to be entrusted with Ultra. The chief problem therefore was what to do with official historians. Denying them access to German records was impractical; cancelling the histories altogether would anger the public.<sup>43</sup> The JIC eventually settled on a plan whereby official historians would be told the Ultra secret and then 'indoctrinated': that is, sworn not to reveal it in their writings. In late July 1945, Historical Sections were issued with a General Directive, which emphasised: 'It is imperative that the fact that such

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<sup>38</sup> TNA HW 50/22, Miscellaneous Notes, 17 November 1943.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.; TNA HW 50/22, 'Compromise of Co-belligerents by Cypher Communications', May 1953.

<sup>40</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, JIC (45) 223 (0) Final, 'Use of Special Intelligence by Official Historians', 20 July 1945; TNA CAB 103/288, 'JIC: General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', 20 July 1945.

<sup>41</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Draft: D-Notice No. 1', G.P. Thomson, 28 November 1945.

<sup>42</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, Directorate of Military Intelligence to London Controlling Section, 17 January 1946.

<sup>43</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, Telegram, Cabinet Office to JSM (Washington), July 1945.

intelligence was available should NEVER be disclosed'.<sup>44</sup> The Directive underlined that official historians would be denied access to Sigint material; would be required 'not to probe too deeply' into the reasons for apparently unaccountable operational orders; and would be expected to sign a declaration prohibiting them from mentioning Ultra in their work.<sup>45</sup> Such a praetorian approach was mirrored in Washington. On 7 September 1945, in a memorandum to the London Controlling Section, the US Joint Chiefs wrote: 'It is desirable and necessary to take appropriate action to ensure the protection of sources of signals intelligence in connection with the preparation of official histories'.<sup>46</sup> As Richard Aldrich argues, 'The official history programme [had] become the last deception operation of the Second World War'.<sup>47</sup>

In respect of tactical, rather than strategic deception, Whitehall was more prepared to creak ajar the door of secrecy. By June 1945, a large number of tactical narratives had been submitted to the Chief Press Censor, Rear-Admiral Thomson. Most related to the defence of Britain during 1940 and included descriptions of Q-lighting, dummy aircraft, and diversions using smoke, gunfire and rockets.<sup>48</sup> Thomson approached R.T. Jansen, Head of the Inter-Service Security Board, with the opinion that, unless some relaxation was granted, editors may start publishing stories without permission and risk legal action being taken against them. Controlled discharge of tactical material, he continued, might deflect interest away from the more sensitive subject of strategic deception. Jansen agreed: 'The Board feels that we are fighting a delaying action in which ground will have to be given. The time has come when a more realistic attitude must be adopted'.<sup>49</sup> The Americans adopted exactly the same policy. 'Publication of tactical items would neither compromise vital information nor

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<sup>44</sup> TNA CAB 103/288, JIC (45) 223 (0) Final, 'Use of Special Intelligence by Official Historians', 20 July 1945; TNA CAB 103/288, 'JIC: General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', 20 July 1945.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.; TNA WO 208/5126, 'Summary: London Signals Intelligence Board Meeting. No. 13', 18 July 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in A.C. Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies* (London, 1976), p. 826.

<sup>47</sup> R.J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), pp. 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, R.T. Jansen to JIC, 20 June 1945.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

reveal the scope of Allied deception', ruled the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>50</sup> By November 1945, therefore, the following information was entering the public domain: construction and tactical use of dummy devices (tanks, buildings, landing craft *et al.*); methods of camouflage; tactical radar counter-measures (decoy balloons); and indications of saboteur activity.<sup>51</sup>

The first lifting of the Sigint blanket came from outside of the UK. In autumn 1945, the Australian Defence Minister, Jack Beasley, spoke publicly about American naval intelligence success during the Battle of the Coral Sea. The *Washington Post* headlined, 'Hush Hush. Intelligence Officers "cracked" the naval code. Now it can be told'.<sup>52</sup> More seriously, under intense constitutional pressure, the 1946 Congressional Inquiry into Pearl Harbor disclosed publicly and in great detail the American Magic programme, which had successfully broken Japanese high-grade naval ciphers.<sup>53</sup> In America, memoirists soon got in on the act. In *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (1946), Captain Harry C. Butcher, Eisenhower's former naval aide, discussed the ruses for the North African invasion, as well as mentioning such unmentionables as 'one-time pads'. In *The Strange Alliance* (1947), Major-General John Deane, Chief of the Military Mission in Moscow, gave a detailed account of Operation Bodyguard, the 'brilliant and successful deception to shield the Second Front'.<sup>54</sup> The American government – 'though doing its best' – was simply in no position to stop publication. Lacking an OSA with which to threaten whistleblowers, the most that could be done, lamented Brigadier Cornwall-Jones (Head of the JSM in Washington), was to identify objectionable

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Security of Deception: Development up to Mid-January 1946', London Controlling Section; TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Disclosure of Information Relating to Deception Devices', Memorandum by Combined Chiefs of Staff, 22 October 1945; TNA DEFE 28/28, British Chiefs of Staff, 8 November 1945.

<sup>52</sup> TNA CAB 104/282, E.G. Hastings, 3 February 1948.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969; J.R. Deane, *The Strange Alliance: The Story of our Efforts at Wartime Co-operation with Russia* (Indiana, 1947); 'Exasperation in Moscow', *Time*, 13 January 1947.

passages and 'tone them down'.<sup>55</sup> American indiscretions started to make Britain's peremptory stonewalling appear decidedly passé. 'We must now accept certain facts; and having, like a good bridge player, counted our winners and losers, only then decide how to play the hand', stated Controlling Officers in 1946.<sup>56</sup>

The cessation of hostilities with Japan encouraged a battle of the books. Post-mortems would be carried out; judgements would be passed. One author absolutely determined to put the record straight was Winston Churchill, engaged in writing his six-volume history of the Second World War. Churchill had long been fascinated by the stratagems, to employ the military lexicon, of 'special means'. Bletchley Park, in particular, had a special resonance to him. By May 1940, much to the discomfiture of his Chiefs of Staff, Churchill insisted on receiving a personal and daily supply of raw intercepts from his Bletchley 'hens'. Ronald Lewin has suggested that the magic and mystery of cryptography had 'an irresistible appeal for the schoolboy working inside a great man'.<sup>57</sup> It was initially believed by historians that 'Churchill needed no guidance on the need to avoid mentioning Ultra' in his memoirs'.<sup>58</sup> Recently declassified evidence tends to suggest otherwise. The galley proofs of *The Gathering Storm* contained manifold references to 'Boniface', Churchill's much-loved euphemism for Ultra. As a result, on 27 January 1948, the Cabinet Secretary (Norman Brook) met with Churchill to discuss the author's Sigint indiscretions. Despite promising Brook that he would not reveal the extent of Ultra's success ('this was our real secret which must be protected at all costs'), Churchill was not dazzled by the cry of secrets and insisted that he would 'find it difficult to complete his book without including at some point statements which implied that we were able to break the codes and cyphers of enemy powers'.<sup>59</sup> E.G. Hastings, Director of London Signals Intelligence Committee, was horrified at Churchill's nonchalant attitude. Because Churchill's history would 'be regarded as an

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<sup>55</sup> TNA DEFE 28/28, Director of Military Intelligence to London Controlling Section, 17 January 1946; TNA DEFE 28/28, 'Security of Deception', Memorandum by Controlling Officers, 17 February 1946.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> R. Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War* (London, 1978), p. 183.

<sup>58</sup> Aldrich, 'Policing the Past', p. 927.



authentic statement of the facts of the war', and would 'be more widely read than any other book of modern times', disclosures of this nature would cause 'irreparable harm'.<sup>60</sup> The temptation for the many thousands 'in the know' to be less guarded, or to appear wise among friends and relations, would be irresistible once disclosed by no less a person than Churchill. The flood-gates would be open. Disclosure would also threaten to foreclose reconciliation with the USSR. During the war, the Russians were not informed of the Ultra success, and what information was revealed to them was paraphrased and disguised. 'Nothing would more surely provide the Russians with potent [anti-West] propaganda', believed the London Signals Intelligence Board, 'than the admission by our wartime Prime Minister that vital information affecting Russian operations had been withheld'.<sup>61</sup> Churchill eventually succumbed to the 'strongest possible appeals'; Ultra was completely removed from Volume I.<sup>62</sup>

In a draft of Volume II, *The Finest Hour*, Brook was shocked to find a blatant reference to the speedy receipt of enemy signals. In depicting General Wavell's counter-offensive against the Italians in Egypt on 9 December 1940, Churchill had written: 'At home in Downing Street they brought me from hour to hour intercepted signals from the battlefield'.<sup>63</sup> Brook demanded its excision: 'You should say nothing which would encourage those who worked in this organisation [Bletchley Park] to think that they are now at liberty to speak more freely about their work'.<sup>64</sup> The word 'intercepted' was duly deleted. Despite his reputation for being something of a loose cannon, less bound by the mortal requirement of being discreet, Churchill proved to be remarkably restrained in each of his six volumes.<sup>65</sup> In the text, Sigint was skilfully repackaged as information derived from either 'two-legged sources' or captured enemy documents. Operation Fortitude – where Ultra had been used to fabricate the ruse that

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<sup>59</sup> TNA CAB 104/282, N. Brook, 28 January 1948.

<sup>60</sup> TNA CAB 104/282, E.G. Hastings, 3 February 1948.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> TNA CAB 21/2176, 'W. Churchill's *Second World War* Volume II, Book IV: Points for Consideration', N. Brook, 7 April 1948.

<sup>64</sup> TNA CAB 21/2176, N. Brook to W. Churchill, 1 June 1948.

<sup>65</sup> Reynolds, 'Ultra Secret', p. 211.

the allied invasion force would land at the Pas de Calais – was completely omitted.<sup>66</sup> Even oblique references to strategic deception – such as, ‘although London was still referred to *in their orders* [emphasis added] as the principal target’ – were expurgated for ‘skating pretty near the wind’.<sup>67</sup> Behind closed-doors, officials admitted that the Australian official historian, Chester Wilmot, had been far more indiscreet in his 1952 publication, *The Struggle for Europe*. According to John Drew, Directorate of Forward Plans, the fullness of Wilmot’s account, especially with regard to Fortitude, had made Churchill’s references to the same matter ‘look rather jejeune’.<sup>68</sup> As David Reynolds argues, Churchill’s silence was key to keeping Ultra hidden from public view. So long as dignitaries remained tight-lipped, those who worked at Bletchley would never cackle.

Ultra was not the only aspect of wartime intelligence that the authorities were anxious to remove from Churchill’s histories. In March 1948, the Cypher Policy Board became deeply concerned about cipher security, when it discovered that Churchill’s drafts had included wartime telegram correspondences with President Roosevelt. Not secure by present standards, verbatim citations of wartime telegrams could potentially render decipherable all traffic dispatched in the same key on the same date, as well as provide foreign powers with a ‘crib’ for the penetration of peacetime code systems.<sup>69</sup> References to telegrams transmitted through the Typex cipher were particularly sensitive because Typex communications included exchanges with Washington on the subject of the atomic bomb. According to David Reynolds, the Cypher Policy Board need not of worried, since ‘Moscow would need to have kept copies of other telegrams sent on the same day’.<sup>70</sup> At the time, however, the risk was considered very real. ‘Foreign cryptographic bureaux file and preserve intercepted traffic even if they cannot

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<sup>66</sup> TNA CAB 21/2176, N. Brook to W. Churchill, 1 June 1948.

<sup>67</sup> TNA CAB 104/282, Anon. to N. Brook, 27 April 1948; TNA CAB 21/2187, N. Brook, 12 July 1949.

<sup>68</sup> TNA CAB 21/3759, J.A. Drew to G. Liddell, 3 November 1952.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 21/3749, A.T. Cornwall-Jones to N. Brook, 2 April 1948; TNA FO 115/4373, ‘Texts of Messages from Churchill to Roosevelt which Churchill Proposes to Publish in Book III of *The Second World War*’; TNA CAB 21/3749, E. Travis to Cypher Policy Board, 4 May 1948. The term ‘crib’ derived from the English public school tradition. ‘Crib’ constituted an illegitimate guide to Latin or Greek translations.

<sup>70</sup> D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2004), p. 160.

‘unbutton’ it at the time’, emphasised one correspondence.<sup>71</sup> Among the documents captured from the Germans in 1945, it went on, were British government telegrams going back as far as 1918.

The matter even embroiled the American President Harry Truman. 1940 telegrams showed that, in advance of domestic public opinion, Roosevelt had been pressing for US entry into the war. For example, convinced that ‘[our] voice and force may count for nothing if withheld for too long’, on 18 May Roosevelt secretly committed America to *de facto* non-belligerency, a policy shift not officially announced until 10 June.<sup>72</sup> Determined to ‘put weight behind’ post-war reconstruction in Western Europe, and fearing that ‘ill-disposed elements might draw an unfortunate parallel between the attitude of Roosevelt and that of the present administration’, Truman ruled against any compliance with Churchill’s requests.<sup>73</sup> Churchill was initially unsympathetic. Documents of the day should ‘speak for themselves’, he argued: ‘It is better for the reader to study what was actually said and done at the time than for me to try and plead the whole case over again, now that we know the answers to all the guesses’.<sup>74</sup> On 9 June 1948, following a personal approach by ‘C’ (Sir Stewart Menzies), Churchill finally accepted that the Cypher Policy Board would need to bowdlerise and remove certain telegrams.<sup>75</sup>

## 5.2 Cloak Without Dagger

By the early 1950s, as Richard Aldrich argues, secrecy was being increasingly challenged by the Machiavellian skills of insiders who ‘behaved as if they were above the law’.<sup>76</sup> Eminent authors recognised that no respectable government was going to prosecute members of the inner circle and used their reputation and pedigree to bypass

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<sup>71</sup> TNA CAB 21/3749, Cypher Policy Board to A.T. Cornwall-Jones, 1 April 1948.

<sup>72</sup> TNA FO 115/4373, ‘Texts of Messages from Churchill to Roosevelt which Churchill Proposes to Publish in Book III of *The Second World War*’; TNA FO 115/ 4373, Foreign Office to Lord Inverchapel, 1 April 1948.

<sup>73</sup> TNA FO 115/ 4373, Lord Inverchapel, 31 March 1948.

<sup>74</sup> TNA CAB 21/3749, N. Brook, 7 April 1948.

<sup>75</sup> TNA CAB 21/3749, A.T. Cornwall-Jones to N. Brook, 10 June 1948.

<sup>76</sup> Aldrich, ‘Policing the Past’, p. 929.

restrictions. The first to put the cat among the pigeons was the erstwhile Ambassador to France, Duff Cooper. In 1950, much to the vexation of the authorities, Cooper published a *roman à clef* of the now legendary deception story, Operation Mincemeat, in which a corpse – the apocryphal Major William Martin – was dumped off the Spanish coast, carrying ‘planted’ details of an imminent Allied invasion of Southern Greece.<sup>77</sup> (As MI5 had predicted, the Spanish forwarded the information to the German High Command, who, ‘having regarded [it] as being worthy of the most urgent attention’ and spread-eagled their defensive force right across Europe, were blinded to the true Allied objective – an invasion of Italy through Sicily.)<sup>78</sup> A less written about, but equally important illustration of a high-ranking official, using his pedigree and position to force a crossing of the Rubicon into print, was Sir Percy Sillitoe in *Cloak Without Dagger* (1955).<sup>79</sup>

Sillitoe, who had been Director-General (DG) of MI5 between 1946-53, submitted a précis of his autobiography to the Home Office in August 1952.<sup>80</sup> As well as addressing Sillitoe’s gang-busting days as Chief Constable of Glasgow, *Cloak Without Dagger* would deal with the author’s time as DG, providing a window onto the Service, its methods of fighting Communism and the need for collaboration with allies. ‘My position as head is fairly well known and it would create an anti-climax if I were to say nothing about it’, emphasised Sillitoe.<sup>81</sup> As a bargaining counter, Sillitoe suggested that publication might be used to secure a public hearing for certain ‘educational matter’ on the Cold War, revealing, for example, the merits of Positive Vetting and the tactics employed by Communists to subvert Trade Unions.<sup>82</sup> (This would not be the only occasion when Sillitoe saw the value of propaganda masquerading as public interest story: in 1957, he commissioned Ian Fleming to write an account of the International Diamond Security Organisation, founded in 1954 to combat the illicit trafficking of

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<sup>77</sup> D. Cooper, *Operation Heartbreak* (London, 1951).

<sup>78</sup> TNA WO 208/3163, T.R. Rawer, 22 October 1945.

<sup>79</sup> P. Sillitoe, *Cloak Without Dagger* (London, 1955).

<sup>80</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, F. Newsam to P. Sillitoe, 14 August 1952.

<sup>81</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, P. Sillitoe to E. Bridges, 24 September 1952; TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to D.M. Fyfe, 28 November 1952.

diamonds from Africa.)<sup>83</sup> Although conscious of the difficulty Sillitoe would face if asked to shut down his autobiography in 1946 ('the book will lose much of its appeal and he may feel obliged to abandon the project altogether'),<sup>84</sup> Sir Edward Bridges, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, and Sir Frank Newsam, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Home Office, drew up a comprehensive list of objections.<sup>85</sup> As well as raising a host of undesirable questions about its objects, methods and procedures, any discussion of the Security Service would constitute a departure from the general rule that officers in MI5 and comparable organisations should remain both anonymous and entirely silent in public. Newsam pointed out that he had been brought up to deny the existence of MI5 ('save in the highest circles'), and for a long time never knew its address or entered its sacred portals.<sup>86</sup> Bridges and Newsam also questioned the desirability of a former DG embarking upon an anti-Communist crusade: 'It is no business of Sillitoe to set up as one who can expound on these topics with authority'.<sup>87</sup>

While agreeing that Sillitoe could not include a section on the lines that he had contemplated, the Home Secretary, David Maxwell Fyfe, was attracted by the idea of showcasing – 'in broad outline' – MI5's recent achievements and, on 16 January 1953, instructed Bridges to grant the retiring DG unprecedented latitude to 'round off his book'.<sup>88</sup> Sillitoe was also permitted to lecture public school high-fliers about the dangers of 'getting muddled up with silly Communist societies at University'.<sup>89</sup> Sworn in as a literary cold warrior, Sillitoe spent much of 1953 working on the text, and submitted the whole work that winter. As the draft manuscript went 'round the houses' between MI5, MI6 and Downing Street, on 22 November *The Sunday Times* suddenly began

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> I. Fleming, *The Diamond Smugglers* (London, 1957).

<sup>84</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to F. Newsam, 13 October 1952.

<sup>85</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to F. Newsam, 13 October 1952; TNA HO 287/1415, F. Newsam to Bridges, 17 October 1952; TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to D.M. Fyfe, 28 November 1952.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, D.M. Fyfe to E. Bridges, 16 January 1953.

<sup>89</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to F. Newsam, 29 January 1953.

serialising extracts.<sup>90</sup> Sir Dick White, who had only recently been appointed DG, took strong objection to Sillitoe's claim – 'an unjustified slur' – that 'MI5 were badly taken in over [the atomic spy] Klaus Fuchs', ignoring compelling evidence of the scientist's communist sympathies as far back as 1942.<sup>91</sup> Sillitoe, protested White, had no relation to the organisation during the war. On 6 March 1950, moreover, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, had publicly defended MI5 against charges of slackness, pointing out that scientists of the highest quality had been in short supply and a decision had been made to overlook Fuchs's character flaws for the sake of the bomb.

The newspaper's revelations prompted White to oversee personally the book's vetting. White's chief concern was to delete, in its entirety, Chapter 18 – 'The Case of Dr. Klaus Fuchs'.<sup>92</sup> Many passages were difficult to square with Attlee's parliamentary statement. For example, 'I would not dream of denying that MI5 were mistaken about Fuchs, and that it would have been much more laudable had the Department been able to establish – or even to suspect – in 1942 instead of in 1949 that Fuchs was passing information to the Russians'.<sup>93</sup> Was it really in the public interest to have the Security Service hauled over the coals? Chapter 18 also had the potential to 'reopen old controversies' with the FBI – 'relations with whom', to quote White, '[were] difficult enough to conduct in normal circumstances'.<sup>94</sup> Sillitoe, for example, had described how the FBI had derided British officials for declining to extradite Fuchs to the United States. He also revealed how the FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover (known for his 'extraordinary sensitivity to criticism'),<sup>95</sup> had bullishly sought permission to interrogate Fuchs before the physicist's trial, a practice forbidden by British law.<sup>96</sup> Sillitoe nevertheless dismissed White's strictures. Come hell or high water Chapter 18 would

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<sup>90</sup> P. Sillitoe, 'The War against Crime: My Answer to Critics of MI5', *The Sunday Times*, 22 November 1953.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.; TNA HO 287/1415, Miscellaneous Note, 23 November 1953.

<sup>92</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, D. White to F. Newsam, 26 November 1953; TNA HO 287/1415, F. Newsam to P. Sillitoe, 4 January 1954.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, D. White to F. Newsam, 26 November 1953.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

not be deleted: 'I do not see any reason based on national security or the public interest why I should be muzzled in these matters'.<sup>97</sup> Pinning his argument on past precedents, the former DG found it deplorable that while his 'poor and humble efforts' were seen as seditious, the depth of revelation constituted a powerful animus in Winston Churchill's memoirs.<sup>98</sup> On this point, Newsam informed Sillitoe, not altogether disingenuously (see Chapter 6), that crown servants did not enjoy the same rights as Ministers to publish after their retirement.

Backchannel deliberations continued apace for much of spring 1954. The Cabinet Office was increasingly concerned that Sillitoe's memoir would set a new benchmark for what might be discussed in the public domain. 'Its publication', lamented Bridges, 'will make it infinitely harder to deal with others in the public service who may wish to embark on undesirable publicity'.<sup>99</sup> The ability to regulate the ever-growing proliferation of intelligence-related memoirs was already at breaking point. In 1953, following what one official described as a 'Roman Circus' of protracted discussions, the MI5 double agent Eddie Chapman (codenamed 'Zig-Zag') published his colourful life-story much to the chagrin of the authorities.<sup>100</sup> Although generally given to tabloidese, Richard Pape's renegade memoir, *Boldness Be My Friend* (1953), elicited sulphurous ruminations from the JIC.<sup>101</sup> Detailing the activities of MI9, Britain's wartime Evasion and Escape Organisation, the former RAF navigator touched upon several taboo subjects. Most damaging was the revelation that certain humanitarian bodies, such as the Red Cross, had assisted prisoner escapes; knowledge of this secret – 'one which we have been specially anxious to protect'<sup>102</sup> – could prevent visitations in a

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<sup>96</sup> For more information on MI5-FBI animosity see: M. Goodman, 'Who is Trying to Keep Secret from Whom and Why? MI5-FBI Relations and the Klaus Fuchs Case', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7:3 (2005), pp. 124-46.

<sup>97</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, P. Sillitoe to F. Newsam, 11 December 1953; TNA HO 287/1415, P. Sillitoe to F. Newsam, 29 January 1954.

<sup>98</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, P. Sillitoe to F. Newsam, 29 January 1954.

<sup>99</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, E. Bridges to F. Newsam, 10 March 1954.

<sup>100</sup> TNA WO 32/15386; E. Chapman, *The Eddie Chapman Story* (London, 1953); N. Booth, *Zig-Zag: The Incredible Wartime Exploits of Double Agent Eddie Chapman* (London, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> R. Pape, *Boldness Be My Friend* (London, 1953).

<sup>102</sup> TNA TS 28/568, Miscellaneous Note, C.V. Mears, 15 October 1953.

future war.<sup>103</sup> Pape's disclosure that MI9 had communicated with selected prisoners by means of parcels containing private codes not only diminished the likelihood of using such methods again, but might also persuade a future detaining power to refuse the repatriation of the sick and wounded. Despite obvious security implications, however, Pape could not be prosecuted since the memoir included only a handful of secret documents.

Concerns about Sillitoe's memoir intensified over the summer when, without any preliminary consultation with authorities, the former DG published a series of articles for the *Sunday Empire News*. Column inches were replete with matters not for public airing, including the claim that in 1952 the police had arrested the KGB spy, Pavel Kuznetsov, despite 'knowing perfectly well' that he was the incumbent Second Secretary at the Soviet Embassy and therefore entitled to diplomatic immunity.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, in 1955, following approval from the Home Secretary, Sillitoe broke new ground as the first DG to publish a full-dress intelligence memoir. He did this knowing full well that it would rile the Establishment and potentially leave him bereft of friends in the intelligence community. It is easy to forget – such is the evanescence of novelty – that publication of Sillitoe's memoir was a sensation: in 1945, no one could have foreseen a former MI5 czar breaching the dyke at all, let alone in the manner that he did. Sillitoe, who went on to run a sweet shop in Eastbourne, would later claim that the 'government tore the guts out of the book'.<sup>105</sup> Although the Home Office had clearly constituted a formidable hurdle on the unbridled course Sillitoe had set for himself, there is little evidence to support this charge. Chapter 18 remained, as did the accusation that 'MI5 was mistaken about Fuchs'. The FBI's desire to pump Fuchs for information is clearly documented, as is the implication that Scotland Yard had knowingly arrested Kuznetsov, contrary to the rules of diplomatic privilege.

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<sup>103</sup> TNA TS 28/568, H.T. Smith to Director of Public Prosecutions, 14 November 1953.

<sup>104</sup> TNA HO 287/1415, P. Allen, 18 May 1954; TNA HO 287/1415, F. Newsam to P. Sillitoe, 3 November 1954.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in D. Hooper, *Official Secrets* (London, 1987), p. 193.



### 5.3 Ultra Exposed

By the late 1960s, the hermetic seal surrounding strategic deception was starting to break. Many authors, knowing that it would be politically difficult, if not impossible, for the government to proceed against them under the OSA, elected to publish and be damned. Others simply grew restive of the endless haggling with government departments and approached foreign publishers. David Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (1967), revealed that Abwehr signals were read on 'machines that filled several buildings'; Władysław Kozaczuk, *Bitwa o Tajemnice* (1967), claimed that Polish cryptanalysts had cracked the Enigma before 1939; and Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (1968), concluded that codebreaking was far more lucrative than human intelligence.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps the most serious breach was made by Donald McLachan; as well as unveiling 'Station X', the codename for Bletchley Park, *Room 39* (1968) referred to captures of cryptographic material, including the seizure from U-boat 110 in May 1941.<sup>107</sup>

One author HMG was particularly anxious to restrain was Sefton Delmer. A member of the World War Two Political Intelligence Department, broadcasting black propaganda to Nazi Germany, Delmer had written *The Counterfeit Spy*, which focused on double agents – particularly the D-Day infiltrator GARBO – in support of field operations in the Western Desert, North Africa and Europe. In January 1969, he informed Norman Denning, Chairman of the D-Notice Committee, that his memoir was designed as a counterblast to Ladislav Farago's forthcoming US history of deception, *The Game of Foxes*.<sup>108</sup> Farago, he argued, was bound to impart an 'erroneous and garbled picture of events', whereas his would be a 'more authentic history'.<sup>109</sup> 'The events I describe lie in what must now be regarded as dim pre-history', declared

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<sup>106</sup> D. Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (New York, 1975); Władysław Kozaczuk, *Bitwa o Tajemnice. Służby wywiadowcze Polski i Rzeszy Niemieckiej 1922-1939* (Warsaw, 1967); K. Philby, *My Silent War* (London, 1968); TNA CAB 163/134, 'Published Material on Intelligence in World War Two', GCHQ to Intelligence Co-ordinator, 27 May 1969.

<sup>107</sup> D. McLachan, *Room 39: Naval Intelligence in Action 1939-45* (London, 1968).

<sup>108</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, N. Denning to JIC (A), 21 January 1969; L. Farago, *The Game of Foxes* (New York, 1971); TNA FCO 73/158, 'Note: Ladislav Farago', P. Allen, 2 August 1971.

<sup>109</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, 'Book by Sefton Delmer', JIC Addendum to JIC (A) (70) (SSC) 157, 22 September 1970.

Delmer.<sup>110</sup> Denning concurred. Indeed, assuming sensitive parts were fictionalised, publication could afford valuable propaganda: 'If Farago's book is likely to create a false impression of our activities', Denning wrote to the JIC, 'then it might be as well to let Delmer go ahead and pre-empt it with a book whose contents we control'.<sup>111</sup> The MOD downplayed any potential risk to contemporary methods, pointing out that wartime techniques were very much the application of 'ingenuity and imagination to the conditions of the moment and the opportunities then presented'.<sup>112</sup> It was also unlikely that Delmer – at best a dutiful footsoldier of operations – had been privy to genuinely sensitive information. 'I would not expect him', pronounced Clifton Child (former head of the Political Warfare Executive [PWE]), 'to have picked up much knowledge of strategic deception from his relatively narrow orbit of black broadcasting'.<sup>113</sup>

Officials were shocked then to discover that the galley proofs were inundated with secret material. As well as having a 'good beaver' through the German Military Archives in Freiburg, it transpired that Delmer had been in contact with Colonel N. Wild, former Director of Forward Plans. Wild, it was believed, had supplied Delmer with several service documents, including a 'missing' Private Office memo on GARBO and the MI5 report of the Alaric case.<sup>114</sup> Patricia McCallum, Head of the Cabinet Office Historical Section, suggested that GARBO was perhaps 'the main source'.<sup>115</sup> It also became clear that Delmer had heavily plagiarised the in-house history of Operation Fortitude by Roger Hesketh. While claiming to have 'no quarrel with the crown or any great interest in money', Hesketh was determined to instigate legal proceedings against Delmer, for what he regarded as a 'pirated and vulgar edition of his work'.<sup>116</sup> Britain's senior intelligence community was outraged. 'The book appears to be a full exposé of the range and success of deception methods', protested GCHQ.<sup>117</sup> Further references to

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<sup>110</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, N. Denning to W.N. Ash, 11 June 1970.

<sup>111</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, N. Denning to JIC (A), 21 January 1969.

<sup>112</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, ACSS (MODA), 27 August 1970.

<sup>113</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, C.J. Child, 30 June 1970.

<sup>114</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, 'Book by Sefton Delmer', JIC Addendum to JIC (A) (70), 4 November 1970.

<sup>115</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, P. McCallum to C.J. Child, 12 June 1970.

<sup>116</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, Kent to Wolf, 14 March 1972.

<sup>117</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, 'Comments by GCHQ.'

the ease of cracking U-boat ciphers would not only lessen the credibility of McLachan's assessment of the high security of German machine systems ('an illusion which should be preserved as long as possible'), but would devalue the overall policy of non-revelation.<sup>118</sup> Humint-centred organisations took considerable umbrage at Delmer's description of particular agents: 'While I do not suggest that any present day German official or unofficial organisation might [take] revenge', asserted the MOD Army Intelligence Chief, 'we would [nevertheless] be putting those agents at risk'.<sup>119</sup> MI6 was even more sombre in its assessment; the KGB, having been tipped-off by Philby about Alaric's infiltration of the Soviet Union, would now have 'a good chance of running [him] to earth'.<sup>120</sup> Although the JIC agreed entirely with each evaluation, lamenting that publication would represent one more breach in the dam, it saw no realistic hope of securing an injunction, since Delmer had cleverly negotiated contracts with both American and German publishers. All that could be done was to reward Hesketh with a lucrative out-of-court settlement, and minimise as much damage as possible by amending the text.<sup>121</sup>

By late 1968, in parallel with discussions over rogue manuscripts, a more pressing concern was the question of wartime Sigint records. As Prime Minister, Harold Wilson had ruled that the 'cream' of World War Two records should be released to the general public 'en bloc' on 1 January 1972, and should not therefore be allowed to trickle out year by year under the Thirty-Year Rule. This decision carried with it certain implications for the long-standing closure of the Sigint archive. HMG could, of course, retain its Sigint papers. Section 3 (4) of the Public Records Act, otherwise known as the 'blanket' exemption, gave the Lord Chancellor discretionary powers to withhold all records related to the intelligence services. On the other hand, as Burke Trend recognised, to 'try to eliminate from the published World War Two records all

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, ACSS (MODA), 27 August 1970.

<sup>120</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, 'Book by Sefton Delmer', JIC Addendum to JIC (A) (70) (SSC) 157, 22 September 1970.

<sup>121</sup> TNA CAB 163/194, 'Book by Sefton Delmer', JIC Addendum to JIC (A) (70), 4 November 1970; TNA CAB 163/194, Kent to Wolf, 14 March 1972.

material based on Sigint would create great difficulties, primarily because this source had a critical influence on the course of events'.<sup>122</sup> On 13 November 1968, the JIC provided a detailed brief delineating the pros and cons of releasing wartime Sigint records.<sup>123</sup> There were, the Report claimed, good reasons for a liberal approach. Firstly, through memoirs and biographies, a good deal of information had already been disclosed. This, in turn, had created pressure for public access to permit historical research. Secondly, the exclusion of Sigint material would be obvious to the majority of memoirists and historians currently pressing for access, particularly as many of them had been themselves closely associated with strategic deception. Thirdly, the D-Notice Committee had become increasingly ineffective as a means to prevent the publication of information, meaning that HMG was now left in the embarrassing position of either having to acquiesce to disobedient authors or institute proceedings under the OSA. A final reason in favour of release was that the Soviet Union, 'largely through the disclosures of defectors', already possessed extensive information about UK Sigint activities, including the peacetime work of GCHQ.<sup>124</sup>

The JIC also considered the reasons against public release. Any discharge of Sigint documentation, the Report underlined, would 'focus attention on the activity as a whole' and make it more difficult to maintain reticence over peacetime operations.<sup>125</sup> In their official pronouncements and answers to parliamentary questions, ministers had hitherto been able to 'check the curiosity of the uniformed' by putting out the polite fiction that Sigint had never been avowed UK policy. Releasing papers, even from 1939-1945, would invalidate this cover story and encourage a wider circle of people to start guessing about the true function of GCHQ. Moreover, revelation about World War Two successes would 'give impulse to communications security in other countries, including those which [were] currently profitable targets'.<sup>126</sup> The JIC's Report made several recommendations, which were subsequently accepted by HMG in spring 1969.

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<sup>122</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, 'Release of Sigint Records', B. Trend to E. Heath, 9 November 1970.

<sup>123</sup> TNA PREM 13/3252, 'The Release of Sigint Records', JIC (58) 46, 13 November 1968.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

In a departure from long-standing policy, Wilson agreed that the Great War Sigint record, the 40 O.B. archive, should be released as soon as practicable. Disclosure would not cause 'embarrassment, resentment or misapprehensions' as to the reasons for allied victory; neither would it risk current operations.<sup>127</sup> Wilson was also prepared to release departmental and cabinet records that contained references to wartime Sigint. Release of 'adjacent' records would nevertheless be done by 'creeping barrage', spread over many years so 'as to generate the minimum public interest'. Less progressively, Wilson endorsed the JIC's view that HMG should continue to withhold under the Lord Chancellor's dispensation all Sigint records held by GCHQ relating to the inter-war period, and the period subsequent to the end of World War Two. Any publicity to such files beyond 1918 would focus critical attention on peacetime activities. HMG would also continue to resist requests for permission to inspect Sigint records. Any departure from this rule, even for 'serious students' or official biographers, would lead to a 'slippery slope' which officials were not prepared to entertain.

Not everyone in Whitehall was happy with a continued policy of non-release for World War Two Sigint documents. Historians have confidently regarded Burke Trend as 'a man of secrets' and a 'natural for the discreet back-rooms of Whitehall';<sup>128</sup> it is perhaps surprising then that the most vocal critic of Wilson's decision was the Cabinet Secretary himself. On 9 November 1970, Trend wrote to the new Prime Minister, Edward Heath, stating that it was both 'anomalous' and 'conspicuous' to treat wartime Sigint records as a separate category, and recommended that they should be released simultaneously with the World War Two 'cream'.<sup>129</sup> Trend's case hinged on several arguments. If ministers did not countenance an authoritative release, they would find other people – 'over whom we have no control' – doing the job for them. *The Codebreakers* by Kahn, which was now being readied for a series of TV programmes, represented merely one example of the manner in which authors were

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<sup>127</sup> TNA PREM 13/3252, B. Trend to H. Wilson, 25 March 1969; TNA PREM 13/3252, 'The Release of Sigint records, JIC (58) 46, 13 November 1968.

<sup>128</sup> P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), pp. 213-4.

<sup>129</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, 'Release of Sigint Records', B. Trend to E. Heath, 9 November 1970.

increasingly exploiting their personal experience of the secret world. Controlled release, argued Trend, would discourage 'the wilder kinds of irresponsible writing' and help to demonstrate that HMG was prepared to be as frank with the general public as circumstances permitted.<sup>130</sup> Trend also played down the natural fear that American and Commonwealth allies would offer stern resistance; prior consultation with Richard Helms, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as Australian, Canadian and New Zealand authorities, had confirmed that all parties 'officially endorsed and welcomed' proposals. Like Wilson, however, Heath opted to continue with a policy of blanket retention. Ultra's disclosure, therefore, would be reliant upon the memoir industry rather than the archive.

Discussions had long been ongoing with Oxford historian, and former chair of the wartime XX Committee, John Masterman. Established in January 1941, the Committee had been a clearing-house for information obtained from organised deception, and had worked closely with Bletchley Park; Ultra, for example, revealed what baits the Germans were swallowing from double agents.<sup>131</sup> In his later years, Masterman was keen to see 'credit due where credit belongs', and applied to the Cabinet Office for permission to publish *The Double Cross System*, which he had written as an in-house narrative in 1945.<sup>132</sup> A bound copy of *Double Cross* had long sat on the bookshelf of Masterman's College office; he even included the history in his *Who's Who* list of publications.<sup>133</sup> Martin Furnival Jones, Director-General of MI5, took strong objection to its publication, suggesting that agent confidence would be undermined. Masterman, however, had powerful friends. As History don at Christ Church, he had the advantage of having taught both the Foreign Secretary, Alec Douglas-Home, and the Prime Minister, Edward Heath. Indebted to his former tutor,

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> TNA KV 4/63, 'The 'Double Agent' System', MI5 (B2a), 27 December 1940; TNA KV 4/65, 'The Twenty Committee', J. Masterman, 3 September 1942; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 486.

<sup>132</sup> TNA FCO 73/158, P. Allen to J. Masterman, 2 April 1970; TNA FCO 73/158, 'Historical Note: Masterman', Attorney General, 27 July 1971; J. Masterman, *The Double Cross System 1939-45* (London, 1972). N.B. The Roman numerals – XX – denote 'Double Cross'.

Heath instructed the Attorney General in July 1971 that 'Sir John, who is an old man, should be given every opportunity to publish'.<sup>134</sup> Masterman's intimate affiliation with the Establishment was not the only reason for green-lighting the project. With the help of Professor Norman Holmes, a former colleague from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Masterman had arranged to publish the history with Yale University Press. As Nigel West argues, faced with this 'force majeure', and coupled with the embarrassment of a 'very public scrap' with a revered academic, HMG had no choice but to approve publication.<sup>135</sup> *Double Cross* was also seen as a useful piece of propaganda. The Attorney General applauded its capacity to demonstrate 'co-operation between different services and departments'.<sup>136</sup> In 1972, therefore, a sanitised version was published. References to the 'most secret source', as well as technical terms such as 'fair-play system' and 'wheatstone', had been removed. The Masterman case marked the first occasion when intelligence staffs were completely overruled by their political masters. MI5's top brass was left burning with resentment: 'I do not understand this argument that he is morally obliged to publish', declared Jones: 'MI5 must be able, if they are to recruit people, to tell them that their service will remain confidential'.<sup>137</sup> Jones heaped considerable scorn on Masterman personally: 'I think it is disgraceful. When you left the service you signed an undertaking not to do precisely what you are now proposing to do'.<sup>138</sup>

In 1974, Whitehall took an even braver step, and decided not to oppose the publication of *The Ultra Secret*, by Group Captain Frederick Winterbotham. This decision was rationalised on several grounds. Firstly, there was an urgent desire to showcase the British contribution in breaking German machine ciphers; in *Enigme* (1973), Gustave Bertrand, former Deputy Director of the Service de Documentation

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<sup>133</sup> For this information, I am grateful to Dr. Declan O'Reilly. See D. O'Reilly, 'The Don, The Peer, The Spook and the Mandarin: Secret History, Spycatcher and the Last Cold War Literary Battle' (Unpublished, 2005).

<sup>134</sup> TNA FCO 73/158, E. Heath to Attorney General, July 1971.

<sup>135</sup> N. West (ed.), *The Guy Liddell Diaries Volume I: 1939-1942* (Abingdon, 2005), p. 3; TNA FCO 73/158, C. Kerr to R. Maudling, 28 July 1971.

<sup>136</sup> TNA FCO 73/158, 'Historical Note: Masterman', Attorney General, 27 July 1971.

<sup>137</sup> TNA FCO 73/158, M.F. Jones to A. Douglas-Home.

<sup>138</sup> TNA FCO 73/158, J. Masterman to A. Douglas-Home, 20 September 1971; TNA FCO 73/158, M.F. Jones to J. Masterman, 4 August 1971.

Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage, claimed to be 'le véritable et seul artisan de cette Enigme' and ascribed 'all the credit and all the glory' to a Franco-Polish collaboration.<sup>139</sup> Secondly, security was no longer a factor; the usefulness of Enigma machines had rapidly decreased with the advent of computer-based cipher communications. With double cross exposed, moreover, officials realised that it was only a matter of time before the story of Bletchley Park came to light. Outsiders were becoming increasingly adept at what Aldrich has called the 'cult of archival intelligence hacking'.<sup>140</sup> Because the wartime secret services interfaced with the core executive, and acted as crucial interlocutors between different sections of government, material could be gleaned from 'adjacent records' of related departments. In September 1974, it was discovered that 2000-plus Air Intelligence files, containing scores of Ultra references, had been sent in error to the Public Record Office in 1972.<sup>141</sup> One outsider known to be hunting around for the Ultra secret was Anthony Cave Brown. A freelance journalist, Brown had first come to the attention of the authorities in March 1963 when a Chiefs of Staff paper, loaned to him from General Freddie Morgan, was put-up for auction at Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York.<sup>142</sup> Brown's argument that it had been stolen from his custody did not stick with consular staff at the British Embassy. Brown – 'a confounded nuisance' – had 'got into debt all round'; financial misdemeanours included failing to meet a car repair bill of \$151.65 and issuing a post-dated cheque of \$640.00, which was dishonoured, for accommodation at the Surfrider Inn, California.<sup>143</sup> While Morgan was admonished ('the [fifty-year] rule applies to everyone and, painful though that duty may be, to shirk the task was fiddle-de-dee'),<sup>144</sup> Brown's card was permanently marked.

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<sup>139</sup> TNA HW 25/16, 'Book Reviews: The Cryptologists who Briefly Came in from the Cold', G.F. Goodhall, 15 May 1974; G. Bertrand, *Enigma ou la plus grande énigme de la guerre* (Paris, 1973).

<sup>140</sup> R.J. Aldrich, 'The Secret State', in P. Addison and H. Jones (eds), *A Companion to Contemporary Britain* (Oxford, 2005), p. 336.

<sup>141</sup> TNA PREM 16/670, J. Hunt to H. Wilson, 15 November 1974.

<sup>142</sup> TNA CAB 21/5865, J. Roper to J.H. Robertson, 8 February 1963; TNA CAB 21/5865, British Defence Staffs (Washington) to the Ministry of Defence, 19 March 1963.

<sup>143</sup> TNA CAB 21/5865, 'Biography of Anthony Cave Brown', British Embassy (Consular Section), 9 November 1962; TNA CAB 21/5865, I. Adams to R.W. Ford, 4 December 1962.

<sup>144</sup> TNA CAB 21/5865, D. Woods, 3 May 1963.



William McIndoe of the Cabinet Office Historical Section would later warn officials that 'he needs to be watched like a hawk'.<sup>145</sup>

In 1940 Ultra would change the course of history; in 1974 it would have a similarly seismic effect on historiography. Winterbotham's account, which was followed a year later by Brown's own exposé *Bodyguard of Lies*, inspired a completely new way of looking at the Second World War. Michael Howard, official historian of *Grand Strategy* (1972), compared the absence of Ultra from the first generation of World War Two histories to that of Shakespeare 'writing *Hamlet* without the ghost'.<sup>146</sup> Intelligence history, once a Cinderella among the disciplines and neglected by its more successful sisters, was to a large extent kick-started by the story of Bletchley Park. *The Ultra Secret*, which sold 4 million copies worldwide, illustrated the commercial benefits for authors of intelligence. After Winterbotham, it became more common for intelligence practitioners to attend historical conferences. In October 1977, for example, during the Third Navy History Symposium of the US Naval Academy, Sir Norman Denning (the former head of the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre) chaired a session on the role of Ultra in the Battle of the Atlantic.<sup>147</sup> That no historian discovered the Ultra secret before 1974 has been criticised by Christopher Andrew as providing striking evidence of 'cognitive dissonance' within the historical profession.<sup>148</sup> The clues to its existence were surely too obvious for historians to have missed? It was well known, for example, that Britain had broken German ciphers during the Great War, whilst the story of Magic was also publicised as early as 1946. What this view may overlook however is the fact that many historians had no interest in exposing Ultra, since they had been associated with wartime Sigint and were therefore Bletchley 'loyalists'.

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<sup>145</sup> TNA CAB 21/5865, W. McIndoe to S. Lohan, 19 Nov 1966.

<sup>146</sup> M. Howard, *Captain Professor: A Life in War and Peace* (London, 2006), p. 188.

<sup>147</sup> R. Lowe (ed.), *Changing Interpretations and New Sources in Naval History: Papers from the Third Navy History Symposium of the US Naval Academy* (New York, 1980).

## 5.4 SOE in France

The Second World War saw a proliferation of secret agencies, including the Special Operations Executive (SOE), created on 22 July 1940 pursuant to Churchill's famous directive to 'set Europe ablaze'. SOE was charged with conducting 'irregular warfare' throughout Axis-occupied Europe: clandestine special operations; sabotage; the abetting, organisation and equipping of resistance movements and partisans in concert with the eventual Allied invasion. The existence of SOE was a steadily expanding open secret by 1945. As Mark Seaman points out, with just fewer than 10,000 men and 3,200 women, SOE was 'the least secret of Britain's secret services'.<sup>149</sup> The bitter 'turf war' in the US, between erstwhile members of the OSS and the CIA's institutional predecessor, the Central Intelligence Group, had showcased many of SOE's achievements in a bid to secure peacetime funding. 'The spate of publicity in the US', commented Harold Caccia (Minister of the Athens Embassy), 'renders the question of giving publicity here more importance'.<sup>150</sup> The Foreign Office was particularly concerned that media hype surrounding OSS was queering SOE's pitch. 'There may be some danger of opinion forgetting the extent of British help', stated Sir Alexander Cadogan.<sup>151</sup> In October 1945, the BBC broadcast a state-sponsored documentary dealing with the British contribution to the European Resistance. The programme was allotted a 'peak-listening' hour, and included 'en passant' references to training, planning and camouflage.<sup>152</sup> Although the suggestion of a press conference to accompany the broadcast was rejected ('there should be no, repeat no, press conference'),<sup>153</sup> a 'British Secret Forces Publicity Panel' was set-up to co-ordinate SOE public relations.<sup>154</sup> SOE even collaborated with the RAF Film

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<sup>148</sup> C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II: The KGB and the World* (London, 2005), p. xxxvii.

<sup>149</sup> M. Seaman, 'A Glass Half Full – Some Thoughts on the Evolution of the Study of the SOE', *Intelligence and National Security*, 20:1 (March 2005), p. 29.

<sup>150</sup> TNA HS 8/863, H. Caccia, 9 November 1945.

<sup>151</sup> TNA CAB 121/305, A. Cadogan to L.C. Hollis, 13 November 1945.

<sup>152</sup> TNA HS 8/863, C. Gubbins to R.K. Dickson, 24 August 1945; TNA HS 8/863, 'The Question of BBC Broadcast on Resistance. Minutes of Meeting held on 18 September 1945.'

<sup>153</sup> TNA HS 8/863, W. de Broke to C. Gubbins, 27 August 1945.

<sup>154</sup> TNA HS 8/863, 'SOE Publicity. Minutes of Meeting held at Air Ministry on 19 September 1945'; TNA HS 8/863, Miscellaneous Note, 11 October 1945.

Production Unit on a feature-length documentary entitled *Now It Can Be Told* (1946), featuring authentic agents, Captain Harry (Felix) Rée and Jacqueline (Cat) Nearne.

There remained, however, much about SOE that was considered best hidden forever. 'As individuals we may hope that the last war has been fought', declared Major-General Gubbins, former SOE head, in August 1945: 'As a department of state we must recognise that there might be another and we must prevent the release of secret matters detrimental to the security of the Empire'.<sup>155</sup> Quite legitimately, these included: SOE devised methods and apparatus – especially those currently employed by liberated minorities and the peacetime intelligence services; locations of Headquarters and Training Schools; and techniques of industrial sabotage.<sup>156</sup> Exploits involving breaches of neutrality, or actions contrary to the rules of war, should 'NEVER be published', for fear of fuelling tension and distrust between nations. Moreover, publicity to officers, as well as detracting from their future usefulness, would fundamentally breach the trust placed in SOE by its agents. 'Secrecy is the breath of life to the clandestine warrior', dogmatised Rear-Admiral A.H. Taylor in June 1945: 'It is necessary for his own morale as well as for his security that he should know it will be faithfully observed'.<sup>157</sup> In Eastern Europe, claimed Gubbins, 'an admission that a person had been a British agent during the war would be most harmful to his interests'.<sup>158</sup> If individuals wanted to expose themselves to public scrutiny 'well and good'; if not, SOE should 'respect their silence'.<sup>159</sup> SOE personnel reintegrated into civilian life presented the biggest problem; while active officers were obliged to obtain the approval of their Service Ministry before publishing any book or article, there was no similar sanction for civilians – the only hold over them was to prosecute after publication. Although it was expected that most civilians *would* submit their memoirs to advance censorship (if only because the

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<sup>155</sup> TNA HS 8/863, 'Publicity of SOE Matters', C. Gubbins, August 1945.

<sup>156</sup> TNA HS 8/863, 'SOE Publicity. Minutes of Meeting held at Air Ministry on 19 September 1945'.

<sup>157</sup> TNA ADM 223/480, 'Clandestine Warfare', A.H. Taylor to the Director of Naval Intelligence, 8 June 1945.

<sup>158</sup> TNA HS 8/863, 'Publicity of SOE Matters', C. Gubbins, August 1945. Appendix A, 'Rules for the Guidance of Security Officers in Reading Manuscript Submitted for Censorship.'

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

more reputable publishers feared the threat of prosecution), SOE secrets hinged on little more than 'good sense and good taste'.<sup>160</sup>

During the late 1950s, the pace of disclosure intensified, as a spate of former 'Baker Street Irregulars' published their memoirs.<sup>161</sup> Policing troublesome texts increasingly precluded meaningful censorship. In February 1958, having thumbed through the draft of James Leasor's *War at the Top*, which provided 'near the knuckle' depictions of General Sir Leslie Hollis and his SOE 'cover-boys', Brook could do little but make 'faintly discouraging remarks'.<sup>162</sup> More worryingly for officials, whereas previous studies were largely panegyrical or hagiographic, a number of writers began to make allegations of maladroitness, foolery and disloyalty. Elizabeth Nicholas – 'compelled by anger, deep emotion, and compassion' – criticised the transgressions leading to the capture of seven F Section women.<sup>163</sup> Maurice Buckmaster, former Head of the French Section, argued that many agents dropped into Holland were picked up and executed because Dutch *réseaux* had been successfully penetrated.<sup>164</sup> Buckmaster also claimed that agent arrests had been deliberately concealed from their next-of-kin. Incensed by Buckmaster's book – 'it just got my goat' – and determined to do justice to those who were sacrificed as well as returned triumphant, in October 1958 Dame Irene Ward MP tabled a Parliamentary motion for a 'full and frank' investigation into SOE.<sup>165</sup> During the war, Ward had many friends in the Resistance and had been a crucial conduit through which collaborators could reach the ear of the Foreign Office. 'She thinks that there is some sort of conspiracy of silence among officials', reported Selwyn

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> See M. Buckmaster, *Specially Employed: The Story of the British Aid to French Patriots of the Resistance* (London, 1952); R.J. Minney, *Carve Her Name with Pride* (London, 1956); J. Fuller, *Born for Sacrifice* (London, 1957); R. Collier, *Ten Thousand Eyes* (London, 1958); P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* (London, 1958).

<sup>162</sup> TNA CAB 21/3773, 'The Hole in the Ground (Later renamed *War at the Top*) by J. Leasor', J. Hollis to N. Brook, 27 February 1958.

<sup>163</sup> E. Nicholas, *Death Be Not Proud* (London, 1958), p. 19.

<sup>164</sup> M. Buckmaster, *They Fought Alone: The Story of British Agents in France* (London, 1958); News, 'Monstrous Assertion about British Agents', *The Times*, 1 December 1958, p. 6; TNA PREM 11/5084, 'SOE and Dame Irene Ward'.

<sup>165</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, I. Ward to S. Lloyd, 29 October 1958; TNA PREM 11/5084, I. Ward to H. Macmillan, 31 October 1958.

Lloyd, 'a desire to hush-up SOE's mistakes while publicising its successes'.<sup>166</sup> With Ward threatening to break Parliamentary taboos concerning intelligence ('unless somebody is going to play straight with me I have every intention of raising the question of the Secret Service in the House'),<sup>167</sup> Macmillan grudgingly formed an enquiry. Whilst dispelling allegations of willful negligence by commanders ('wars are invariably full of muddle, confusion and human fallibility'), the ensuing report made numerous observations.<sup>168</sup> Firstly, 'striking successes were balanced with disastrous failures', leading to the deaths of many brave men and women. Secondly, SOE was disbanded 'too quickly and too completely' with the result that many families were ill-informed about deceased relatives. The upshot of the enquiry was the announcement on 17 March 1959, by the Foreign Office Parliamentary Under-Secretary, John Profumo, that the government would examine the possibility of an officially published SOE history.<sup>169</sup>

Writing strictly *in-house* intelligence narratives (only accessible to those with Top Secret clearance) had commenced in October 1945. MI6 aside – 'C stated categorically that he would never allow any history to be written' – all the wartime secret organisations (MI5, GCHQ, SOE and the PWE) wished to document 'lessons learned' for the benefit of future practitioners.<sup>170</sup> Not for publication, authors were authorised to 'ferret around' all the available records and unveil 'what they liked', including contacts with Chiefs of Staff, guerrilla operations throughout Europe, use of signals intelligence, and intelligence contribution to OVERLORD.<sup>171</sup> The histories, far from being colourless, were suffused with sensational tales. Charles Morgan's *History of Naval Intelligence* (1947) lavished praise on Operation RUTHLESS, a scheme hatched in September 1940 by Ian Fleming to seize a German naval coding machine by crashing

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<sup>166</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, 'SOE and Dame Irene Ward'.

<sup>167</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, I. Ward to S. Lloyd, 29 October 1958.

<sup>168</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, 'SOE and Dame Irene Ward'.

<sup>169</sup> TNA T 220/1388, B.A. Bishop to N. Brook, 25 May 1959.

<sup>170</sup> TNA CAB 103/256, 'The Work of Special Organisations during the War', 7 May 1947; TNA HS 8/429, C. Gubbins to the Cabinet Office, 5 June 1945; TNA HS 8/429, C. Gubbins to F. Nelson, 24 October 1945.

a captured enemy bomber in the English channel to lure in a rescue vessel, kill the crew and 'dump them overboard'.<sup>172</sup> The pilot, suggested Fleming, would be a 'tough bachelor, able to swim' – an early prototype of 007. To this hopeful plan, which was cancelled only at the last minute on account of bad weather, James Bond's creator earmarked a touch of autobiographical panache: one of the crew being called 'Fleming'. Some histories transgressed the parameters of suitability. The Foreign Office condemned David Garnett's *The Political Warfare Executive* (1952) as a 'chronique scandaleuse', abounding in somewhat unmeasured judgements on persons still employed in public service.<sup>173</sup> MI6 castigated J.H. Godfrey's account of the XX Committee, *Double Crossing and Deception* (1952), for giving detailed definitions of working MI6 jargon – 'Post Boxes', 'Chicken Food', 'Life Lines'.<sup>174</sup> But, of course, impropriety was largely irrelevant; secret histories would never enter the public domain.

Profumo was not the first insider to recommend a public intelligence history. In May 1947, the Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brook, called on intelligence chiefs to endorse a single volume published history on the work of wartime secret organisations: 'If official historians [are] kept silent, there is a real danger that the credit due to the man who took part will go elsewhere'.<sup>175</sup> Few might have expected Dick White, the incumbent Director-General of MI5, to endorse such a project. A broad conspectus, he argued, divided into four sections (counter-espionage, resistance work, political warfare, and special operations), could highlight many fascinating episodes.

1. The account of 'JOE K' – an espionage network brought to light entirely through the work of Imperial Censorship at Bermuda.
2. The exploits of the Norwegian Patriot Starheim in capturing the German ship GAL TESUND on the high seas.

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<sup>171</sup> TNA HS 8/430, C. Eastwood, 10 August 1946; TNA HS 8/430, W.J. MacKenzie to C. Hambro and F. Nelson, 25 October 1945.

<sup>172</sup> TNA ADM 223/464, 'History of Naval Intelligence and the Naval Intelligence Department 1939-42 by Charles Morgan', pp. 1-288.

<sup>173</sup> TNA CAB 102/609, 'The PWE: From the Munich Crisis till the Surrender of Germany by David Garnett', August 1952; TNA FO 1110/533, D. Brown, 2 April 1953.

<sup>174</sup> TNA CAB 154/104, 'Double Crossing and Deception by J.H. Godfrey', 3 March 1952.

<sup>175</sup> TNA CAB 103/256, 'History of Secret Organisations 1939-45', N. Brook, May 1947.

3. The story of Sybarill, the Breton boat-builder who, entirely unaided, arranged the escape of over a hundred persons from France.
4. The sabotaging of the heavy-water plant at Vemork in Norway, including a sensational race on skis.
5. The appalling incident where one SOE operative found himself lying wounded in an hotel otherwise occupied by the Nazi Governor of Norway and his entire defence staff.<sup>176</sup>

White also underlined the study's potential propaganda value. For example, disclosing the Yugoslav missions of Hudson and Deakin – why they were sent and how they made contact with Tito – would provide a 'mild corrective' to the Soviet allegation that Britain did nothing to assist Tito until he had become the dominant figure in the country. Despite White's backing, MI6 put forward an 'unreasoned veto'.<sup>177</sup> The War Office and Foreign Office echoed the protestations voiced by MI6. The Admiralty was the only department to provide clear and bona fide objections: 'There is a serious danger', claimed Sir Richmond Walton, 'that the information [concerning] methods and ruses will, on future occasion, imperil those who are charged with similar enterprises'.<sup>178</sup> It was also feared that an unchecked history would endanger Allied confidants who were now leading normal lives. Although Brook believed that such risks could be mitigated, if not altogether obviated by suppression or distortion of names, this was the point at which the venture stalled.<sup>179</sup>

From spring 1959, a working party, chaired by Treasury third secretary Burke Trend, was pooling the various arguments for and against a published SOE history. For Douglas Dodds-Parker, former SOE officer, a history would 'stir up a good deal of mud best left undisturbed': firstly, it might allow the un-Free French Section in SOE to claim undue credit for the gallantry of their field personnel; secondly, it might provoke ex-parte replies of a recriminatory nature.<sup>180</sup> Dodds also stressed the point of principle that SOE recruited its officers on the understanding that their activities were entirely 'non-

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<sup>176</sup> TNA CAB 103/356, D. White to D. Hubback, June 1947.

<sup>177</sup> TNA CAB 103/256, N. Brook to S. Luke, 22 October 1947.

<sup>178</sup> TNA CAB 103/256, R. Walton to S. Luke, 24 June 1947.

<sup>179</sup> TNA CAB 103/256, N. Brook to S. Luke, 22 October 1947.

<sup>180</sup> TNA PREM 13/949, 'Historical Note: Decision to Write History', J.E. Jackson, 26 October 1965; TNA CAB 103/572, D.D. Parker to Lt-Colonel Boxshall, 21 April 1964.

attributable' and 'would never be disclosed'.<sup>181</sup> The secret services reacted with the old stock-in-trade warning about safeguarding current methods. John Allen, MI5, stated: 'This major departure, from what has been government policy for many years, will be unfavorable to [the security of] our two services'.<sup>182</sup> In Cabinet, however, the winds of change were blowing.

As Christopher Murphy has argued, the intense lobbying of Dame Irene Ward was neither the sole, nor the most significant factor behind the authorisation of an SOE history.<sup>183</sup> 'If it were only a question of her, we could probably turn the proposal for an SOE history down flat and ride out [the] trouble', explained Patrick Dean (Foreign Office Deputy Under-Secretary).<sup>184</sup> A publication would enable justice to be done to the many SOE agents, alive and dead, who had secretly played their part in the final Allied victory; it would provide an authoritative account of the 'indispensable' support which the UK gave to indigenous resistance movements; and accordingly this would correct the impression, currently being spread abroad by Soviet and Satellite historians, that the successes in this field were the result of either national efforts or Communist initiatives.<sup>185</sup> In March 1961, at the Conference for the History of the European Resistance in Milan, the British delegation had criticised Eastern scholars for deliberately replacing rational discourse with 'doublethink' delivered in 'newspeak'.<sup>186</sup> Bloc presentations argued that the Resistance – a Communist led 'social movement' – had ensured that 'anti-popular' regimes did not return after liberation to exploit the workers. Anglo-American involvement, claimed Soviet historians, rested exclusively on

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<sup>181</sup> TNA CAB 103/572, D.D. Parker to Lt-Colonel Boxshall, 28 November 1964; TNA CAB 103/572, D.D. Parker to Lt-Colonel Boxshall, 2 April 1965; TNA PREM 13/949, D.D. Parker, 12 July 1964.

<sup>182</sup> TNA CAB 163/134, 'Notes on the Decision to Authorise an Official History of SOE', Cabinet Office Historical Section, 14 March 1969.

<sup>183</sup> C. Murphy, 'The Origins of SOE in France', *The Historical Journal*, 46:4 (2003), pp. 935-52, esp. p. 935.

<sup>184</sup> TNA PREM 11/5584, P. Dean to B. Trend, 3 May 1960.

<sup>185</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, 'History of SOE in France', B. Trend to A. Douglas-Home, 26 March 1964; TNA CAB 103/570, 'Genesis of this Study. An Interdepartmental Meeting held on 18 May 1967'; TNA T 220/1388, 'Official History of SOE. Further Report by a Working Party', May 1959; TNA PREM 13/949, P. Thomas to D.D. Parker, 26 July 1964.

<sup>186</sup> TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969.



the desire to preserve economic and political hegemony in post-war Europe. 'The West cannot leave the history of Resistance to the Communists', advocated US authorities – 'a true historical picture is the unfinished business of the West'.<sup>187</sup> UK officials also hoped that an official history would 'restore the balance of truth' to the distorted picture given by 'penny packet' publications. Most recently, in early 1960, former agent Mathilde-Lily Carré had sensationally claimed that she had turned double for the Germans, becoming the lover of Abwehr investigating officer Hugo Bleicher.<sup>188</sup> With oppositional arguments neutralised, the decision to commission a history was made by the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, in September 1960.

This left the problem of the history's ambit and authorship. One suggestion was to resurrect the secret SOE history – completed by W.J. MacKenzie, the wartime head of the Air Council Secretariat – and reconstitute it for public consumption; another was to conduct a 'pilot project' addressing a solitary locale of SOE activity. France was well-suited because 'it [at once] posed the most acute problems of treatment, both on account of the complexity of the operations involved and the delicacy of the political background'.<sup>189</sup> Although MacKenzie had pressed for a published version of his own history in 1948 – 'it is dangerous for the public not to know' – he did not, as Aldrich suggests, 'argue vigorously for this' in 1960.<sup>190</sup> The brush used in 1948 was 'too broad', whilst effacing high-level source material – innately enmeshed in the linguistic structures of the text – would render the narrative unreadable. The French option was therefore approved on 7 November 1960. To avoid accusations of bias, the task was not given to an ex-member of SOE but to an independent historian, M.R.D. Foot, for the initial fee of £2,000.<sup>191</sup> As a former intelligence officer, and having worked closely with the French Resistance after D-Day, Foot was *persona grata* with both the Armed Forces

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<sup>187</sup> <[https://www.cia.gov/csi/kent\\_csi/docs/v05i4a14p\\_0001.htm](https://www.cia.gov/csi/kent_csi/docs/v05i4a14p_0001.htm)> (1 March 2007).

<sup>188</sup> TNA T 220/1388, 'Official History of SOE. Further Report by a Working Party', May 1959; M. le Carré, *I was the Cat* (London, 1960).

<sup>189</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, 'History of SOE in France', B. Trend to A. Douglas-Home, 26 March 1964.

<sup>190</sup> TNA HS 8/430, W.J. MacKenzie to C. Gubbins, 7 December 1948; TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969; Aldrich, 'Policing the Past', p. 937.

and the Cabinet Office.<sup>192</sup> Despite being granted full access to SOE files, chronologies and Section Histories, Foot was subject to stiff restrictions.<sup>193</sup> Permission to interview all but a few participants was denied; Irene Ward's *bête noire* Vera Atkins, and partisan leaning (F, DF, RF) Section staff, were especially 'off-limits'. The right to sanction publication would rest exclusively with Ministers. The history would be written on the 'understanding that there had never been such a body as SIS'. There would also be no mention of 'currency operations'; activities that had involved violations of neutrality; or 'the breakdown of resistance organisations through treachery or weakness under interrogation'.<sup>194</sup> Whitehall clearly did not want an official history *par excellence*, more preferable was a history with an official muzzle.

While Foot got to work, further aspects of Britain's wartime intelligence labyrinth began to emerge. Without official consent, Montgomery Hyde published *The Quiet Canadian* (1962), which revealed the activities of Sir William Stephenson, the one-time head of British Security Co-ordination (BSC) in New York.<sup>195</sup> The biography was due to be completed by an ex-MI6 officer; Hyde was only commissioned when the author in question was re-employed by the secret service. Like his predecessor, Hyde was shown all of Stephenson's 'personal papers', which included many BSC records.<sup>196</sup> For Dick White, chief of MI6, the book's damage spread in three directions: it referred to MI6 as an existing organisation and, contrary to custom, named its wartime head, Major-General Sir Stewart Menzies; it exposed the late Admiral Lais as the Italian Naval Attaché in Washington whom a woman agent seduced into parting with his

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<sup>191</sup> TNA CAB 163/134, 'Notes on the Decision to Authorise an Official History of SOE', Cabinet Office Historical Section, 14 March 1969.

<sup>192</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, 'A Biography: Michael Richard Daniel Foot', P.A. Wilkinson, September 1960; D.H. Davis, 'The Man with a Load of Secrets under his Arm', *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 April 1966. For further details about Foot's appointment: C. Andrew and R.J. Aldrich, 'The Intelligence Services in the Second World War', *Contemporary British History* 13:4 (Winter 1999), pp. 130-69, esp. p.145.

<sup>193</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, 'SOE History: Working Arrangements', E.G. Boxshall, 23 September 1960.

<sup>194</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, 'Refusal of Agents for Interview', P.A. Wilkinson to B. Trend, 6 October 1961; M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London, 1964), p. xiii; TNA T 220/1388, 'Official History of SOE. Further Report by a Working Party', May 1959.

<sup>195</sup> M. Hyde, *The Quiet Canadian* (London, 1962). See also B. MacDonald, *The True Intrepid: Sir William Stephenson and the Unknown Agents* (London, 1998).

<sup>196</sup> TNA CAB 21/5864, Background Note.

government's naval code; and it left a general, but misleading, impression that HMG were relaxing rules about publications from official documents.<sup>197</sup> *'The Quiet Canadian'*, reviewed *The Sunday Times*, '[will] cause a shudder to run down the spines of many members of the clubs and local hunts'.<sup>198</sup>

Why then did Whitehall not prosecute? Hyde had clearly breached the rule that manuscripts based on official information must be submitted for security clearance. Set against the backcloth of HMG's incessant blocking of SOE histories, on 8 November 1962, Irene Ward went to the House declaring double-standards: 'Why do some people feel that they must adhere to the Official Secrets Act and others that they need not do so? It is a most terrible muddle.'<sup>199</sup> The Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, passed publication off as the result of a 'regrettable misunderstanding'.<sup>200</sup> Hyde, he argued, was known to have made contact with Stephenson's original biographer. Although the original biographer was under instruction from MI6 to inform Hyde to submit his text for formal approval, he somehow left Hyde with the impression that his security advice was tantamount to security clearance. In these circumstances, it would have been impossible to prove that either of them knew, or had reasonable cause to believe, that the confidential information had been given in contravention of the OSA. Legal proceedings against Stephenson were also unlikely to succeed; as a Canadian citizen, his discussions with Hyde, all held in North America, were conducted outside the jurisdiction of English law. Ward, however, refused to accept that prosecution had been by-passed by a misunderstanding; Hyde, she claimed, 'knew exactly what he was doing'.<sup>201</sup> Foot's manuscript would arrive not a moment too soon.

During 1963 and 1964 Foot's galley proofs were screened from various angles: legal ramifications; security; domestic political reaction; and effect upon international

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<sup>197</sup> TNA CAB 21/5864, Background Note; TNA CAB 21/5864, A. Wyatt, 2 November 1962.

<sup>198</sup> I. Fleming, 'Intrepid: Silhouette of a Secret Agent', *The Sunday Times Magazine Section*, 21 October 1962.

<sup>199</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 8 November 1962, 666, cols 1153-4.

<sup>200</sup> TNA CAB 21/5864, Background Note; TNA CAB 21/5864, Draft Letter, H. Macmillan to I. Ward, December 1962.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

relations.<sup>202</sup> Eager to deflect potential French recrimination, Lt-Col Eddie Boxshall, first SOE adviser, demanded a moratorium on statements which belittled the French Resistance. These included:

1. Gaullists seemed unable to understand what security meant;
2. The notorious French carelessness of security;
3. The British never passed a secret to the French except in dire necessity.<sup>203</sup>

Anxious to avoid criminal proceedings for libel or injurious falsehood, Sir Colin Gubbins insisted that gratuitous remarks about individuals were also expunged. For example, Foot had described the wireless operator Arnaud as 'foul-mouthed'. Denise, the first woman parachuted into Occupied France, was demeaned with the epithet 'sultry'; F Section officer, Major Nicholas Bodington, was characterised as 'bold to the point of foolhardiness', recklessly sending agent Jack Agazarian to his capture and death.<sup>204</sup> Having read the draft, and seen himself painted with numerous 'snide comments', Buckmaster pleaded: 'I cannot but object. I am made to appear irresponsible, callous, partial, inefficient, and crassly insensitive in my optimism.'<sup>205</sup> The threat of libel in France was particularly acute since, under French law, truthfulness was not a defence when the facts, to which defamation relates, were more than ten years old. On 6 April 1964, having impressed on Foot the need for revisions, HMG formally approved publication. Notwithstanding a certain amount of de-bunking (the suggestion that the bombing offensive played a peripheral role was 'not likely to pass without comment'), Trend believed the draft 'a scrupulously fair and balanced presentation of events'.<sup>206</sup> Peter Wilkinson, former M.I (R) Chief, rhapsodised: 'Ward's charge that the French Section was run by incompetents will simply not stick'.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, B. Trend to P.A. Wilkinson, 12 June 1962.

<sup>203</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, P.A. Wilkinson to B. Trend, 22 May 1963; TNA CAB 103/571, E.G. Boxshall to P. Wilkinson, 10 October 1963.

<sup>204</sup> TNA CAB 103/572, C. Gubbins to M.R.D. Foot, 5 February 1964; TNA CAB 103/572, M. Buckmaster to E.G. Boxshall, 11 November 1964; TNA CAB 103/569, 'SOE: Pros and Cons. Notes of Meeting', 16 September 1969.

<sup>205</sup> TNA CAB 103/572, M. Buckmaster to E.G. Boxshall, 11 November 1964.

<sup>206</sup> TNA PREM 11/5084, 'History of SOE In France', B. Trend to A. Douglas-Home, 26 March 1964.

<sup>207</sup> TNA CAB 103/571, P.A. Wilkinson to B. Trend, 22 May 1963.

But, as Trend had rightly cautioned in 1959, *SOE in France* was a step into the unknown. Despite fastidious prior inspection by authorities, and Foot's personal assurance that he would 'gladly fall in [line]' with the principal objections, the published version was not the slavish Whig History HMG had desired; indeed, when copies reached bookshops in May 1966, Foot boasted: 'I took care to write it in English and not in Whitehallese'.<sup>208</sup> French reaction was acerbic. Edward Behr, *Nouvel Observateur*, protested at the deprecation of the Resistance: 'Les Français étaient considérés comme extrêmement dangereux, parce que bavards et inconscients. La règle d'or, inculquée aux candidats tout au long de l'entraînement était – Ne confiez jamais un secret aux français, sauf si c'est absolument nécessaire'.<sup>209</sup> To the dismay of officials, Foot had given the true names of individuals (instead of pseudonyms) without their consent, including, the last SOE Head, Major-General Lawrence Grand. Grand castigated Foot: 'He has gone beyond the proper role of a historian'.<sup>210</sup> Public disclosure of Grand's wartime work had threatened to disrupt his peacetime role as the incumbent Director, and chief contractor negotiator, of Engineer Planning and Resources Ltd: 'No one believes that I have long since been clear from such [clandestine] activities – this may cost several millions of exports'.<sup>211</sup>

Determined to give 'life-blood and humanity' to the story, Foot blackballed official praxis by interjecting several defamatory references, often attributing personal responsibility for failed operations. As a result, HMG was presented with libel actions from three decorated SOE staff: Odette Sansom, Peter Churchill, and Rubeigh Minney. 'The book leaves not a shadow of a doubt that its author and sponsors regard her as unworthy of the George Cross', charged Odette's solicitors. For example, on her return from France, Odette was depicted as being 'non-composmentis' with a 'state of nervous tension so severe that she had considerable trouble in distinguishing fantasy and

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<sup>208</sup> TNA CAB 103/572, M.R.D. Foot to E.G. Boxshall, 16 November 1964; D.H. Davis, 'The Man with a Load of Secrets under his Arm', *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 May 1966.

<sup>209</sup> TNA FO 146/4634, 'La Guerre Secrète des Services Secrets', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Edward Behr.

<sup>210</sup> TNA PREM 12/949, L.D. Grand to H. Wilson, 26 April 1966.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

reality'.<sup>212</sup> Churchill, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Croix de Guerre, was described in slanderous terms:

1. Neither patience nor diplomacy was [Churchill's] long suit;
2. Churchill and his courier, Odette, found that life could be easy for people with plenty of money on the Riviera;
3. Churchill had a careless habit of keeping old [deciphered] messages.<sup>213</sup>

Foot implied that Minney possessed a 'prurient imagination'; had a callous disregard for the feelings of Violette Szabo; and, as a memoirist, had written 'completely fictitious stories of torture'.<sup>214</sup> While the press blamed Whitehall for denying Foot the opportunity to double-check his facts with SOE personnel, the Paymaster General, George Wigg, arranged out-of-court settlements. Foot would publicly apologise to Odette in *The Times*; both Churchill and Minney would receive £5,000 in damages from HMG (Foot was indemnified); and small alternations – 'a paper and scissor job' – would be made to the forthcoming second edition.<sup>215</sup>

Historians shared none of the compunction of some former SOE staff. No account of SOE was more comprehensive and readable. *SOE in France* was the catalyst for a veritable explosion of interest in SOE on the part of the historical community. The book's publication also triggered a proliferation of academic conferences dealing with wartime intelligence themes. In November 1967, the University of Manchester held a two-day workshop entitled 'Subversion, Intelligence and Resistance', featuring papers from M.R.D. Foot, Donald McLachan and, in a rare public appearance, Sir Colin

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<sup>212</sup> TNA CAB 103/575, Solicitors to G. Wigg, 3 May 1966; TNA CAB 103/575, 'Threat of Libel Action by Odette Sansom', E.G. Boxshall, 14 April 1966.

<sup>213</sup> TNA CAB 103/575, O. Nickson to the Controller (HMSO), 24 June 1966; TNA CAB 103/576, 'Writ between Peter Morland Churchill and M.R.D. Foot/HMSO', 10 August 1966; TNA CAB 103/579, 'Counsel for the Plaintiff'; TNA CAB 103/577, Writ Minney vs HMSO and Foot.'

<sup>214</sup> TNA CAB 103/576, R.J. Minney, 25 October 1966; TNA CAB 103/577, 'Writ Minney vs HMSO and Foot.'

<sup>215</sup> R. Pitman, 'I Call this a Shocking Attack on a Brave Woman', *Sunday Express*, 3 May 1966; 'Agents who Survived the SOE', *The Sunday Times*, 1 May 1966; TNA CAB 103/575, J.E. Jackson, 29 April 1966; TNA CAB 103/575, 'Statement to the Editor, M.R.D. Foot, *The Times*, 11 July 1966; TNA CAB 103/599, B. Salt to G. Jones, 24 January 1969; T. Johnson, 'Secret Agent gets Libel Settlement', *Evening News*, 27 January 1969; TNA CAB 103/579, 'Minney Case: Terms of Settlement'.

Gubbins.<sup>216</sup> Some presumed that Foot's history was an entrée to the SOE archive. Here they were mistaken. 'Foot's book, retorted the Foreign Office, 'does not mean that the archives will be more freely available in the future'.<sup>217</sup> In 1972 SOE records were prohibited from release alongside the 'cream' of World War Two archives on the grounds that many were amalgamated with current intelligence files from which they could not be separated. Continued stonewalling had diplomatic implications. In 1967, the Greek government publicly criticised the Cabinet Office for 'seeking refuge behind the Public Records Act', and refusing Greek official historians access to SOE papers. In private, the MOD feared that a Greek history would resurface Britain's controversial wartime decision to buttress right-wing, para-military resistance organisations, such as the National Republican Greek League (EDES), against communist groups.<sup>218</sup>

In March 1966, HMG announced its intention to write further SOE histories, so that 'events might be described while the official records can still be supplemented by the personal recollections of [those] men who were involved in them'.<sup>219</sup> Official histories would also help deflect public interest away from salacious private accounts. The Foreign Office were already sweating about the imminent publication of *Inside SOE* by E.H. Cookridge; his previous books, *Secrets of the British Secret Service* and *Soviet Spy Net*, had manufactured the cock-and-bull story that he had been a confidant of George Blake for eighteen years.<sup>220</sup> His publishers, moreover, had refused to replace the forbidden expression 'British Secret Service' with the more nebulous phrase 'British Intelligence authorities'.<sup>221</sup> Trend, now Cabinet Secretary, was again charged with overseeing developments. He soon discovered that departments were more than happy to drag their feet. *SOE in France*, although 'historically profitable', had proved 'embarrassing politically'; financially it had showed a loss of some £40,000.<sup>222</sup> MI6,

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<sup>216</sup> TNA CAB 146/210, 'A Series of Public Lectures at Manchester University. "Subversion, Intelligence and Resistance"', November 1967.

<sup>217</sup> TNA CAB 103/569, E.G. Boxshall, 3 February 1966.

<sup>218</sup> TNA CAB 103/569, Miscellaneous Note, January 1967.

<sup>219</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 725, 9 March 1966, cols 561-3.

<sup>220</sup> TNA FO 146/4635, A. Goodenough to J. Adams, 21 October 1966.

<sup>221</sup> TNA FO 146/4635, J.E. Jackson to D. Logan, 25 October 1966.

<sup>222</sup> TNA CAB 103/569, 'Note of Meeting held at Cabinet Office', 18 May 1967.

meanwhile, politely informed Trend that it would turn down any liaison or administrative support with official historians.

Only in 1969, under a chorus of renewed parliamentary pressure, and in the knowledge that Foot had signed a contract with MacMillan (USA) to write a history of SOE in Europe as a whole, did Trend force the pace by asking Dame Barbara Salt – formerly SOE Head in Tangier – to reinvestigate the possibility of additional volumes.<sup>223</sup> While Salt's report considered *SOE in France* 'a good touch stone' against the value of commissioning further histories, the factors which compelled HMG to approve Foot's study, over a decade ago, were now deemed largely irrelevant. Historians consulted were of the opinion that, apart from innate professional preference for 'more history rather than less', there was no lively demand in academic circles for further government-sponsored volumes. Students believed that a saturation point in the number of SOE books had been reached, with the percentage actually read decreasing in proportion to the total quantity published. Although the vogue for spy stories still prevailed – especially amongst 'would-be Ian Flemings' – SOE publications had convinced many people that the Executive was not a spy ring, whilst the recent publicity afforded to Kim Philby had seemingly diverted public interest into more up-to-date channels.<sup>224</sup> Salt conceded privately, however, that *SOE in France* had put Whitehall 'onto a buttered slide'. 'Ministers will be embarrassed', she argued, 'if their answers must always be in the negative'.<sup>225</sup>

What form would further histories take? One suggestion, first made by MacKenzie in 1958, was to give 'a few handpicked historians' access to the archives – albeit with 'strict safeguards' – and encourage them to publish through commercial channels.<sup>226</sup> The removal of HMG imprimatur would foreclose any possibility of legal action. It would also reduce costs; expenditure on *SOE in France* stood at £32,586 in

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<sup>223</sup> TNA CAB 103/581, B. Trend to B. Salt, 19 February 1969.

<sup>224</sup> TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969.

<sup>225</sup> TNA CAB 103/569, Note of Meeting between B. Trend and B. Salt', 16 September 1969.

<sup>226</sup> TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969.



July 1969. This proposal was quickly rejected: allegations of bias would be quite impossible to refute; the Cabinet Office would find itself – in what was aptly described by the SOE Adviser – as an ‘historical beargarden’.<sup>227</sup> The most practical option was a single official volume ‘à la Foot’. Salt recommended two possible subjects for publication: Italy and the Far East. Italian operations constituted ‘an undoubted success story’. They reduced allied casualties in the final offensive of April 1945 to almost negligible proportions; they safeguarded economic patrimony concentrated in the Po basin and Alpine Valleys; and they paved the way for the Allied policy of counter-scorch.<sup>228</sup> Salt considered an Italian publication as ‘immensely valuable anti-communist propaganda’. Communists had made vast political capital out of the Italian resistance, to the point where ‘the activities of the bourgeois political parties’ and *a fortiori*, of the Anglo-Americans, were made to appear as factors of minor importance in freeing Italy from Fascism.<sup>229</sup> SOE in the Far East, meanwhile, would help spread – what Lord Mountbatten had coined – ‘the new spirit of empire’. In fighting with indigenous populations as ‘brothers’, SOE had presaged contemporary liberal approaches to insurgent nationalism.<sup>230</sup> A broad history, encompassing operations in the Far East, would also rectify the strange absence of the Asiatic arena from existing works.

Salt also enumerated the points against publication. Historians of proven calibre, rather than ‘up-and-coming men’ or those reaching retirement, were very much in demand. They were usually overworked whilst a large proportion did not live in London. (Security protocol insisted that SOE papers had to be viewed on government premises.) Although Foot had already alerted officials to the depressing state of the SOE archive (‘the surviving material is, to put it mildly, patchy’),<sup>231</sup> Salt confirmed the record detritus. To save storage space, wholesale and indiscriminate destruction of records had been carried out, particularly ‘by those not adequately briefed for task’. No original file list existed thus rendering it impossible to ascertain what was missing. Personal records

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> TNA CAB 103/576, ‘Some Lessons Learnt from First Publication’, M.R.D. Foot, 19 July 1966.

were arranged alphabetically and did not relate individuals to specific areas. A mysterious fire in Baker Street in 1946 had destroyed many administrative and financial records.<sup>232</sup> There were also security concerns. Most sensitive were 'Pickaxe Operations': Pickaxe was the codeword used to infiltrate Soviet agents into German-occupied territories without informing the friendly government concerned. Moreover, Treasury solicitors believed that no matter how carefully drafts were scrutinised, they could never totally negate the risk of libel.<sup>233</sup> On 16 September 1969, having evaluated Salt's findings, officials postponed plans for further SOE histories. The *raison d'être* seemed clear: 'Never again should there be an official publication on the model of *SOE in France*'.<sup>234</sup> Perhaps more decisively, as Aldrich argues, Trend – 'the prime mover in all this' – was now proposing something far more ambitious: an official history of wartime intelligence.<sup>235</sup>

## 5.5 Official History of Intelligence in World War Two

The 1960s have been described as the 'era of exposure' for the intelligence and security agencies.<sup>236</sup> Punctuating the entire decade was a series of well-publicised spy scandals. These included, *inter alia*, the defection of Kim Philby, ringleader of the legendary Cambridge Five, to the Soviet Union; the exposure of George Blake and John Vassall as Soviet spies; and the uncovering of the Portland Spy Ring. In June 1963, after it was revealed that the Secretary of State for War, John Profumo, had shared his prostitute lover Christine Keeler with a Russian spymaster, the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan publicly tasked the Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning, to examine 'the operation of the Security Service'.<sup>237</sup> In the deferential spirit of the 1950s, such subjects may have been passed over in silence. Now, however, they received rapt attention from the media. A

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<sup>232</sup> TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969; TNA CAB 103/569, 'Note of Meeting between B. Trend and B. Salt', 6 October 1969.

<sup>233</sup> TNA CAB 103/570, 'Study of the Pros and Cons of Publication of Further Histories of SOE', B. Salt, July 1969.

<sup>234</sup> TNA CAB 103/569, 'SOE: Pros and Cons. Notes of Meeting', 16 September 1969.

<sup>235</sup> Aldrich, 'Policing the Past', p. 944.

<sup>236</sup> Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 607.

good illustration of this was the 8-month investigation carried out by *The Sunday Times*' 'Insight' team into the Burgess-Philby affairs. In late 1967, the newspaper published several highly detailed, perceptively written accounts of Britain's most notorious quislings – culminating, on 17 December, with the only interview (until the late 1980s) that the national press conducted with Philby after his defection. *The Times*'s revelations were particularly damaging for the deference and club spirit of the D-Notice Committee. Denis Hamilton, the newspaper's editor, championed a 'clear duty to expose the ineptitude of the Secret Service' and ignored a D-Notice imposed on the story.<sup>238</sup> In 1968, HMG was powerless to prevent a spate, if not a surfeit, of publications relating to Philby's exploits.<sup>239</sup> 'The world of the D-Notices', declared Donald McLachan, '[could] now never be the same again'.<sup>240</sup> In the popular imagination, spies had become emblematic of treachery, duplicity and bureaucratisation. For example, in John le Carré's breakthrough novel, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, members of MI6 were described as 'vain fools, traitors...sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives'.<sup>241</sup>

The decade of horrible revelations rattled the Establishment. Restoring reputations was now considered essential. Both Trend and the new Intelligence Co-ordinator, Sir Dick White, knew this all too well. Between February and June 1969, therefore, they convened several committees to evaluate the tenability of an authoritative official history of intelligence in the Second World War. An official history would aim to present a 'sober account' of intelligence. This would not only have a useful 'prophylactic effect' of correcting damaging private histories, but would also

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<sup>237</sup> <<http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page244.html>> (1 January 2005).

<sup>238</sup> TNA FCO 73/76, 'Report of Luncheon with Denis Hamilton', Lord Chalfont to T. Cochrane, 11 September 1967.

<sup>239</sup> See K. Philby, *My Silent War* (London, 1968); E.H. Cookridge, *The Third Man* (London, 1968); E. Philby, *Kim Philby: The Spy I Loved* (London, 1968); H.T. Roper, *The Philby Affair* (London, 1968); B. Page, D. Leitch and P. Knightley, *Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation* (London, 1968).

<sup>240</sup> D. McLachan, 'Intimate Enemies: Review of K. Philby, *My Silent War*, and H.T. Roper, *The Philby Affair*', *Listener*, 26 September 1968.

<sup>241</sup> J. le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (London, 1963), p. 220.

help de-sensationalise the current public impression of the secret world.<sup>242</sup> Pouring cold water on colourful inaccuracies was not the only reason for sponsoring publication. The chief purpose, argued White, would be to 'meet the claims of history by filling in the present gaps of the Second World War, a period when intelligence played an unprecedented and crucial role in events'.<sup>243</sup> The official histories, having omitted intelligence activities, were misleading. A synoptic work, drawing together the lessons learned from wartime experience, would also benefit Staff College instructors and commanders-in-chief. The Foreign Office, moreover, was still worried that Britain's contribution to allied victory in World War Two was being compromised by state-sponsored Soviet historiography. Despite the steady proliferation of samizdat publications (self-published 'underground' manuscripts), Russian histories of the Second World War were peppered with rabid anti-Britishness, and contained distortions and omissions on a scarcely credible scale. Unlike *SOE in France*, the Committee supported the virtue in having a panel of historians, rather than a single author, in a bid to 'reduce the danger of personal rivalry and public dispute'.<sup>244</sup> Carefully selected, members would be reputable and reliable historians, preferably with personal knowledge of intelligence work. Although paid for their services, authors would have no rights in the book which, when finished, would be wholly the property of HMG with all royalties accruing to the Exchequer.<sup>245</sup> Having accepted the conditions, and signed the OSAs, the historians would be given 'unrestricted access to all *relevant* [emphasis added] records'.<sup>246</sup> White also made the point that recent archival openings in Germany would enable the story to be written from 'both sides of the hill'.

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<sup>242</sup> TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969.

<sup>243</sup> TNA PREM 13/3252, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 4 July 1969; TNA PREM 15/424, 'Record of a Meeting held at No.10', 19 February 1971; TNA DEFE 24/656, 'Official History of Intelligence. Meeting at B. Trend's Room', 26 February 1969.

<sup>244</sup> TNA DEFE 24/656, 'Official History of Intelligence. Meeting at B. Trend's Room', 26 February 1969.

<sup>245</sup> TNA PREM 15/424, 'Official History of Intelligence in World War Two', B. Trend to E. Heath, 10 November 1970.

<sup>246</sup> TNA PREM 15/424, 'Record of a Meeting held at No.10', 19 February 1971.

Best-laid plans encountered the usual breakwater of intelligence practitioners. Although not against disclosure *per se* ('[it] would not cause problems as far as revelations of methods were concerned'), GCHQ feared that publication might generate heavy public pressure for further histories.<sup>247</sup> More seriously, argued Leonard Hooper (Director of GCHQ), reference to individuals who served continuously after the war might draw attention to the peacetime work of the service.<sup>248</sup> It is worth remembering that, as far as HMG was concerned, Sigint was run down in 1945. GCHQ's consultations also highlighted the difficulty in securing approval from allies. Any history was bound to indicate, however tactfully handled, that the Americans had been the 'junior partner' in the wartime period.<sup>249</sup> Stressing their 'great dependence on British ideas and concepts' would not sit well with Senators and Congressman.<sup>250</sup> A British history might also expose 'American friends' to corresponding pressure in relation, not merely to the 1939-45 war, but also to more recent conflicts in their history, such as the Korean War and – worst-of-all – the Vietnam campaign.<sup>251</sup> MI5 presented a less vociferous case. Unlike GCHQ, the peacetime role of MI5 had been officially acknowledged, whilst documents referring by name or initials to the Security Service (MI5 and Box 500) were already filtering into the Public Record Office (PRO).<sup>252</sup> MI5 accepted that the revelation of wartime techniques was 'not a problem'. Their main concern stemmed from the possible breaking of agent anonymity. As well benefiting hostile intelligence services, revealing names would have an 'adverse effect' upon service morale, since the identity of agents was rightly understood to be highly confidential and restricted to a

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, 'Record of a Meeting held between the Intelligence Co-ordinator, GCHQ and M. Oldfield', 12 March 1969.

<sup>249</sup> TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969; TNA DEFE 31/8, R.A. Fyfe to D. White, 25 June 1969.

<sup>250</sup> TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969

<sup>251</sup> TNA PREM 15/424, 'Official History of Intelligence in World War Two', B. Trend to E. Heath, 10 November 1970; TNA CAB 163/133, B. Trend to R. Helms, 12 December 1969.

<sup>252</sup> TNA CAB 185/13, 'Release to the Public of Records Relating to Intelligence', JIC (A), 20 September 1973.

narrow circle.<sup>253</sup> The Chiefs of Staff, meanwhile, viewed with suspicion the idea of 'debt to history'. In order to fulfil an academic obligation, argued R.A. Fyffe, it would be necessary to endanger 'the real and vital factor of national security', as well as expose 'dirty' intelligence methods to public opinion.<sup>254</sup>

MI6 presented a litany of concerns. An unclassified history, it was feared, would open for public discussion a field of activity that it had traditionally been the policy of successive governments to keep closed. With few exceptions, Parliament had long been silent on intelligence matters, whilst the press were still in theory restrained by the D-Notice system. The identity of agents was another stumbling block. MI6 was adamant that naming names would not only damage vital agent relationships ('the element of trust with agents must be cherished'), but would also afford possible grounds for libel.<sup>255</sup> C was particularly keen to protect current intelligence operations; a published history, if handled imprudently, could lead to a 'review by some countries of the security measures employed against us'.<sup>256</sup> Political conditions, moreover, were hardly congenial to publication. At a time when HMG was seeking to promote a United Europe, should it be reviving the image of Germany as a hostile power, and one that was thoroughly beaten in the context of intelligence and sabotage techniques? Mention would also have to be made of Britain's use of neutral territories and occasions would certainly be revealed when the War Cabinet failed to take account of accurate intelligence reports. Although all three agencies indicated that they would in principle allow a small coterie of historians 'loose in the archives', a full-blown public history, analogous to *SOE in France*, was unanimously rejected.<sup>257</sup> Only the concept of an in-house history found general acceptance.

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<sup>253</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, 'Record of a Meeting held between the Intelligence Co-ordinator, GCHQ and M. Oldfield', 12 March 1969.

<sup>254</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, R.A. Fyfe to D. White, 25 June 1969.

<sup>255</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, 'Record of a Meeting held between the Intelligence Co-ordinator, GCHQ and M. Oldfield', 12 March 1969; TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> TNA DEFE 31/8, R.A. Fyfe to D. White, 25 June 1969; TNA DEFE 31/8, DCDS(I) to DUS, 6 October 1969.

By July 1969, with discussions at an impasse, Trend presented Ministers with a palliative by proposing a 'limited and illustrative official history'.<sup>258</sup> Unlike a boundless history, which would ask awkward questions of 'how', a limited publication would restrict itself to more palatable 'what' questions. It would define the role played by the secret services; concentrate on the 'users' of intelligence rather than sources and methods; discuss selected episodes of historical interest; and analyse the merits and defects of the system. Employing a special series of anonymous references would protect particularly sensitive sources. Harold Wilson concurred: on 16 March 1970, he informed Edward Heath, Leader of the Opposition, that HMG was ready to endorse a four-part history, encompassing strategic intelligence, operational intelligence, counter-intelligence and strategic deception.<sup>259</sup> By the end of the year, however, no ministerial decision had been reached. Peter Fleming, who had long harboured a desire to contribute, complained of 'a Cabinet go-slow movement'.<sup>260</sup> In truth progress had been hampered by a General Election. In November 1970, Trend began peddling the project to a Conservative Government, explaining that it was 'historically desirable' to fill the gaps in the official histories of the war.<sup>261</sup> Although a calculated risk ('It is a gamble, and by lifting the veil, we are effectively limiting our ability to stop any future revelations'),<sup>262</sup> Trend underlined that an official history would offset the plea from 'outside' historians for access to intelligence records. The crux of the matter was that HMG simply could not realistically uphold the existing barriers to release: 'We are having considerable difficulty with Delmer; we are fighting a losing battle with Masterman; and we are tangling with Fleming'.<sup>263</sup> It was also imperative to 'spare the D-Notice system the strain' to which it would otherwise be subjected if obstructive policies were maintained.

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<sup>258</sup> TNA PREM 15/424, 'Official History of Intelligence in World War Two', B. Trend to E. Heath, 10 November 1970; TNA CAB 163/133, 'Proposal for an Official History of British Intelligence Activities in World War Two', The Intelligence Co-ordinator, 19 June 1969.

<sup>259</sup> TNA DEFE 23/107, H. Wilson to E. Heath, 16 March 1970.

<sup>260</sup> TNA CAB 164/1230, P. Fleming to A. Douglas-Home, 8 October 1970.

<sup>261</sup> TNA PREM 15/424, 'Official History of Intelligence in World War Two', B. Trend to E. Heath, 10 November 1970.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

Heath finally approved the project on 19 February 1971. What clinched the deal was Trend's argument that the 'proof of the pudding [was] in the eating',<sup>264</sup> and that a decision to publish could be delayed until after the history was written. Heath may also have been swayed by the publication in late 1970 of Nikita Khrushchev's first volume of memoirs, *Khrushchev Remembers*, which made scant acknowledgement of Britain's role in World War Two. Although the Cabinet Office Historical Section had heavily criticised Hinsley's *Hitler's Strategy* in 1951 ('the author's [interpretations] are frequently based on an all too glib and inaccurate exposition of the argument. I regret to think that this book is being used for a course of lectures at Cambridge'),<sup>265</sup> the celebrated cryptanalyst had since reached the apex of the historical profession, and was the obvious choice for overall authorship. Published in 5 volumes between 1979 and 1990, Hinsley's *Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War* received laudatory reviews from both the public and the academic community. Fair but forthright, fluently written and authoritative, Hinsley's series opened a new chapter in the public's understanding of World War Two intelligence by systematically integrating elements such as Ultra, the first batch of files for which were released in 1977. Some critics were disappointed that the histories declined to name individuals. The former head of MI6, Sir Maurice Oldfield, was reported to have said of the first volume:

You get the impression that the intelligence war was won by committees in Whitehall rather than by people. This is a book written by a committee, about committees for committees.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> TNA DEFE 23/107, B. Trend to E. Heath, 1 March 1971.

<sup>265</sup> TNA CAB 103/198, B. Melland R.A. Butler, 21 December 1951; F.H. Hinsley, *Hitler's Strategy* (Cambridge, 1951). Melland went on: 'Apart from the lopsided results of relying too much on the Nuremberg documents, Hinsley's equally liberal use of the Fuhrer Naval Conferences has resulted in too great an emphasis on the naval aspects of the war. As to the book itself I regard it, on balance, as an unfortunate and presumptuous publication. Whilst some passages are reasonably good, the bulk of the chapters we have examined contain far too many errors of fact and of interpretation, largely because of the narrow source foundation on which they repose.' Also see: R. Langhorne, 'Hinsley, Sir (Francis) Harry (1918–1998)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/69418>] (10 September 2007).

<sup>266</sup> Cited in P. Hennessy, 'Ultra's Shadowy Secrets Emerge', *The Times*, 9 September 1981, p. 5.



Fleet Street's greatest ferret-in-chief, Chapman Pincher, momentarily came out of retirement to mourn the fact that no effort had been made to explore the wartime activities of the Cambridge spy ring.<sup>267</sup> Other faultfinders, opened-eyed for indications of whitewashing, took issue with the unparalleled archival exclusivity afforded to Hinsley and his team. Despite these carpings, Hinsley's vast tome was rightly seen as a landmark text, raising the bar for future histories and firmly elevating the field of intelligence history beyond the realm of memoirs.

## Conclusions

Intelligence is the most secret of professions. Its operations are wreathed in a miasma of secrecy, while its practitioners are spectral figures, known only to their organisations. Ironically, however, few trades have seen as many of their members publish memoirs in retirement. As Nigel West explains, 'It is one of the paradoxes of the British intelligence tradition that whereas there is a convention, and now a criminal statute, to prevent intelligence officers from making unauthorised disclosures, more have done so in this country than anywhere else in the world'.<sup>268</sup> By 1975, the intelligence memoir had become a literary genre in its own right. The 'cast list' consisted of one Director-General, one Group Captain, one traitor, and a plethora of SOE and PWE officers. For many in the secret world, reared in the tradition neither to confirm nor deny the existence of intelligence, the aforementioned were 'guilty men', who betrayed a lifelong vow of secrecy. 'Guilty Man Number One' would probably be Sir Percy Sillitoe.<sup>269</sup> The importance of his memoir rested not in what it had to say, but the fact that he had the audacity to write it in the first place. Though prone to sensationalism, exaggeration and self-exculpation, intelligence memoirs served a valuable public interest. At a time when archives were inaccessible and scholarship on intelligence was thin, they offered a rare

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<sup>267</sup> Interview with Mr Chapman Pincher, journalist, 24 May 2007.

<sup>268</sup> N. West, 'Fiction, Faction and Intelligence', in L. Scott and P. Jackson, *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in Shadows* (London, 2004), p. 123.

<sup>269</sup> Here I am borrowing from Michael Foot's assessment of Cato's 'Guilty Men'. See M. Foot, *Loyalists and Loners* (London, 1986), p. 180.

glimpse into the inner workings of espionage, enabling readers to experience imaginatively the exploits and psyche of a real-life James Bond.

In Whitehall, memoirs aroused concerns for revealing too much, too soon, even if many were written in the style of 'How Bill Adams Won the Battle of Waterloo'. Decisions about censorship were made on a case-by-case basis and, with no set procedure to follow, depended on the nature of the material discussed and the status of the author in question. Exercising control proved extremely difficult and rested on the ability of departments to wheedle and coax authors into self-censoring. Because men of eminence and position were often involved, officials lacked the nerve to reach for the Doomsday Weapon, the then fully operative OSA. By the 1960s, with more and more authors resorting to American publishers, the authorities had become powerless to stop the bleeding. Historians, in turn, called for access to intelligence records in order to write popular works for which there was a steady and profitable commercial market

Rather than bow to public pressure over archives, HMG embraced official history, which, despite being a gamble of sorts, provided a means to correct misconceptions and maintain control over the extent of revelation. Both *SOE in France* and Hinsley's *Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War* were in part instruments of Cold War politics, charged with restating the past from the glare of the present. Britain's reluctance to support resistance movements had become a leitmotiv in Soviet accounts of the Second World War; official histories, therefore, were intended to set the record straight. Neither Foot nor Hinsley were given a completely free rein to write a 'warts and all' history. He who is 'commissioned' is also constrained. Neither, however, became prisoners in a gilded cage. Foot, in particular, said far too much for his sponsor's liking. Cynical academics will always reserve a degree of contempt for state-sponsored programmes. In December 2002, the appointment of Christopher Andrew as the official historian of MI5 provoked some commentators to label the Cambridge Professor as 'court historian', bound to convey the 'Home Office' view of history.<sup>270</sup> Denouncing Andrew's privilege to monopolise and influence MI5 historiography for

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<sup>270</sup> D. Walker, 'Just How Intelligent?', *Guardian*, 18 February 2003.

many years, others demanded the simultaneous release of files to the free-play of historical scholarship. Whatever the criticisms, it should be remembered that official historians do bring to light revelations earlier than might otherwise have been the case. In consequence, this encourages debate and cross-fertilisation of ideas, advancing 'learning' on intelligence themes at many different levels. In the final analysis, official history should always be read as a dyadic or polyphonic account in which two independent but harmonically related voices sound together. Done well, the voice of the state and the voice of the author should complement and interact with each other, producing a balanced and melodic composition. Done badly, the voice of the state will drown out the voice of the author, leaving the latter as nothing more than a basic chordal accompaniment.

## CHAPTER SIX | ON THE CABINET: SECRECY AND THE 'INDUSTRY' OF MINISTERIAL MEMOIR WRITING

Modern political culture is awash with ministerial memoirs. Omnipresent, avidly consumed and courted by publishers, recent years have witnessed a cascade of impassioned accounts, especially those attending the premiership of Tony Blair.<sup>1</sup> The notable Cabinet dissidents, Robin Cook and Claire Short, have both published memoirs airing serious animadversions *vis-à-vis* the Second Gulf War. Political memoirs are not, of course, a new phenomenon. In Britain, the genre has been vibrant since the early twentieth century, leaving a profound imprint on the political landscape. As yet, however, there have been few attempts at a synthesis for the period as a whole, let alone substantive explanatory or interpretive reflections. Analysis has tended to concentrate on uses and limitations and whether political autobiographies constitute 'good history'. Here debate bifurcates into two distinct schools: those who applaud the genre for providing a precious glimpse onto the policy process; and those who attack it as polemical 'pamphleteering', prone to factual contamination with a political agenda, and tinged with a whiff of the 'great man in history' fallacy.<sup>2</sup> As George Egerton argues, 'political memoir seems to have inhabited an academic no-man's-land falling between literature and the social sciences'.<sup>3</sup>

Egerton has encouraged historians to appreciate the 'latent function' of memoirs, in particular their role in shaping perceptions of the past. During the last two decades scholars have become increasingly concerned with the subject of memory and the manifold ways in

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<sup>1</sup> R. Cook, *The Point of Departure* (London, 2003); C. Short, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq, and the Misuse of Power* (London, 2004); L. Price, *The Spin Doctor's Diary: Inside Number 10 With New Labour* (London, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See A. Gamble, 'State of the Art: Political Memoirs', *Politics*, 14:1 (1994), pp. 35-41; T. Arklay, J. Nethercote and J. Wanna (eds), *Australian Political Lives* (Canberra, 2006); G. Bolton, 'The Art of Australian Political Biography', in T. Arklay, J. Nethercote and J. Wanna (eds), *Australian Political Lives* (Canberra, 2006), pp. 1-12.

which human experience is recalled and interpreted.<sup>4</sup> 'Memory Studies', which has emerged across a broad disciplinary spectrum, has paid close attention to the importance of constructed versions of the past (otherwise known as 'vehicles of memory' or 'sites of memory') such as films, museums and commemorations.<sup>5</sup> But, with the notable exceptions of David Reynolds' *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War*, and Egerton's own contribution, "The Lloyd George "War Memoirs"", little work has been done on ministerial autobiographies as 'sites of memory', despite the fact that they respond to, reflect upon and explore central issues of public experience and consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Even less has been done on the extent to which these manuscripts have been subject to official scrutiny and control. If we accept Eric Hobsbawm's argument that practices of memory are allied to the rituals of state formation – serving to weld social obedience, legitimise authority and create a shared national identity – then the role of the censor is of fundamental importance.<sup>7</sup> Primarily, then, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that ministerial memoirs, as well as reflecting history, have a history of their own in which the British Government played an integral and often intrusive role. It will try to tease out what authors knew at the time; what they wanted to reveal; and what 'hidden transcripts' the state ultimately consigned to the cutting-room floor. The chief problem for such an investigation has hitherto been a lack of sources. Today the opposite is the case. Evidence of official orchestration exists not only in private collections, but also in the now declassified background papers generated by the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs in 1975.

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<sup>3</sup> G.W. Egerton, "The Lloyd George "War Memoirs": A Study in the Politics of Memory", *The Journal of Modern History*, 60:1 (March 1988), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> See T.G. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper (eds), *The Politics of War, Memory and Commemoration* (London, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> The phrase 'vehicles of memory' is used by Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

Since lighting up dark corners of government, though laudable in a journalist, is ostensibly repugnant to every crown servant, it is probably expedient to delineate from the outset some general reasons as to why politicians might indulge in literary pursuits. Some are determined to make history both as a statesman and as a historian. A scholarly disquisition on Cabinet life, which draws on experience and imparts lessons and examples to a subsequent generation of political leaders, is their gift to posterity. Others – possibly fearing judgement at the court of history – will write memoirs as a shield to protect and burnish their reputation. ‘A politician’s character and position are measured in his day by party standards’, asserted Winston Churchill:

When he is dead, all that he achieved in the name of his party is at an end. The eulogies and censures of partisans are powerless to affect his ultimate reputation. The scales wherein he was weighed down are broken. The years to come bring weights and measures of their own.<sup>8</sup>

Many statesmen simply do not trust historians to impart anything but a bigoted and irreverent picture of political life. ‘Too much history’, Lewis Namier wrote to Churchill in 1934, ‘is written by don-bred dons with no knowledge or understanding of the practical problems of statecraft’.<sup>9</sup> Lord Salisbury, erstwhile Lord President of the Council, was more sensitive than most to the freebooting attacks of the academic community: ‘I have an ineradicable dislike of young men who pop their heads up twenty years after the events of which they write had taken place, and tell their elders who had themselves taken part in these events what really happened’.<sup>10</sup> It should be said, of course, that the historical profession is rarely hospitable towards the musings of outsiders from Westminster, especially when the outsiders dominate the best-sellers list. For politicians who receive only modest comfort while in office, a lucrative publishing contract, coupled with the rewards of newspaper serialisation, provide further stimuli. In 1960, for example, Lord

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<sup>8</sup> W. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill: Volume II* (London, 1960), p. 488.

<sup>9</sup> J. Namier, *Lewis Namier* (Oxford, 1971), p. 230.

Chandos, who as Colonial Secretary (October 1951-July 1954) drew an annual salary of roughly £5,000, sold syndication rights to the *Daily Telegraph* for £15,000.<sup>11</sup> As King Edward VII told Sir Sidney Lee, 'Stick to Shakespeare, Mr Lee, there's money in Shakespeare'.<sup>12</sup>

In attempting to flesh out the extent to which memoirs have been censored, this chapter will draw several conclusions. Firstly, during the Cold War, memoirs became progressively more candid; and their disclosures, particularly about individuals, became more uninhibited. For Sir Burke Trend, Cabinet Secretary in 1971, this was 'a reflection of the permissive age in which we live'.<sup>13</sup> Trend's interpretation, however, is less than satisfactory. Publishers paid higher sums for revelations and spicy anecdotes, and were tireless in pushing their literary assets to live up to their explosive potential. The press too, under the influence of market forces, unashamedly demanded their 'pound of flesh in the strongest beef essence'.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, established by trial and error over a long period of time, the 'rulebook' governing the publication of memoirs is best viewed as a palimpsest, in which new conventions have been constantly superimposed upon older contours. Ultimately, however, when vetting troublesome manuscripts, HMG have relied on little more than polite exhortation and the readiness of the official to exercise goodwill and a sense of public duty. Prosecution under the OSA, or withdrawal of Privy Councillor Status, were regarded as so incommensurate with the true measure of the offence as to make it wholly unrealistic to invoke them in practice. 'We are therefore driven', declared Trend, 'to bargain and to compromise'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Birmingham University Library (BUL), Avon Papers, AP 23/57/15A, Lord Salisbury to Lord Avon, 16 December 1966.

<sup>11</sup> The National Archives (TNA) CAB 21/5829, 'Note for the Record', N. Brook, 20 June 1960; Lord Chandos, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> TNA CAB 164/1294, 'Drafts: Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs', 1975.

<sup>13</sup> TNA CAB 164/1332, B. Trend to E. Heath, 18 June 1971.

<sup>14</sup> TNA CAB 21/5848, W. Deedes to B. Trend, 8 April 1964.

<sup>15</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'Harold Macmillan Publication', J.M. Moss, 13 May 1975; TNA CAB 164/1332, B. Trend to D. Allen, 10 July 1970; TNA CAB 164/1332, B. Trend to E. Heath, 18 June 1971.

Thirdly, the Cabinet Secretary operated as HMG's gatekeeper, the conduit through which the executive could convey its concerns to authors. Some, including Edward Bridges and Norman Brook, enjoyed being the focal point through which dealings were channelled. Bridges described himself in positive terms as 'the guardian of the secrecy of confidential papers and communications'.<sup>16</sup> For others, such as Trend, the role of 'History Policeman'<sup>17</sup> was a poisoned chalice. Satisfying HMG without alienating the author was a virtually impossible feat and attracted constant recrimination from both parties. Relaying 'political' objections also obscured the degree to which the Cabinet Secretary was still *au font* a neutral adviser. Trend, in particular, viewed the temporal aspirations of politics with moderate suspicion and plainly believed that ministers and Cabinet Secretaries were not from the same stable. When dealing with authors, therefore, he would routinely apologise for 'trespassing beyond my bailiwick into territory which is not my concern'.<sup>18</sup> Finally, disputes over memoirs have been inextricably linked with wider questions about the operation and efficiency of government business. As a rule, former ministers were expected to obey the convention of collective responsibility, which, *inter alia*, prescribed that Cabinet secrets should not be disclosed. The argument was relatively simple: elected officials would not speak freely with colleagues, nor surrender their own preferences to the achievement of a common decision, if they knew that their views were likely to become public knowledge prematurely. As the Committee of Privy Councillors explained in 1975, 'Opinions, perhaps unpopular, perhaps embarrassing, will be muted or suppressed if they are known to be liable to future disclosure at the whim of a retired colleague'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> TNA CAB 66/65, E. Bridges to S. Cripps, 1 July 1942.

<sup>17</sup> The phrase 'History Policeman' is used in R.J. Aldrich, 'Persuasion? British Intelligence, the History Policeman and Official Information', in P. Major and C.R. Moran (eds), *Spooked: Britain, Empire and Intelligence since 1945* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> B. Trend to H. Wilson, 30 April 1971 cited in TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>19</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386.



### 6.1 'Telling Tales Out of School': The Birth of the Memoir Industry

Before 1914 ex-ministers seldom published autobiographical works charting their experiences in office. As Sir Rupert Howorth, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, reported in 1941, Cabinet proceedings were treated with 'secrecy, reverence and respect' in accordance with traditions handed down from the mid-Victorian age.<sup>20</sup> Ministers occupied fiduciary positions, bound by the maxim that a trustee should never profit out of his trust, whilst the absence of Cabinet minutes and similar papers also militated against publication. Guided less by legal sanctions, but by an ingrained belief that silence in regard to official work was golden, no Prime Minister of the nineteenth century published, or even wrote, a personal memoir. The more common practice was for statesmen to bequeath their papers to an heir and to be venerated posthumously in the medium of 'Life and Times' biographies.<sup>21</sup> Few were written during the lifetime of the subject; Winston Churchill's *Life of Lord Randolph Churchill*, for example, was published in 1906, eleven years after the latter's death and twenty years after he had resigned from office.<sup>22</sup>

The general rule against disclosure was eventually waived in respect of memoirs of the Great War. Politicians had become open to public criticism for their conduct of operations and claimed, quite reasonably, a right to reply. In sympathy for individuals whose memory had been unfairly injured, on 30 January 1922 HMG established a 'vindicator' clause, ruling that ministers should be allowed to justify their actions by publishing documents which they had seen during their time in office. A more open-

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<sup>20</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Introductory Historical Note: The Use of Official Material in Ministerial and Other Memoirs', R. Howorth, 18 July 1941; TNA CAB 164/1296, 'Drafts: Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs', 1975. Annex C.

<sup>21</sup> Egerton, 'Lloyd George', p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Introductory Historical Note: The Use of Official Material in Ministerial and Other Memoirs', R. Howorth, 18 July 1941. Lord John Russell's Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox did not appear until 1853 – 47 years after Fox's death. The first set of diaries of Charles Greville, who died in 1865, did not come out until 1875 and remained in expurgated form until 1927. The papers of Thomas Creevy, who died in 1838, were withheld from the public until 1903. (TNA CAB 164/1296, 'Drafts: Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs', 1975. Annex C.)

minded approach was palliated by the fact that meetings of the War Cabinet were by no means confined to members of that body, as is customary in peacetime, whilst, for reasons of administrative efficiency, its conclusions were given a wide distribution. 'Individual discretion therefore', claimed Maurice Hankey (Cabinet Secretary) in 1934, 'had a freer play in deciding the use to which its records can be put'.<sup>23</sup> The *quid pro quo* was that authors wanting to publish classified material were expected to submit a formal application, followed by a draft of their manuscript, to the Cabinet Office.<sup>24</sup> In consultation with the departments concerned, the incumbent Prime Minister (as well as the Prime Minister in office when the documents in question were prepared), the Cabinet Secretary would examine the proofs with a view to establishing whether disclosure would be detrimental to the public interest. While not empowered to exempt authors from either the Privy Councillor's Oath or from the OSA, the Cabinet Secretary operated as an important sentinel of official secrecy. His assessment of what should or should not be published would greatly influence the government's final decision. Self-justificatory accounts benefited immeasurably from the creation of the Cabinet Secretariat in December 1916, which, in setting in motion a 'Paper' bias, greatly increased the pool of sources on which memoirs could be based.<sup>25</sup> Self-vindicators also benefited from the Cabinet's decision in November 1919 to relax the rules regarding the custody of official documents. Whereas during the war ('impressed by the grave danger of [information] getting into the wrong hands'),<sup>26</sup> Privy Councillors were required to hand over their papers upon leaving office, it now became open for ministers to retain Cabinet papers, and thus reprocess them into memoirs. In making this decision, members relied on the principle that secrecy was 'safeguarded by the rule that no one is entitled to make public use of Cabinet documents without the

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<sup>23</sup> M. Hankey to L. George, 21 April 1934 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, 'Additional Notes on the Establishment of the Conventions', 14 October 1975.

<sup>24</sup> TNA CAB 104/142, 'Publication of Cabinet Documents', R. Howorth, 21 January 1935.

<sup>25</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Introductory Historical Note: The Use of Official Material in Ministerial and Other Memoirs', R. Howorth, 18 July 1941.

<sup>26</sup> TNA CAB 21/2824, 'Cabinet Papers', M. Hankey, September 1934.

permission of the King'.<sup>27</sup> On relinquishing office, Leo Amery was believed to have kept, on principle, a copy of every paper circulated over his initials from 1924-29.<sup>28</sup> Lloyd George even took with him the sole copy of the Irish Treaty – not missed until it was rediscovered in 1945.<sup>29</sup>

The 1920s, therefore, saw a swathe of polemical memoirs about the Great War, many of which contained stinging criticisms of the personalities involved. The apologias of Field Marshal Douglas Haig and Admiral of the Fleet John Jellicoe were given carte blanche to quote from official documents and stimulated other persons who were, or who thought they were attacked, to publish replies.<sup>30</sup> The first notable civilian authorised to vindicate his actions against misrepresentation was Winston Churchill. Plagued by memories of the Gallipoli disaster, and singled-out for special criticism by the Report of the Dardenelles Commission in 1919, Churchill wrote *The World Crisis* (6 volumes, 1923-31) with the explicit intention of nailing his opponents into a historical coffin. Churchill was publishing gold dust; by January 1921, before a single copy had been sold, his contract with Curtis Brown, London's leading literary agent, totalled £27,000.<sup>31</sup> Serialisation in February 1923 prompted a host of parliamentary questions probing the extent to which the author had sought permission to quote so freely from Admiralty telegrams. However, as Peter Fraser argues, *The World Crisis* was far too popular for any nitpicking about the use of official documents to carry weight.<sup>32</sup> Although newspapers do not offer the historian an unproblematic 'magic mirror' onto the prevailing social mores of a political culture, it is interesting to note that many journalists initially displayed a profound uneasiness at the proliferation of political memoirs. *The Times* considered Margot Asquith's autobiography

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> TNA CAB 21/2824, E.B. Boyd to R. Howorth, 9 May 1934.

<sup>29</sup> F. Stevenson, *The Years That Are Past* (London, 1967), p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386; TNA CAB 104/141, M. Hankey to L. George, 8 April 1933.

<sup>31</sup> B. Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> P. Fraser, 'Cabinet Secrecy and War Memoirs', *History*, 70:230 (1985), p. 403.

as 'proof that our politicians and the circles in which they move live lives of philandering frivolity'; its publication represented the 'corruption and hypocrisy of British manners'.<sup>33</sup>

In early August 1922, Lloyd George signed a book, serialisation and film package – dubbed the 'biggest deal in the history of publishing'.<sup>34</sup> The reputed price of £90,000 for the Welsh Wizard's memoir was twice the sum paid for those of Kaiser Wilhelm II. In Fleet Street, a good deal of discussion took place on the point of whether Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, should be writing a book while still in office. *Outlook* attacked him for 'disregarding the old English traditions' and 'selling his name to a publisher'.<sup>35</sup> 'If this is honestly worth its money', the weekly continued, 'it will contain information which no Prime Minister can use without the gravest impropriety.' Such was the public outcry at Lloyd George's perceived profiteering, on 26 August it was announced that he would donate all the proceeds to war charities.<sup>36</sup> Two months later, having been ousted from government and with no income (apart from the £2,000 per annum left to him by the steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie), Lloyd George extricated himself from the contract and devoted his time to journalism. According to Egerton, Lloyd George cultivated an interim career in Fleet Street to the tune of £500 per article, making him the highest paid political journalist of his age.<sup>37</sup>

In 1932, with no prospect of holding office again, Lloyd George resurrected the project. Many of the Great War's chief protagonists, both military and civilian, had written trenchant critiques, leaving the former Prime Minister with little option but to publish evidence in refutation. In April 1934, he expressed his grievances to the Cabinet Secretary, Maurice Hankey:

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<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, 4 November 1920.

<sup>34</sup> 'Lloyd George Book to Bring \$400,000', *The New York Times*, 13 August 1922, p. 1. The figure of £90,000 was arrived at in the following way: US serial rights £40,000; US book rights £20,000; British book rights £15,000; British Empire serial rights £15,000.

<sup>35</sup> *Outlook* cited in *New York Times*, 13 August 1922, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> 'Lloyd George to Devote to War Charities All Profits of his Forthcoming Memoirs', *The New York Times*, 27 August 1922, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Egerton, 'Lloyd George', p. 61.

For fifteen years I have borne with a stream of criticism polluted with much poisonous antagonism. The books published have all quoted secret documents. My shelves groan under their mutilated bowdlerised quotations.<sup>38</sup>

As a self-vindicator, Lloyd George was afforded every facility to inspect wartime papers, and duly exercised his right to quote from them as successive inter-war governments accepted that the principle of withholding the use of official documents had been irretrievably surrendered so far as the war period was concerned.<sup>39</sup> Along with Churchill, Lloyd George was one of the great ones who took the law into their own hands. Despite calls for moderation on the grounds of taste and decency ('personal attacks will recoil on Lloyd George himself who will go down in history as lacking generosity'),<sup>40</sup> the wartime Prime Minister refused to tone down what he called the 'acerbities of truth', and his six volumes on the war included damning indictments of Liberal Party panjandrums such as Asquith, Haldane, Grey and Milner. Preparing a biography of her late husband, and angered by Lloyd George's accusation that he had failed to foresee the Russian Revolution, Lady Milner demanded to inspect the documents in question.<sup>41</sup> On 17 October 1934, while emphasising that each case must be decided on its merits, HMG agreed that where extracts had already been published they could also be shown to persons of 'good title' who wished to vindicate the memory of a deceased relative.<sup>42</sup> The extended 'vindicator' principle was prefaced with an important rider: biographers would be subject to the same regulations as

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<sup>38</sup> TNA CAB 104/141, L. George to M. Hankey, 18 April 1934.

<sup>39</sup> TNA CAB 104/141, M. Hankey to R. MacDonald, 23 August 1932; TNA CAB 104/141, M. Hankey to R. Vansittart, 16 April 1934.

<sup>40</sup> TNA CAB 104/142, M. Hankey to C. Wigram, 28 May 1934; D.L. George, *War Memories of David Lloyd George*, 6 Volumes (London, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1938).

<sup>41</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'Additional Notes on the Establishment of the Conventions', 14 October 1975.

<sup>42</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386; TNA CAB 104/142, 'Publication of Cabinet Documents', R. Howorth, 21 January 1935; TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Introductory Historical Note: The Use of Official Material in Ministerial and Other Memoirs', R. Howorth, 18 July 1941.

ministers whilst leniency would not be granted to those producing 'ordinary historical work'.<sup>43</sup>

The war memoir – treated by officials as altogether *sui generis* – soon became a 'dying class' as authors gradually sought to tackle peacetime events. Without permission, on 6 March 1934 Edgar Lansbury, son of the opposition leader George Lansbury, published *Lansbury, My Father*, which quoted verbatim extracts from Cabinet documents.<sup>44</sup> Circulated to ministers in 1930 and 1931, when the latter had been First Commissioner of Works, the two extracts conveyed government plans to cut unemployment benefit by ten per cent.<sup>45</sup> Although George Lansbury escaped punishment for transmitting the documents, his son was convicted under Section 2 and fined £20 and 25 guineas.<sup>46</sup> Deploying the OSA was certainly draconian and it has long been held that the real objective was to discipline the Labour leader himself, who had not only denounced the OSA in 1911, but more recently had been suspected of leaking to the *Daily Herald* the names of ministers who had voted against his social policy in 1931.<sup>47</sup> But the Cabinet minutes tell a different story. Embroiled in publishing battles with Lloyd George and Churchill, both of whom behaved as if they were above the law, HMG feared that one disclosure would lead to another and decided therefore to make an example of a less 'untouchable' figure like Edgar Lansbury. 'If the views of one Cabinet Minister are to be published', declared Howorth on 5 March 1934, 'it is inevitable that his colleagues will claim a similar privilege, and the whole basis of Cabinet secrecy will be imperilled'.<sup>48</sup> Failure to prosecute, moreover, would have reduced the status of Section 2 to that of 'a dead letter'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> E. Lansbury, *Lansbury, My Father* (London, 1934).

<sup>45</sup> News, 'Last Labour Cabinet. Papers Disclosed', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1934.

<sup>46</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386; TNA CAB 21/391, 'The Lansbury Case', R. Howorth, 20 March 1934.

<sup>47</sup> D. Hooper, *Official Secrets* (London, 1987), pp. 54-6.

<sup>48</sup> TNA CAB 21/391, 'Biography of George Lansbury. Cabinet Leakages', R. Howorth, 5 March 1934.

<sup>49</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, R. Howorth to E. Bridges, 18 July 1941.

On 21 March, the day after Lansbury's conviction, HMG decided that it should be the duty of all ministers, on vacating office, to return forthwith Cabinet papers issued to them while in office.<sup>50</sup> As a compensatory gesture, former ministers would still be allowed to examine Cabinet documents issued to them during their period in office, albeit on the understanding that these must be consulted in the Cabinet Office. The unenviable task of recovering documents already in the custody of ministers (or, if deceased, their executors) fell to the Cabinet Secretary. By May 1935 over 75 per cent of those concerned had agreed to surrender their papers.<sup>51</sup> The most notable exceptions were Lloyd George and Churchill; the latter argued that he had 'invariably obtained the prior sanction of the Government of the day' before publishing, whilst his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, had bequeathed all his state papers to trustees under a deed which *inter alia* provided 'that no documents...shall be printed without the written consent of Her Majesty's Government'.<sup>52</sup> Recognising that it was impossible to take butter from a dog's mouth ('it is quite clear that Mr Churchill has no intention during his lifetime of returning his papers'),<sup>53</sup> the Cabinet Office had little choice but to acquiesce. The elite in Whitehall, not for the first time (and certainly not the last), was above the regulations it had created.

The treatment meted out to Lansbury failed to discourage other authors determined to get into print. In June 1941, Admiral Lord Chatfield, who had been Minister for Coordination of Defence from February 1939 to April 1940, submitted his memoir for vetting.<sup>54</sup> Chatfield was adamant that he disclosed very little; this claim, declared Howorth, was 'of hoary antiquity' and 'covered a multitude of sins'.<sup>55</sup> Despite an absence of verbatim quotations, the solitary exception being his resignation letter of 11 October 1939, the manuscript constantly referred to documents circulated to the Cabinet and to the

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<sup>50</sup> TNA CAB 21/2824, 'Cabinet Papers', M. Hankey, September 1934.

<sup>51</sup> TNA CAB 21/2824, 'Recovery of Cabinet Papers: Churchill's Case', 3 May 1935.

<sup>52</sup> TNA CAB 24/257, 'Cabinet Procedure: Recovery of Cabinet Papers', 29 November 1935; TNA CAB 21/2824, W. Churchill to R. Howorth, 19 November 1934.

<sup>53</sup> TNA CAB 21/2824, R. Howorth to T. Barnes, 23 January 1935.

<sup>54</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Lord Chatfield's Memoirs', R. Howorth, 19 June 1941.

Committee of Imperial Defence. Treating subjects in the 'most controversial, tendentious and *ex parte* manner possible', the volume was especially objectionable from a security point of view.<sup>56</sup> As well as references to the 'hidden hand', the draft raised the question of responsibility for Britain's un-preparedness for war. Hankey suggested that the effect on national unity would be 'deplorable' and even went so far as to hint that the memoir 'might cause the Government to break up'.<sup>57</sup> The Foreign Office feared that publication might offend new allies; the draft contained general aspersions about the Soviet Union, describing, for example, how visitors were always assailed by the 'Russian smell'.<sup>58</sup> Afforded a grandstand view of the publishing battles that followed the Great War, Sir Edward Bridges, Hankey's successor as Cabinet Secretary, feared that a liberal policy would give rise to a similar flood of recriminatory publications.<sup>59</sup> Churchill, although satisfied by the general conclusion that publication would be inimical to the war effort, added an important caveat, proposing that 'a far wider latitude' could be given after the war. 'There are only a few things', he continued, 'which should never be mentioned'.<sup>60</sup> As David Reynolds argues, 'doubtless the Enigma secret lay behind Churchill's second sentence, while anticipation of his own memoirs probably prompted the first'.<sup>61</sup> On 24 November 1941, the Cabinet agreed that Chatfield's memoir would arouse a great deal of 'controversy and ill-feeling', and prohibited publication subject to re-evaluation after the war.<sup>62</sup>

Lord Londonderry (Secretary of State for Air [1931-5]) was another ex-minister seeking to re-write the history of appeasement. The general purpose of the memoir was an apologia *pro vita sua*, consisting partly of a number of commendatory letters that he had received from ministers, partly of argumentative justifications for the policies he had

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<sup>55</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, R. Howorth to E. Bridges, 18 July 1941.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.; TNA CAB 21/2165, 'Notes on Volume 5', R. Howorth, 9 July 1941.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> TNA FO 370/660, S. Gaselee to Lord Chatfield, 11 September 1941; TNA FO 370/660, Lord Chatfield to S. Gaselee, 17 September 1941; TNA FO 370/660, S. Gaselee to Lord Chatfield, 18 September 1941.

<sup>59</sup> TNA CAB 21/3766, 'Disclosure of Cabinet Proceedings and Papers', 9 February 1953.

<sup>60</sup> TNA CAB 21/2165, W. Churchill to E. Bridges, 23 November 1941.

<sup>61</sup> Reynolds, *Command of History*, p. 30.



supported, and partly of criticisms of his political opponents.<sup>63</sup> In September 1939, his request to publish was turned down by the Prime Minister, who accepted Bridges's assessment that, while publication 'would not cut much ice [domestically], it might do harm abroad'.<sup>64</sup> Bridges also explained the dangerous precedent of granting exceptions to the rule that permission should not be given to publish peacetime papers: 'No doubt we shall have quite enough trouble on that when the war is over, but need not anticipate it'.<sup>65</sup> In May 1942, anxious to overturn his reputation as the diplomat who 'had entertain[ed] Ribbentrop',<sup>66</sup> Londonderry re-submitted his galleys. Bridges considered Londonderry 'more troublesome than the scoundrel Lansbury'; as well as containing derogatory remarks about persons now holding high office, the typescript was replete with passages that disclosed confidential information, most notably the evolving strength of the RAF.<sup>67</sup> With one eye on his own post-war histories, and swayed perhaps by the fact that Londonderry was his second cousin, Churchill took a different view: 'Our real point is that we must not be hampered in the conduct of the war until it is won. But I really think pre-1935 is ancient history'.<sup>68</sup> Londonderry was granted leeway on the strict proviso that all objectionable citations were removed. To enforce accordance with this ruling, letters were sent from the Treasury Solicitor, Sir Thomas Barnes, mentioning the OSA specifically. In November 1942, having expunged 35 pages, the manuscript was given the 'nihil obstat', and *Wings of Destiny* finally reached bookshops in March 1943.<sup>69</sup> Londonderry long harboured the conviction that he had been infamously treated by the War Cabinet, not only denied privileges afforded to other memoirists, but claiming, with some truth, that the

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<sup>62</sup> TNA ADM 116/4477, 'Conclusions of a Meeting held at the War Cabinet', 24 November 1941.

<sup>63</sup> TNA CAB 21/2677, S. Cripps, 2 December 1942.

<sup>64</sup> TNA CAB 21/2676, Lord Londonderry to N. Chamberlain, 19 September 1939; TNA CAB 164/1297, 'Additional Notes on the Establishment of the Conventions', 14 October 1975.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> TNA CAB 21/2677, 'Wings of Destiny', R. Howorth, 2 December 1942.

<sup>68</sup> TNA CAB 21/3766, 'Disclosure of Cabinet Proceedings and Papers', 9 February 1953.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 21/2678, E. Bridges to Lord Londonderry, 19 November 1942; TNA CAB 21/2678, Lord Londonderry to E. Bridges, 11 March 1946.

OSA had been 'stretched to [its] utmost' in order to soften his critique of Crown Servants.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, when *Ambassador on Special Mission* by Samuel Hoare (later Lord Templewood) was published in 1946, containing Cabinet minutes in full, Londonderry protested that he had been derailed by the 'rub of the green'.<sup>71</sup>

It was an established rule that civil servants, serving or retired, should not indulge in political or party controversy lest by doing so they should appear no longer the disinterested advisers of ministers impartial to execute their policy. It followed from this that civil servants should not publish books dealing with political matters; and *a fortiori* that he or she should not be permitted to use official information in such works. Ironically, the first person to fulminate against this rule was none other than Maurice Hankey, the erstwhile Cabinet Secretary who had done so much to clarify and police procedures during inter-war period. Based on a secret diary, and supplemented by extracts from various memoranda and appreciations written at the time, *The Supreme Command* was conceived as the last great inside history of the First World War, and was submitted in September 1943.<sup>72</sup> A memoir that refought the 1914 conflict was not in itself objectionable; the Cabinet Office, underlined Bridges, had for some years regarded the publication of wartime documents as 'beyond hope'.<sup>73</sup> What made the memoir 'indecent' was that Hankey had revealed ('and indeed gloried in the revelation of') what was said and done in the confidential relationship between a minister and his adviser, contrary to the canons of civil service tradition.<sup>74</sup> The draft was also interlarded with references to peacetime discussions and thus, *prima facie*, contravened the OSA and Crown Copyright. Having reshaped the manuscript in accordance with these concerns, Hankey resubmitted the galley proofs in late 1944, appealing directly to Churchill for latitude. In his defence, Hankey pointed out that his book dealt with events at least a quarter-century old, and that Great War memoirs

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<sup>70</sup> TNA CAB 21/2678, Lord Londonderry to E. Bridges, 11 March 1943.

<sup>71</sup> TNA CAB 21/2678, Lord Londonderry to E. Bridges, 6 May 1946.

<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 104/229, M. Hankey to E. Bridges, 22 September 1943.

<sup>73</sup> TNA CAB 104/229, E. Bridges, 5 November 1943.

had long been treated as *sui generis*.<sup>75</sup> Hankey also invited the Prime Minister to bear in mind that, 'I myself had some misgivings about publication of *The World Crisis*, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that this consideration was outweighed by [its] contribution to history'.<sup>76</sup> Churchill sided with Bridges. As a retired civil servant, who occupied a highly confidential position, Hankey was expected to be the keeper of his conscience: 'If broken', declared Churchill, 'there is a danger that Ministers will not communicate with frankness which is essential for the public service'.<sup>77</sup> Publication was therefore forbidden on the grounds that it would undermine the 'governing marriage' between ministers and their officials.

The elite in Whitehall did not always enjoy greater privileges than those occupying the lower rung of the ladder. During the war, while the personal reminiscences of ministers, top civil servants and senior servicemen were invariably regarded as *male fide*, 'ordinary' memoirs written by 'ordinary' officials were encouraged as good propaganda.<sup>78</sup> In April 1942, with fears of invasion receding following the successful Battle of Britain, the Armed Services were inclined to the view that the public were 'slipping towards a dangerous apathy' – apathy being the forerunner of flagging effort and demoralisation.<sup>79</sup> The impetus for restorative action came from the Air Ministry: 'WE must do our utmost to keep the public interest in the war if they are to put their backs into it'.<sup>80</sup> Couched in nationalistic zeal, writings by junior officers were instrumental in ascribing a sense of purpose in the minds of the people, and contributed to the construction of what Benedict Anderson would later call an 'imagined community'. The publication of 'field experiences'

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> TNA CAB 21/2193, M. Hankey to W. Churchill, 8 December 1944; TNA CAB 104/229, M. Hankey to E. Bridges, 27 October 1944.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386.

<sup>78</sup> TNA AIR 2/6555, ACAS (G) to PUS, 17 April 1942.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> TNA AIR 2/6555, DPR/ACAA (G) to AUS (G), 10 April 1942; TNA AIR 2/6555, ACAS (G) to PUS, 17 April 1942.

also did much to enhance Britain's prestige abroad, especially in America, where Churchill's antipathy to a cross-channel invasion was increasingly seen as Britannia holding out against munificent Uncle Sam.

### *Post-war Troubles*

The cessation of hostilities with Germany heightened the desire to clarify the rules under which public servants could publish their reminiscences. In 1946 Herbert Morrison, then Lord President, announced that the government intended to grant memoirists the 'greatest practicable freedom' with regard to histories about the war and defence themes immediately preceding it.<sup>81</sup> There were various reasons for treating these periods exceptionally. Firstly, wartime administration raised problems that were of special public interest whilst historical analysis provided 'valuable lessons for the future'.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, the fear that disclosure of ministerial discussions would lead to political embarrassment was mitigated by the fact that there had been a coalition government. It was also believed that disclosures relating to the war, when the world was divided between allies and enemies, involved less risk of damaging diplomatic relations. Churchill, who since 1939 had instructed his staff to print all of his 'minutes', greatly facilitated his own (and many others') post-war literary career by deftly amending the principles by which former ministers could have access to official documents. Ratified by the caretaker Prime Minister on 23 May, WP (45) 320 contained unprecedented liberality, stipulating that:

- (1) Ministers leaving office may take with them copies of War Cabinet Memoranda and other documents of State that they wrote themselves. Duplicate copies will be provided, if required, for the use of their Department.
- (2) Ministers of Cabinet rank may at any time have access in the Cabinet offices to documents issued to them while they were in office.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, 'Memoirs', H. Macmillan, July 1961.

<sup>82</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, 'Disclosure of Official Information', N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 8 February 1960.

A number of ministers, including Hugh Dalton and Anthony Eden, immediately availed themselves of this right. Churchill, whose prints were explicitly headed 'Prime Minister Personal' and eschewed Cabinet Office imprimatur (doubtless, as David Reynolds argues, to pre-empt claims that such documents were government property), took no fewer than sixty-eight monthly volumes of minutes, directives and telegrams.<sup>84</sup> The frontier of contemporary memoir writing had arrived.

Civil servants, rather than politicians, caused the first wave of post-war controversy. In 1948, the Lord Chancellor, Viscount Jowitt, urged HMG to prosecute Sir James Grigg, erstwhile Permanent Under-Secretary at the War Office, for his unauthorised autobiography *Prejudice and Judgement*.<sup>85</sup> Publication, claimed Jowitt, caused irrevocable harm to the confidential relationship between ministers and officials; to pass this indiscretion by in silence would establish a dangerous precedent. The Attorney General, however, decreed that legal proceedings would be rather like using a 'Nasmith hammer to crack a nut'.<sup>86</sup> The Cabinet Office had greater success with the proposed memoir of Dr. Thomas Jones, former Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet (1916-30), and a legendary figure in the Whitehall pantheon. Based on a personal diary, the book disclosed the extent to which Jones had helped ministers write their speeches, had received their confidence and on occasion had lent a hand in Cabinet decision-making.<sup>87</sup> Norman Brook, who succeeded Bridges as Cabinet Secretary in 1947, took the view that Jones' memoir should not be authorised, not least because Hankey would doubtless renew his request for permission to publish. Churchill, who was now enjoying his 'Indian Summer' premiership, underlined that 'it is a bad thing for [Cabinet] Secretaries to keep diaries' and was at pains to point out that Jones' duty, even as a retired octogenarian, was to 'play the game' so to speak.<sup>88</sup> Yet he

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<sup>83</sup> TNA CAB 66/65, 'War Cabinet Documents', WP (45) 320, W. Churchill, 23 May 1945.

<sup>84</sup> Reynolds, *Command of History*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>85</sup> J. Grigg, *Prejudice and Judgement* (London, 1948).

<sup>86</sup> TNA LCO 2/3219, Viscount Jowitt, 7 January 1948.

<sup>87</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, N. Brook to W. Churchill, 28 May 1953.

<sup>88</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, W. Churchill to N. Brook, 2 July 1953.

also offered a remarkably liberal footnote: 'Time passes its sponge across the significance of all records. Each case must be dealt with on its merits and individual instances must be turning points of judgement'.<sup>89</sup> This was clearly a comment from Churchill the historian. Recognising that no 'hard and fast rule' existed – and being 'somewhat an expert in these matters' – Churchill offered to inspect the manuscript.

Bridges, now Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, drew up a list of objectionable passages. Comments made in 'bad taste' were numerous. On 9 March 1923, for example, Jones suggested that, 'the question of drink when staying with Lloyd George is a diverting one'.<sup>90</sup> Bonar Law was also portrayed as a profligate dipsomaniac. 'I do not think that Law's drinking ought to be immortalised', considered Bridges.<sup>91</sup> Bad taste occasionally bordered on the vituperative. On 17 January 1918, following the formation of the National Salvage Board, Lloyd George was said to have referred to its inaugural chairman, Herbert Samuel, as 'the very man – a Jew to collect old clothes'.<sup>92</sup> The memoir was interleaved with gossip. Jones put on record his doubts about the adequacy of Stanley Baldwin for the post of Prime Minister and outlined the views of several Private Secretaries about the weaknesses of their political masters. Jones was particularly defamatory about Churchill – ironically the very individual who had the authority to approve publication. On 10 April 1919, for example, Jones opined that, 'Churchill had never known how to use experts. Nelson would never have allowed the German fleet to escape at Jutland'.<sup>93</sup> Jones even accused Churchill of embellishing his reputation through literary erroneousness, suggesting that 'Winston's account of his appointment to the Admiralty, in *The World Crisis*, was not very close to the facts'.<sup>94</sup> Churchill was appalled. Questioning his military acumen was one thing; questioning his carefully cultivated place in history was quite another. 'Such extracts',

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, 'Objectionable Passages', E. Bridges, 20 July 1953.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

protested the Prime Minister, 'show how utterly unsuitable and improper its publication would be. I consider that severe objection should be taken'.<sup>95</sup>

A vivid recapitulation of the various concerns was relayed to Jones in September 1953. Difficulties with the text, explained Brook, did not relate to the disclosure of official information and were of a more 'tangible' kind – namely the effect on the relations between ministers and their official advisers.<sup>96</sup> Brook treated Jones to a recital of collective principles, pointing out that the positions held by the Cabinet Secretary and his senior assistants were essentially positions of trust, and disclosure – even years after the event – was a betrayal of that trust. 'By the nature of their job', emphasised Brook, '[Deputy Cabinet Secretaries] will receive many confidences which they will be expected to respect. This does not apply only to Cabinet discussions; it extends equally to the gossip they hear and the confidences they receive about policies and personalities'.<sup>97</sup> It was immaterial, he continued, whether these were heard in the Cabinet Room or outside it; the fact remained that the knowledge had been obtained by virtue of the adviser's official position. Brook, who was formulating his case on an incredibly broad canvas, was fairly punctilious about what he expected Jones to delete from the manuscript. References depicting the unguarded thoughts and personal foibles of ministers were prohibited: 'It may be that no man is a hero to his valet; but a man who relaxes his self-control in his valet's presence usually assumes that his valet will not write memoirs'.<sup>98</sup> Brook denounced, above all, the *obiter dictum* on the dipsomania of Bonar Law. Also forbidden were passages that exposed the extent to which Jones had ghosted ministerial speeches. Under the direction of collective responsibility, it had long been held that no official would claim credit for such an activity, since he would not be asked to share the catcalls for the failures. Jones considered Brook's litany of complaints as unworkable and, rather than publish a mutilated memoir,

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<sup>95</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, W. Churchill to E. Bridges, 4 August 1953.

<sup>96</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, N. Brook to T. Jones, September 1953.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

bequeathed his original three-volume diary to Oxford University Press for posthumous publication.<sup>99</sup>

Yet the exploits of the 'Edwardian generation' civil servant could not be suppressed forever. In October 1956, Sir Henry Bunbury informed Thomas Padmore, Second Secretary of the Treasury, that he was editing the diurnal scribblings of William J. Braithwaite, most remembered for assisting Lloyd George to produce the landmark 1911 National Insurance Bill. Braithwaite's preference for anonymity had rendered his name synonymous with failure and ridicule; and his family were keen to cement his place as the architect of modern social welfare, an impression historically distorted by the fact that Sir Robert Morant, Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education in 1911, had been chosen ahead of Braithwaite to spearhead the Bill after it became law. Braithwaite's family, noted Padmore, 'maintained a bitter grievance against a number of those concerned'.<sup>100</sup> Passed down to posterity, argued Bunbury, the diary would be an invaluable aid to the student of public administration, public affairs and personalities of the period. The diary's publisher, Methuen and Co, also contended that a point in time had been reached (some forty-four years) where the claims of historical objectivity must be allowed to transcend the sensibilities of individuals. Now was the time to render Braithwaite's account.

Unpersuaded by the historical importance of the diary (stressing its 'incomplete picture' and 'inconsequential evidence'), Padmore took particular umbrage at the attacks on civil servants.<sup>101</sup> Calculated insults included: Morant being 'a treacherous hound'; Warren being 'rather dense'; Stead being 'slow mentally'; and Bradbury being a 'crude atheist'.<sup>102</sup> Suggesting that Llewellyn Smith – a civil servant of some considerable stature – 'had to put

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<sup>99</sup> TNA CAB 21/3743, N. Brook to E. Bridges, 17 June 1955; T. Jones, *Whitehall Diary: 1916-25 Volume I* (Oxford, 1969); T. Jones, *Whitehall Diary: 1926-30 Volume II* (Oxford, 1969); T. Jones, *Whitehall Diary: Ireland, 1918-25* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>100</sup> TNA T 215/504, T. Padmore to E. Bridges and N. Brook, 11 October 1956.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.; TNA T 215/504, N. Brook to H. Bunbury, 22 October 1956.



his hat on with a shoe horn' was simply asinine.<sup>103</sup> The objection to disclosures of this kind, protested Padmore, was not removed by the fact that publication was deferred until long after the event; the restraint enjoined by the doctrine of *de mortuis* was required of the dead as well as the living. The diary was also filled with damning indictments of ministers and thus infringed the doctrine of collective responsibility. Braithwaite had implied that Asquith was routinely 'drunk after dinner'; 'walk[ed] very badly and look[ed] very blotchy'; and was often caught 'slouching out'.<sup>104</sup> Civil servants, underlined Padmore, are hired to serve ministers in a relationship of which 'confidence' is the essence; the whole basis of this confidence would be undermined if ministers feared that their confidential advisers were 'chaps who [went] home after talking to them and scribbled it all down in a little book with a view to subsequent publication'.<sup>105</sup> While sharing Padmore's assessment that Braithwaite's remarks had gone beyond the pale ('what we have to secure is that ministers are not discouraged from being frank with their civil servants and inviting them to confidential meetings, by seeing catty things about their predecessors published in memoirs by deceased officials')<sup>106</sup>, Bridges was not altogether hostile towards the idea of a civil service exposé, and on 15 October sanctioned a more suitably anodyne version.<sup>107</sup> Having published *Portrait of a Profession: The Civil Service Tradition* in 1950, and contributed to the 'This I Believe' series in 1953 (which professed to be 'the most listened to [political] programme in the United States'), Bridge's decision to grant the diary an unprecedented *nihil obstat* may have been calculated to help smooth over his retirement occupation as an author.<sup>108</sup> *The Treasury* (1964), for example, was published without official disapprobation.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> TNA T 215/504, T. Padmore to E. Bridges and N. Brook, 11 October 1956.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> TNA T 215/504, E. Bridges to T. Padmore, 1 October 1956.

<sup>107</sup> TNA T 215/504, E. Bridges to T. Padmore, 15 October 1956; H.N. Bunbury (ed.), *Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon: Being the Memoirs of William J. Braithwaite* (London, 1957).

<sup>108</sup> E. Bridges, *Portrait of a Profession* (Cambridge, 1950); R.A. Chapman, 'Bridges, Edward Ettingdene, first Baron Bridges (1892-1969)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press,

The decade after 1945 saw a spate of ministerial memoirs about the Second World War and its origins. Self-vindicators from the War Cabinet included Samuel Hoare (Lord Privy Seal, Viscount Halifax (Foreign Secretary)), John Simon (Chancellor), Clement Attlee (Deputy Prime Minister), and Hugh Dalton (Board of Trade).<sup>110</sup> In writing history, as in making it, all were totally eclipsed by Winston Churchill who left his indelible mark on the conflict 'both as Prime Minister and again as its principal historian', with six gargantuan tomes of full-dress memoirs published between 1948 and 1954.<sup>111</sup> By the late 1950s, however, there were signs that the war memoir had run its course. The public, Brook observed in November 1959, had developed a 'growing distaste' for war-related exposés, particularly those written 'by the soldiers'.<sup>112</sup> It had also come to his attention that many senior ministers were accumulating private collections of official documents – presumably in preparation for the eventual compilation of memoirs. Who would be the first 'giant' to step out of line? With events in the real world taking their course, the literary world would soon have its answer.

## 6.2 Anatomy of a Tragedy: Sir Anthony Eden, Collusion and Suez Memoirs

Anthony Eden, first Earl of Avon, was passionate about his reputation and the verdict of history.<sup>113</sup> Before 1956 his legacy as a 'Great Briton' was taken as axiomatic. As a staunch opponent of appeasement, who in February 1938 famously resigned as Foreign Secretary to protest against Neville Chamberlain's *de jure* recognition of Italian policy in Abyssinia

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September 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. [<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32063>] (17 January 2008).

<sup>109</sup> E. Bridges, *The Treasury* (Oxford, 1964).

<sup>110</sup> S. Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission* (London, 1946); S. Hoare, *Nine Troubled Years* (London, 1954); Viscount Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (London, 1957); J. Simon, *Retrospect* (London, 1952); C. Attlee, *As It Happened* (London, 1954); H. Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday* (London, 1953); H. Dalton, *High Tide and After* (London, 1962).

<sup>111</sup> Reynolds, *Command of History*, p. xxi.

<sup>112</sup> N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 24 November 1959 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>113</sup> This is the main argument of D. Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and a Reputation* (London, 1997).

(‘There are occasions when strong political convictions must override all other considerations’),<sup>114</sup> Eden was omitted from the cast list of Cato’s ‘Guilty Men’, the celebrated indictment of the ‘White Paper’ generation. Eden’s illustrious place in the history books – fortified during his third term as Foreign Secretary (1951-5) – was afforded the priceless endorsement of Winston Churchill who, in *The Gathering Storm*, called him ‘the most resolute and courageous figure in the [wartime] Administration’.<sup>115</sup> In 1954 he was knighted – an achievement treated with tremendous fanfare in the popular press. 1955 marked Eden’s *annus mirabilis*, as a ‘conviction’ politician noted for his urbane realism, mastery of modern diplomacy and unrivalled political experience, his accession to the premiership was greeted with ‘fulsome praise and without demur’.<sup>116</sup> By every conceivable test of history, politics and popularity’, wrote James Margach, ‘Eden should have been one of Britain’s truly great Prime Ministers’.<sup>117</sup> After Suez, however, his reputation was in tatters. Suez, which confirmed Britain’s precipitous decline from world-power status to that of a second-class nation, heaped personal humiliation upon the Prime Minister and his *folie des grandeurs*. Critics had been given a sword and they stuck it in and twisted it with great gusto. As David Dutton argues, it was ‘precisely because of the reputation which Eden enjoyed, and cultivated, that Suez proved so damaging to him’.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, despite their barefaced support for the campaign, character assassinations were not dealt out to either of the leading French players, Christian Pineau (Foreign Minister) and Guy Mollet (Prime Minister), or to Harold Macmillan, whose political currency actually flourished after the soap opera of Suez.

Eden’s short and ill-starred premiership prompted a full-scale literary inquisition. Paul Johnson’s *The Suez War* (1957) portrayed a statesman with bloodstained hands,

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<sup>114</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 332, 21 February 1938, col. 42.

<sup>115</sup> W. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London, 1948), p. 190; Dutton, *Eden*, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> R.R. James, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1986), p. 404.

<sup>117</sup> J. Margach, *The Abuse of Power: The War between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (London, 1978), p. 100.

<sup>118</sup> Dutton, *Eden*, p. 5.

evangelising and practising a policy of violence in the Middle East.<sup>119</sup> Replete with petty asides and general haughtiness, Randolph Churchill's *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden* (1959) speculated whether Eden would have been so successful had he not been blessed with good looks and brownnosed with the right people.<sup>120</sup> Seen through the prism of Suez, and through the splenetics of his detractors, Eden was suddenly reconstituted as a second-rater, renowned as much for his fragile temperament, dyspepsia and political opportunism as for his parliamentary adroitness. Such assessments, of course, relied heavily on retrospective hindsight – or what D.R. Thorpe refers to as an approach distorted by 'syllogistic inevitability' (i.e. the tendency to write a career backwards).<sup>121</sup>

Eden, whether a child of vanity or not, became deeply concerned about how posterity would judge his political record. In retirement, therefore, recognising that his reputation required literary gilding, Eden fought meticulously and relentlessly to vindicate his actions, most notably over Suez – the most controversial episode of his public life. Published in 1960, *Full Circle* set out to plead for justice before the bar of history: 'This book will expose wounds', prefaced the author, 'by doing so it could help to heal them'.<sup>122</sup> *Full Circle* covered the period from October 1951, when Eden became Foreign Secretary, to his resignation as Prime Minister in January 1957. Its title, taken from William Shakespeare's *King Lear* ('The wheel is come full circle: I am here'), attested to the author's obsession with rationalising the political vicissitudes of Suez and restoring balance to his career. *Full Circle* also confirmed Eden's faith in the utility of learning from the past; its central theme was 'the lessons of the Thirties and their application to the Fifties'.<sup>123</sup> Drawing analogies with Hitler on the Rhine, and Mussolini in Ethiopia, it rubberstamped the argument that the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had been a modern-day dictator incapable of responding positively to a policy of appeasement. What makes *Full*

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<sup>119</sup> P. Johnson, *The Suez War* (London, 1957).

<sup>120</sup> R. Churchill, *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden* (London, 1959).

<sup>121</sup> D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden* (London, 2003), p. 602.

<sup>122</sup> A. Eden, *The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle* (London, 1960), Foreword.

*Circle* particularly arresting for this thesis is the fact that it obscured, concealed and lied about vital elements of the Suez story. On the question of whether the British, French and Israelis were acting in concert when they invaded Egypt in 1956, Eden said nothing. Sidestepping allegations of collusion, he maintained that Britain had joined the conflict as an unscheduled peacekeeper, separating warring Egyptian and Israeli forces: 'We had intervened to divide and, above all, to contain the conflict...Once the fighting had ceased, justification for further intervention ceased with it'.<sup>124</sup> This, of course, was entirely consistent with what he had said to Parliament at the time of the crisis: 'There was not foreknowledge that Israel would attack Egypt – there was not'.<sup>125</sup> With the benefit of several first-hand accounts, as well as the opening of pertinent government records (most importantly in January 1987 when documents from 1956 became available at the PRO), we now know that this was outright deception.<sup>126</sup> On 24 October 1956, a few days before the Israeli attack on Egypt, representatives of the British, French and Israeli governments met at Sèvres on the outskirts of Paris to sign an audacious plot. The essence of the tripartite agreement – otherwise known as the Sèvres Protocol – was remarkably simple: Israel would attack the Egyptian Army near the Suez Canal, thereby enabling Britain and France to display a feeling of consternation for the safety of the waterway, and intervene forcibly as peacemakers.

What follows, then, is the first in-depth examination of *Full Circle*. It examines – in terms of Stuart Hall's important schema – each of the three 'moments' of any cultural form: its production (encoding); the text itself; and its reception (decoding). Several key questions are addressed. What was the attitude of the Cabinet Office towards publication? How far was *Full Circle* subject to official control? What was removed and on what grounds? It remains a commonplace assumption that the efficacy of carrying out such an investigation

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 437.

<sup>125</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 502, 20 December 1956, col. 1457.

is fettered by the dearth of primary material. As Richard Lamb, author of *The Failure of the Eden Government*, concedes: 'There is no means of telling how much Eden toned down his memoirs for 1956 because of advice from Lloyd, Brook and the Foreign Office'.<sup>127</sup> I should like to suggest that this is no longer the case. Files related to *Full Circle's* vetting, both at The National Archives and Birmingham University, are voluminous. A central argument will be that *Full Circle* did not, as is often claimed, 'shape interpretations that prevailed for a generation'.<sup>128</sup> Even by 1960, as reviewers sharpened their pencils, the rudiments of collusion were too well known for Eden's carefully packaged disguise to stick. It will also be shown when vetting *Full Circle*, the question the Cabinet Office invariably asked was not, 'is this item damaging to national security', but 'how would the Americans react to its disclosure'?

### *In the Dock*

Eden left Downing Street on 9 January 1957 with a cheerless and uncertain future ahead of him. His political career was over; his medical prognosis was grim; and, with small private means and mounting medical bills, his financial situation was perilous.<sup>129</sup> 'With the heartlessness of politics', wrote his official biographer Robert Rhodes James, 'it was generally assumed that he was finished'.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, however, Eden was a publisher's golden ticket. Having held ministerial office for a quarter of century, he had been witness to Suez and Munich, the two most divisive political crises of the twentieth century. Unbeknownst to the erstwhile premier, his close friend Brendan Bracken (later Viscount Bracken of Christchurch) had been making overtures to the General Manager of *The Times* (Mathew Wellsian), suggesting the idea of Eden writing a political life history

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<sup>126</sup> A. Nutting, *No End of a Lesson* (London, 1967); C. Pineau, *Suez 1956* (Paris, 1976); M. Dayan, *Story of My Life* (London, 1976); S. Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Personal Account* (London, 1978).

<sup>127</sup> R. Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government* (London, 1987), p. 310.

<sup>128</sup> P.L. Hahn, 'Suez', *Reviews in American History*, 20:4 (December 1992), p. 567.

<sup>129</sup> James, *Eden* (London, 1986), p. 603.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.

and syndicating the world rights to the newspaper.<sup>131</sup> The sum tentatively mooted by Wellsian was £100,000. Wellsian clearly underestimated Eden's literary capital; the *Telegraph* had reportedly offered £150,000 whilst Lord Beaverbrook, albeit in a state of semi-intoxication, had enthralled several dinner-parties with the proposed bid of a million pounds! Bracken saw considerable merits to the venture. Publication, argued Bracken, would help to rebuild Eden's shattered reputation and thus influence history's judgement on his political record. The remunerative benefits, moreover, would allow Eden to purchase a new home – preferably one where he could 'dig his hands deep into the English countryside'.<sup>132</sup>

Eden initially resisted the blandishments of the public prints. The permanence of ill-health was certainly an issue; the fact that most newspapers, including *The Times*, had disclaimed their support for Eden's policies in the Middle East also stuck in the craw. By the autumn, however, after a restorative and contemplative holiday in Jamaica, Eden had changed his mind. While lacking in hard evidence, let alone a smoking gun, rumours of collusion failed to go away. Merry and Serge Bromberger's caustic polemic *The Secrets of Suez* (1957), which accused Eden of lying to Parliament, demonstrated with startling clarity the pitfalls of leaving his reputation to 'history'.<sup>133</sup> In his own defence, therefore, Eden finally decided to write his memoirs and, on 5 October 1957, formed a Literary Trust (analogous to that which Winston Churchill had established) that would arrange publication as well as the sale of serial rights to *The Times*.<sup>134</sup> His contract with the newspaper provided for an initial capital payment of £100,000; an annual income for each year of writing; and an equal share of the profits. As paymaster – 'insistent on having its Suez pound of flesh first'<sup>135</sup> – *The Times* prohibited annual payments until Eden had deposited chapters relating to his premiership. This reflected a natural fear that he would

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 603-4.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 604, p. 613.

<sup>133</sup> Merry and Serge Bromberger, *The Secrets of Suez* (London, 1957).

<sup>134</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

not live long enough to finish the book and thus provided an incentive to finish quickly. Eden had no qualms about publishing out of chronological sequence; Suez was a millstone around his neck and, as his wife explained, there was no telling how long until he 'falls down dead'.<sup>136</sup> Eden, who assumed from the outset that he was entitled to all the facilities accorded to Churchill, assembled a stellar research team including Alan Hodge (on the staff of *History Today*), Bryan Cartledge (St Antony's College, Oxford), Robert Blake (Christ Church, Oxford), Robin Furneaux (Third Earl of Birkenhead) and David Dilks (St Antony's).<sup>137</sup> The Cabinet Office granted Eden special dispensation on the grounds of health; Hodge, who had been private secretary at the Ministry of Information, was treated as Sir Anthony's 'eyes and ears', rather than a separate person, and was thus permitted to inspect sensitive papers in London.<sup>138</sup> The perquisites of being a research assistant were not insignificant. Furneaux, for example, received an annual salary of £750 and could claim expenses for his London flat.<sup>139</sup>

Financially secure, and mildly less valetudinarian than before, Eden started writing *Full Circle* in late 1957. Stylistically, he hoped to replicate Sir Edward Grey's *Twenty-Five Years*, an 'admirable diplomatic narrative' but no means confined to the political *beau monde*.<sup>140</sup> Hodge was especially keen to avoid the 'greyness' of official histories, which he argued were generally 'anthologies and resums of documents'.<sup>141</sup> Eden was encouraged to use rococo flourishes and orotund phrases. Unlike Churchill, however, Eden was not a naturally accomplished writer or grandiloquent wordsmith, and sought near constant advice and validation. On 10 December 1957, following a particularly anxious letter from Lord Avon, Hodge wrote:

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<sup>135</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 553.

<sup>136</sup> M. Amory (ed.), *The Letters of Ann Fleming* (London, 1985), p. 217.

<sup>137</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, 'Disclosure of Information', N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 8 February 1960.

<sup>138</sup> TNA PREM 11/332, N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 1 January 1958.

<sup>139</sup> BUL AP 33/3/3/47, W. Edwards to R. Furneaux, 9 December 1959.

<sup>140</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/4, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 23 September 1957.

<sup>141</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/11, A. Hodge to E. Reves, 22 October 1957; BUL AP 33/3/2/41, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 10 December 1957.



Writing history is rather like making a film: the 'takes' and 'sequences' may be shot at many different times and in the wrong order; for the right order is the penultimate thing to be imposed upon them. The last thing, of course, is the first paragraph – it never takes the best shape until all else is done. Nor does it matter if parts of the first draft, here and there, appear what newspaper-people call 'thin'. You thicken them hereafter, as opportunity offers. To change the metaphor, I believe that the best chefs thicken their roux much towards the end of cooking a meal.<sup>142</sup>

Eden was also a slow writer, to which Hodge offered considerable sympathy: 'There are days when the pen or tongue runs dry, and six hours' work produces only a few hundred unsatisfactory words'.<sup>143</sup> By late 1958, however, the speed with which Eden was drafting had quickened. The fact that Randolph Churchill was stealing Eden's thunder, by previewing his own controversial biography in the *Daily Express*, almost certainly encouraged a quicker turn-around.

Having submitted several chapters to HMG in May 1958, Eden held numerous meetings with the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook. The book's coverage of Suez, argued Eden, would help the Conservative cause in an election, showing that the government had been right in thinking that Nasser's action, if left unchallenged, would lead to endless trouble in the Middle East.<sup>144</sup> While congratulating Eden on the 'delicacy and skill' with which this matter had been handled in the manuscript, Brook underlined that the Conservative Party itself had been divided about Suez, and that it would hardly be expedient to recall these old differences at a time when the Party was in the throes of an election.<sup>145</sup> Brook was anxious on two further counts. Firstly, the general presentation of the Suez story was an implied indictment of American policy and revealed how John Foster Dulles, in particular, had goaded Eden beyond endurance. Secondly, it would be embarrassing if the final typescript had to be submitted officially to a Labour Prime Minister. In an exchange of personal correspondence, Eden emphasised that he had been

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<sup>142</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/41, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 10 December 1957.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

'very restrained' in his treatment of the Americans, and 'there [was] certainly much more that [he] could [have] said'.<sup>146</sup> Brook's tactic from then on was to play for time by inviting other departments to add their objections. For Sir Philip de Zulueta, Harold Macmillan's private secretary, it was essential that publication did not jeopardise the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>147</sup> The draft showed how Macmillan, as Foreign Secretary in the early days of the crisis, had been a leading hawk in the Cabinet, pressing Eden for military action irrespective of the potential rift with the United States. As Prime Minister, however, Macmillan had since set great store by re-establishing relations of cordiality with Eisenhower. 'The American administration', underlined de Zulueta, 'are more co-operative than they were in their more ignorant days'.<sup>148</sup> (Evidence of the new rapport was the agreement at Bermuda in March 1957 for sixty Thor missiles to be based in Britain.) Eden, continued De Zulueta, also needed to show more restraint in his descriptions of personalities from the Middle East – whether friend, enemy or neutral. For example, although the Shah would not repudiate his hatred of Nasser, it would be very embarrassing for him to be quoted.

Prefaced with the important rider, 'to be shown to no-one except, at Brook's discretion, the Prime Minister', the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, produced what might be aptly described as a 'Grand Remonstrance'.<sup>149</sup> Lloyd identified many problems. Firstly, the draft had a strong anti-American bias throughout, including 'pretty outspoken criticism' of Dulles; publication of these passages, within a year of the Secretary's death, would gravely endanger the Special Relationship – a relationship only recently renewed.<sup>150</sup> Secondly, Eden's partisanship of the Israelis against the Egyptians would impair British

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> A. Eden to N. Brook, 18 May 1958 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>147</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> S. Lloyd to N. Brook, 8 August 1959 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

efforts to improve relations in the region; indeed, Eden's 'rather crude' belief that the 'Israeli-Egyptian explosion was advantageous to the free world' would not only strengthen suspicions that he had inspired the crisis, but imply that there had been foreknowledge of the Israeli attack of 29 October.<sup>151</sup> Third, the proofs indicated the author's personal malice and resentment of criticism. Lloyd pointed out that he had hoped for a 'broadminded, tolerant and statesmanlike' interpretation – a judgement that would stand the test of history and befit Eden's great reputation.<sup>152</sup> Lloyd concluded that 1960 (the date set for publication) was simply too soon after the events; many of those principally concerned were still active in politics and would be mortified by the disclosure of what they had entrusted to Eden in confidence. If published, argued Lloyd, *Full Circle* would have to be more jejune than otherwise.

While the Cabinet Office fretted over the manuscript's inclusions, Lord Avon's research assistants were more disturbed by what Eden had omitted. 'It is certain that the book will be very largely judged by the Suez chapters', wrote Blake: '[Therefore] it is absolutely vital to answer the questions still left in people's minds, and not to give any impression, however unwittingly, of evading problems or suppressing facts'.<sup>153</sup> Blake's concerns were threefold. Firstly, that the draft did not unpack the 'exact motive' for Anglo-French intervention. Eden, despite claiming that the object was to prevent war spreading all over the Middle East and to safeguard free passage through the canal, had revealed neither *when* the Cabinet arrived at this decision, nor where or when the concerting of a joint policy had been discussed with the French.<sup>154</sup> In view of all the allegations and counter-allegations, Blake implored Eden to deal with the charge of collusion 'quite specifically', otherwise public reaction was bound to be 'sceptical and incredulous'.<sup>155</sup> Blake

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/33, R. Blake to A. Eden, 2 March 1959.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/33, R. Blake to A. Eden, 2 March 1959; BUL AP 33/3/1/45, R. Blake to A. Eden, 14 April 1959.

– who admitted that he had ‘heard something about our extreme secrecy’<sup>156</sup> – had clearly not been taken into Eden’s confidence on the subject of collusion. His correspondences betray a complete (and retrospectively quite comical) ignorance of what had actually transpired in late 1956. In one exchange, he derided the Suez Group’s (perfectly accurate) claim that Eden had travelled to Paris where he ‘concerted some allegedly mysterious and sinister plans with French Ministers’.<sup>157</sup>

Blake’s second fear was that Eden had not properly explained the reasons for British withdrawal. The average reader, he opined, would find it difficult to believe the claim that Britain had pulled-out merely because Egypt and Israel had stopped fighting. Although, in a sense, HMG had achieved its intention of ‘separating the combatants’, surely Ministers had also hoped to obtain a settlement of the canal question and to deal a decisive blow to Nasser? Unlike ‘left-wing intellectual moralists’, Blake declared, the ‘ordinary man in the street does not care a damn whether there was collusion or not’; what he failed to understand was why ‘we did not finish the job, occupy the whole canal, clear it with our own salvage fleet, and then negotiate a new settlement with Nasser’.<sup>158</sup> Blake’s final critique was that Eden had given insufficient attention to the military side of Suez.<sup>159</sup> The manuscript said nothing on the alleged discrepancy between Anglo-French forces over how to stage the intervention. For Blake, it was widely held that the British had insisted upon a slow preliminary air bombardment, whereas the French had preferred a lightning action with 48 hours of bombing followed by parachute descents. Lord Chandos also weighed in with his opinion of the draft, suggesting that ‘complete silence [with regard to collusion] ‘may tend to provoke more controversy than if you were able to put something which headed them off’.<sup>160</sup> Eden, however, was his own man (arguably worst enemy), and

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<sup>156</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/33, R. Blake to A. Eden, 2 March 1959.

<sup>157</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/45, R. Blake to A. Eden, 14 April 1959.

<sup>158</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/33, R. Blake to A. Eden, 2 March 1959; BUL AP 33/3/1/45, R. Blake to A. Eden, 14 April 1959.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> BUL AP 23/17/37, Lord Chandos to A. Eden, 29 September 1959.

decided to say nothing explicit: 'As regards the other charge against us, after much reflection I thought a detached account of events without protestation was the best way to handle the business'.<sup>161</sup>

Brook took a personal interest in *Full Circle*, and exhibited an extraordinary readiness to assist in its evolution. An omnivorous bibliophile, well versed in the related historiography, Brook spent considerable time reading draft chapters and putting forward substantive revisions in the interests of both accuracy and style. Many of the memoir's baroque locutions came from the Cabinet Secretary's pen. Brook moderated objectionable passages by shrewdly reconfiguring syntax, punctuation, style and idiom. A good example of this is the opening of Chapter III. Eden had written: 'Dulles was not forthcoming. He sidestepped the point by telling us much that we already knew about the disadvantages of sailing round the Cape and the undesirability of petrol rationing'.<sup>162</sup> Brook's alteration, in contrast, was far less scurrilous: 'Dulles was not forthcoming. He enlarged upon the disadvantages of sailing round the Cape and the undesirability of petrol rationing'.<sup>163</sup> Brook successfully convinced Eden to omit some of the manuscript's more blatant condemnations of the Eisenhower administration. The following statement, for example, was deleted on the grounds that it would 'evoke protest' from all concerned: 'Two of the more backward countries in the Middle East and in Africa, South Africa and Liberia, are two where American interests play a conspicuously large part'.<sup>164</sup> Under duress from Macmillan, who feared that *Full Circle* would trigger calls for a Suez enquiry, Brook was instrumental in convincing Eden to defer publication until after the 1959 General Election. He also made

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<sup>161</sup> BUL AP 23/17/37, A. Eden to Lord Chandos, 1 October 1959.

<sup>162</sup> TNA PREM 11/4234, 'Comments on Memoirs', N. Brook; TNA PREM 11/4234, 'Comments on Books II and III of Volume II. The Period of Premiership', N. Brook, 20 July 1959; TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

sure that nothing untoward was said about Winston Churchill. (Churchill would later acknowledge that Lord Avon had been 'honourable to his name'.)<sup>165</sup>

Why was Brook so helpful? To some extent he was making virtue out of necessity.<sup>166</sup> Eden was publishing his memoirs whether HMG liked it or not: 'Our difficulty', Brook explained to ministers, 'arises from the fact that the control we can exercise over anyone in Sir Anthony's position cannot be more than persuasion'.<sup>167</sup> He may have felt sympathy for the former Prime Minister. Eden himself had said that he was more sinned against than sinning. Brook, who had been Cabinet Secretary in 1956, almost certainly had a vested interest in keeping Eden on tight leash. Retelling the Suez episode in his autobiography, *The Course of My Life* (1998), Edward Heath divulged that Eden had ordered his Cabinet Secretary to destroy all documents confirming collusion between Britain, France and Israel. In carrying out this thankless task, Brook looked like 'an old samurai who had just been asked to fall on his own sword'.<sup>168</sup> Generally speaking, however, I think it is more expedient to follow David Reynolds' cue about the role played by Sir Edward Bridges, then Cabinet Secretary, in the production of Winston Churchill's *The Second World War*.<sup>169</sup> Bridges, contends Reynolds, considered the histories as 'not merely inevitable but desirable' – a 'surrogate for an overview official history'.<sup>170</sup> While there is no hard evidence, Brook arguably saw Eden's memoir in exactly the same way. 'Outsider' accounts, replete with wayward charges, were already hoving into view.<sup>171</sup> The proposed histories of Henry Azeau (*Le Piège de Suez*), Michel Bar-Zohar (*Suez Ultra Secret*) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (*The White House Years*), all of which Brook would have known about, were a forewarning that the French, Israelis and Americans would soon be

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<sup>165</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/314, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 20 October 1959.

<sup>166</sup> David Reynolds makes exactly the same argument for Winston Churchill's war histories.

<sup>167</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>168</sup> Cited in M. Jones, 'Operation Musketeer', *The Sunday Times*, 6 September 1998; E. Heath, *The Course of My Life* (London, 1998).

<sup>169</sup> Reynolds, *Command of History*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

publishing their own narratives.<sup>172</sup> The perfect counterblast would be a carefully controlled, modestly self-effacing bestseller from Eden.

Was *Full Circle* an official history by proxy? The evidence for such an inference is tantalisingly compelling. In private, Macmillan admitted that 'Eden can (and anyway must) be treated as *sui generis*'.<sup>173</sup> As well as browbeating Brook into giving him permission to quote from personal telegrams, Eden was given virtually open access to Cabinet records. It had long been government policy not to transmit secret material via normal postal channels;<sup>174</sup> but in Eden's case many departments circumvented the ban by communicating documents in locked pouches. If post was simply not an option, the Cabinet Office laid on a special courier service, to deliver items 'by safe hand'.<sup>175</sup> Following a 'fierce, but agreeable'<sup>176</sup> letter from Brook, his coadjutors were granted remarkable privileges. Hodge – '[albeit] under penalty of being sent to the Tower of London for indiscretion'<sup>177</sup> – was allowed to consult *any* paper he wished. The Foreign Office even provided Hodge with an official car (with a trunk big enough to be 'loaded with papers') so that he could fetch confidential material from London.<sup>178</sup> A.J.P Taylor, who as the doyen of revisionism would later question Eden's reputation as an 'anti-appeaser' ('Eden did not face the dictators; he pulled faces at them'), resented the fact that Eden had been granted a jester's licence to complete his history and that it would be fifty years before historians would be able to see how partisan, if at all, he had been.<sup>179</sup> Tristan Jones, editor of *The Observer*, voiced a

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<sup>171</sup> See E. Childer, *The Road to Suez* (London, 1962); A.J. Barker, *Suez: The Seven-Day War* (London, 1964); L. Epstein, *British Policy in the Suez Crisis* (London, 1964).

<sup>172</sup> H. Azeau, *Le Piège de Suez* (Paris, 1964); M. Bar-Zohar, *Suez Ultra Secret* (1964); D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-6* (London, 1963); D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace 1956-61* (London, 1966).

<sup>173</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, H. Macmillan to N. Brook, 9 February 1960.

<sup>174</sup> Policy regarding the transmission of Secret documents is catalogued in TNA CAB 21/2839 and TNA CAB 21/2407.

<sup>175</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/1, A. Eden to A. Hodge, 10 September 1957.

<sup>176</sup> BUL AP 33/3/2/32, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 28 November 1957.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*; BUL AP 33/3/2/40, A. Hodge to A. Eden, 9 December 1957.

<sup>179</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-45* (Oxford, 1965), p. 754; Taylor, *English History*, p. 627.

growing sentiment that there was 'one law of the high and mighty and another law for ordinary mortals'.<sup>180</sup> Jones was in little doubt that *Full Circle* bore all the hallmarks of an official history: 'The high and mighty – who makes the rules – are enabled to put out their versions of events and prevent other people, who may have other evidence, from challenging them'.<sup>181</sup> On the eve of publication, faced with the risk that authors would now expect the same exceptional facilities afforded to Eden for the period after 1945, it became advantageous for HMG to classify *Full Circle* as a category by unto itself – in effect an official history. By 1961, Macmillan had released a public communiqué stating that Eden's memoir was a departure from the normal rules applicable to peace-time government, and that in future a 'stricter standard' would be applied in dealing with applications relating to the post-war period.<sup>182</sup>

Even (surrogate) official histories, however, can rebound on their sponsors. Much to the chagrin of the Cabinet Office, the printed proofs remained sharply critical of the Eisenhower Administration and were suffused with personal attacks. Dulles, the late Secretary of State, was Eden's *bête noire*. To Eden, Dulles was a 'preacher in a world of politics' who, as evidenced by his declaration in October 1956 that America must play an 'independent role' in areas affected by 'so-called colonialism', had 'little regard for the consequences of his words'.<sup>183</sup> Later in the text, while responding to the allegation that the crisis had been colonialism masquerading as international law enforcement, Eden added – *touché* – that 'if the United States had to defend their treaty rights in the Panama Canal, they would not regard such action as colonialism'.<sup>184</sup> In contrast to his own adroitness in negotiating the settlement of the Indo-Chinese War in 1954, Eden exposed Dulles' desire to bomb the besieged fortress of Dien Bien Phu; implied persuasively how he had routinely protected Dulles from his own intransigence; and revealed how Dulles – contrary to an

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<sup>180</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, T. Jones to B. Trend, 4 January 1964.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, H. Macmillan, July 1961.

<sup>183</sup> Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 64.



agreement with Eden not to disclose details of the settlement – had in fact ‘taken steps to settle the question of membership in advance, on his own terms’.<sup>185</sup> Eden’s outright disdain towards Dulles crystallised on page 484: ‘[Dulles’] cynicism towards Allies destroys true partnership. It leaves only the choice of parting or a master and vassal relationship in foreign policy’.<sup>186</sup> The Foreign Office, in pressing the point that Eisenhower was still alive and still in office, desperately tried to agree an eleventh-hour arrangement for changes. What made *Full Circle* in its present form even worse was its timing. America’s quadrennial elections would take place in the same year as publication. The Republicans’ presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, who had been Eisenhower’s Vice-President in 1956, could ill-afford to be humiliated by accusations of cold-shouldering British allies. Eden – who informed Brook that he had received ‘a very pleasant message from the White House’ – nevertheless stoutly refused to make further alterations to the text.<sup>187</sup> *Full Circle* was his apologia and the criticism of American policy was essential to it.

Despite sanctioning publication (‘[there] is no alternative now but to put up with the book as it now stands’)<sup>188</sup>, Macmillan remained acutely aware that it would revive public controversy, both domestically and in the United States. The light shed by *Full Circle* was far from cold. With serialisation set for 11 January 1960, therefore, he sent a Top Secret Telegram to Eisenhower reminding the President that HMG had not endorsed publication; that suggestions had been made for softening the many unqualified verdicts on American personalities; and that responsibility for the memoir lay solely with the author.<sup>189</sup> Macmillan paid tribute to the Bermuda conference where both countries had agreed to put recriminations about Suez behind them. The telegram ended with Macmillan making the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-145.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 484; Lamb, *Eden Government*, p. 307.

<sup>187</sup> A. Eden to N. Brook, 27 August 1959 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, ‘The Eden Memoirs’, J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>188</sup> N. Brook to H. Macmillan, 2 November 1959 cited in TNA CAB 164/1297, ‘The Eden Memoirs’, J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

case for banishing politicians from the house of history: 'My own feeling is that we should leave history to the historians. You and I have quite enough trouble with the present and the future without going back over the past'.<sup>190</sup> The Prime Minister then summoned Eden to Chequers, the British Prime Minister's official country residence, for a private meeting. Here it was put to Eden that he should avoid being drawn, especially by the press, into giving further information or explanations about Suez. *Full Circle* was conceived as the final word and Eden was instructed to take the line: 'I have nothing to add to the [published] account'.<sup>191</sup>

In early 1960, then, Eden broke new ground as the first Prime Minister to publish a memoir relating to the post-war period. Commercially *Full Circle* was very successful. By 14 October 1960 it had sold 77,000 copies at 35s per copy.<sup>192</sup> According to Blake, the memoir's serialisation increased *The Times*' circulation by 15 per cent, a 'remarkable jump' for a newspaper whose sales were very rigid.<sup>193</sup> The corollary of spectacular sales was financial security. Eden's multi-layered contract with *The Times*, coupled with book royalties, brought him an estimated £160,000 – a sum equal to £2.8 million in present day terms: no other politician who published in the 1960s would have it so good.<sup>194</sup> In America, at least, sales were matched by the reviews. Drew Middleton, foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, described *Full Circle* as 'one of the most important diplomatic records of our times – a compelling, informative and convincing personal account of

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<sup>189</sup> 'The Eden Memoirs', *The Times*, 11 January 1960, p. 4; TNA PREM 11/4234, 'Note for the Record', N. Brook, 3 November 1959; TNA PREM 11/4234, H. Macmillan to D. Eisenhower, 5 January 1960.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> TNA PREM 11/4234, 'Note for the Record', N. Brook, 3 November 1959. Guidance was also given to the press explaining that, 'These are the personal memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden and Her Majesty's Government are not responsible for the views expressed in them'. (TNA PREM 11/4234, 'Note: Guidance to the Press'.)

<sup>192</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 559.

<sup>193</sup> BUL AP 33/3/1/158, R. Blake to A. Eden, 9 February 1960.

<sup>194</sup> Using the Retail Price Index, where £1,000 in October 1957 is the equivalent of £17,575 in December 2007, one might speculate that Eden earned a sum equal to £2.8 million in present day terms.

[Eden's] stewardship'.<sup>195</sup> Middleton was left in no doubt that Eden had been 'an international negotiator of the very highest order'; *Full Circle*, he continued, was particularly impressive when one considered that the author had been racked by recurrent bouts of illness and was almost certainly restricted in what he could reveal.<sup>196</sup> On 10 February, Downing Street received a telegram from the White House reporting that the general reaction to publication had been 'mild', and that the volume of comment in the press had been 'relatively small'.<sup>197</sup> With very few exceptions, American reviewers refused to revisit the rights and wrongs of the Suez invasion, arriving instead at a more refined assessment of 'an ill-advised adventure'. For the esteemed scholar of International Relations, Martin Wight, Suez seemed 'less consequential internationally than the Mexican expedition of Napoleon III, less consequential domestically than the failure to relieve Gordon at Khartoum'.<sup>198</sup> The serenity of US public opinion probably reflected the fact that Suez had 'dropped further back in the national consciousness' than was the case in Britain.<sup>199</sup> Since 1956, in the harsh words of one commentator, Britain had become a 'butterfly content to flutter pathetically on the periphery of the world';<sup>200</sup> America, by contrast, had cemented her place as a superpower of unrivalled strength.

UK press reviews, both popular and patrician, were less positive. Martin Wight has suggested that 'Eden's Memoirs have had a worse press than his premiership itself did'.<sup>201</sup> The style of *Full Circle*, complained reviewers, made few concessions to the general reader. For Randolph Churchill, writing for the *New Statesman*, the text was 'pedestrian', 'dull', and gave little sense that there was a private human being behind the public political life.<sup>202</sup> The Labour MP, Francis Noel Baker, accused Eden of using deep blacks and stark whites,

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<sup>195</sup> D. Middleton, 'The Clash of Two Men', *The Times*, 29 February 1960, p.11.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> TNA CAB 164/1297, 'The Eden Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 18 June 1975.

<sup>198</sup> M. Wright, 'Brutus in Foreign Policy: The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden', *International Affairs*, 36:3 (July 1960), p. 309.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> 'Redefining that Special Relationship', *Time*, 2 February 1970.

<sup>201</sup> Wright, 'Brutus in Foreign Policy', p. 300.

and only seeing events from his point of view. Baker also insinuated that Eden had treated certain documents with deliberate superficiality, thereby making a better case for his argument than a more rigorous and objective analysis could sustain.<sup>203</sup> Complaints on points of style were clearly influenced by political prejudice. In its language, tempo and cadences, *Full Circle* followed the much-revered formula employed by Winston Churchill. Eden used the same characteristic vocabulary ('disarray', 'sustain', 'crunch'); the same double verbs ('Communist power was thrusting and obtruding itself in many lands [p. 178.]'); and the same indulgently dismissive climaxes ('all this did not matter very much [p. 184.]').<sup>204</sup> To attack *Full Circle* for its terse, clean efficiency of prose is also beside the point. Eden was not essentially addressing a popular audience. *Full Circle* was conceived as a serious essay in diplomatic theory, a book to adorn the scholarly bookshelf rather than the airport departure lounge.

Eden's account of Suez provoked universally tart reviews. Paul Johnson, columnist for *The New Statesman*, rounded on Eden's failure to afford any new information on the crisis, despite the fact that he had been given the full run of the state archives: 'He can make no better case for his Suez adventure than such journalists as John Connell and T.E. Utley'.<sup>205</sup> *Full Circle*, protested Johnson, was not an exercise in commission but omission, and in many issues on which his policy had been questioned or criticised, Eden had not attempted to find an answer. The resignations of Anthony Nutting (Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) and Sir Edward Boyle (Economic Secretary to the Treasury) were not discussed, still less their remarkable self-abnegation in refusing to express public criticism of their former chief. Needless to say, lamented Johnson, the word 'collusion' was not allowed to sully Sir Anthony's pages; Israeli military operations were treated as wholly independent of Britain and France. Eden's attempts at self-justification were considered

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<sup>202</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: I Randolph Churchill', *New Statesman*, 5 March 1960, pp. 335-6.

<sup>203</sup> TNA PREM 11/4660, F.N. Baker to H. Macmillan, 11 August 1963; Dutton, *Eden*, p. 11.

<sup>204</sup> Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 178, p. 184; Wright, 'Brutus in Foreign Policy', p. 299.

<sup>205</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: II Paul Johnson', *New Statesman*, 5 March 1960, pp. 335-6.

perfunctory, unconvincing and disingenuous. No one, declared Randolph Churchill, would believe Eden's argument that British intervention, though called off in less than 2 days, was essential because it prevented the outbreak of a major war in the Middle East and brought into being a UN police force in the region.<sup>206</sup> This was certainly a very small and fugitive dividend to achieve at such an enormous cost. Although most reviews accepted Eden's basic premise that if Nasser had been appeased, instead of resisted, then the same tragic pattern of the 1930s might have been reproduced, it was also true that the author had largely vitiated his own case by neglecting to discuss Arab Nationalism. Eden did not refer to it until Nasser had seized the Canal whilst the villain of the memoir remained curiously featureless. 'It is like an account of Sarajevo', claimed one reviewer, 'that leaves out South Slav nationalism'.<sup>207</sup> In other episodes, too, Eden had been less than frank. His claim that during the crisis, 'Not a mouse moved in Arab lands', was pure dissimulation, not least because he had omitted any reference to Saudi Arabia breaking off diplomatic relations with Britain and Iraq proposing her expulsion from the Baghdad Pact.<sup>208</sup> Hugh Gaitskell, plainly nettled by the author's statement that he regarded Gaitskell's rise to leadership as a 'national misfortune', said that his own view of Eden as Prime Minister was now 'even stronger', and called *Full Circle's* account of the Opposition's role during the crisis 'exceptionally misleading'.<sup>209</sup> Worst of all, protested Randolph Churchill, was that Eden still refused to admit to the cardinal blunders he had made. *Full Circle* was rather like the housemaid who, having broken the valuable chinaware, proceeded to claim that, 'It came to pieces in my hand'.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: I Randolph Churchill', *New Statesman*, 5 March 1960, pp. 335-6.

<sup>207</sup> Wright, 'Brutus in Foreign Policy', p. 305.

<sup>208</sup> Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 543.

<sup>209</sup> Cited in 'The Unhappy Memory', *Time*, 14 March 1960.

<sup>210</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: I Randolph Churchill', *New Statesman*, 5 March 1960, pp. 335-6.

### *No End of a Lesson*

The clamour that accompanied *Full Circle's* publication dulled Macmillan's enthusiasm for greater openness. In 1963, although clearly calculated to raise the hackles of the would-be memoirist, he created 'The Suez Embargo', stipulating that ministers and officials could not consult records relating to the crisis without the express permission of the Prime Minister.<sup>211</sup> He also re-established the rule that Research Assistants should not be allowed independent access to official papers.<sup>212</sup> The first author duty-bound to work within the parameters of these revised constraints was the former Lord Chancellor, David Kilmuir. Submitted in November 1963, the draft of *Political Adventure* was, for the most part, 'unexceptionable'.<sup>213</sup> Its examination of Suez, confirmed the new Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home, revealed 'no more than all of us said in Parliament at the time'.<sup>214</sup> Enforced deletions therefore related mainly to constitutional and cognate matters. For example, on the grounds that Ministerial Committees were never mentioned by name in public, Kilmuir was asked to replace all references to the 'Suez Committee' with the phrase 'a meeting of Ministers'.<sup>215</sup> Kilmuir also removed unflattering material about colleagues who currently held office. Disclosing, for example, '[Butler's] fatal habit of publicly hedging his bets', or the advice that Eden had given the Queen on the succession to Macmillan, would have had serious repercussions both at home, where a General Election was imminent, and abroad.<sup>216</sup> Although at first disinclined to exceed his role as an impartial referee ('I find it difficult to decide how far I am officially entitled to offer comment on the passages which trouble me'), the new Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, made several revisions to the

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<sup>211</sup> To compound matters, as a Prime Minister had imposed the restriction, only his successor could revoke it.

<sup>212</sup> TNA PREM 11/4938, B. Trend to S. Lloyd, 1 May 1963.

<sup>213</sup> TNA CAB 21/5848, B. Trend to H. Macmillan, 19 November 1963.

<sup>214</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Kilmuir Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 7 May 1975; TNA CAB 21/5848, 'Note for the Record', T. Bligh, 5 December 1963.

<sup>215</sup> TNA PREM 11/4115, B. Trend to Lord Kilmuir, 12 December 1963.

text.<sup>217</sup> This was not simply a case of tightening the prose. Whereas Kilmuir had written, 'The [Suez] cease-fire was ordered on November 6 purely because the United Nations had decided to intervene', Trend insisted on something consistent with the fiction that Britain had been 'peacekeeping' in the Middle East: 'The cease-fire was ordered on November 6 because, by that time, the UN were ready to take our place'.<sup>218</sup> Trend was also deeply involved in preparing the memoir for serialisation. A 400-page book submitted in manuscript would leave one impression; a potted version – taken out of context and with 'juiciest passages uppermost'<sup>219</sup> – had the potential to create something quite different.

The shortcomings of *Full Circle* started to crystallise during the mid 1960s as details of collusion were discovered. The entire process was similar to restoring a fresco – gradually uncovering the hidden aspects of a picture. In May 1964, during a television interview promoting his new book, *Dulles Over Suez*, Herman Finer produced a letter he had received from Christian Pineau revealing that Selwyn Lloyd had travelled incognito to Paris and had, along with Pineau and Ben-Gurion (Israeli Prime Minister), devised a joint plan of action against Nasser.<sup>220</sup> (Eisenhower was deeply angered by *Dulles Over Suez*. As well as accusing the former President of using 'less official, army-life, [and] tongue-lashing language', Finer implied that the Americans had laid down an 'ultimatum' to Britain over Suez. 'An ultimatum', protested Eisenhower, '[was] to make a mockery out of the dictionary'.)<sup>221</sup> Two years later, in plain defiance of all the assurances that he had given at the time, Pineau himself spilt the beans. In July, when interviewed by the BBC's Third Programme, Pineau referred to 'an Anglo-French-Israeli Treaty'; the phrase could not have been inadvertent because the BBC's technique was to break off the recording before each

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<sup>216</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Kilmuir Memoirs', J.M. Moss, 7 May 1975; TNA CAB 21/5848, 'Note for the Record', T. Bligh, 5 December 1963.

<sup>217</sup> TNA CAB 21/5848, B. Trend to H. Macmillan, 19 November 1963.

<sup>218</sup> TNA PREM 11/4115, B. Trend to Lord Kilmuir, 12 December 1963.

<sup>219</sup> TNA CAB 21/5848, W. Deedes to B. Trend, 8 April 1964.

<sup>220</sup> H. Finer, *Dulles Over Suez: The Theory and Practice of His Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1964); R. Scott, 'Joint Plan over Suez Admitted', *Guardian*, 6 May 1964.

<sup>221</sup> TNA PREM 11/4749, D. Eisenhower to A. Eden, 23 June 1964.

question and go over the ground in French to ensure it was correct. In November, with the tenth anniversary of Suez provoking a number of commentaries in the press, Pineau published an article in *Le Monde* in which he confirmed that a secret accord had been signed at Sèvres 'in the last ten days of October 1956'.<sup>222</sup> As Gaitskell had predicted, if there had been collusion, sooner or later the men who had been party to it '[were] bound to start giving one another away'.<sup>223</sup> In view of Pineau's frank revelations (qualified on the grounds that the operation was now 'old history'), Michael Foot initiated a move for a special inquiry – comparable to the Dardanelles Commission after the Great War – into the origin, inception and conduct of the Suez campaign.<sup>224</sup> The matter, however, was quietly dropped. An inquest into 'peacetime history', recorded Trend, would have signalled a clear break with constitutional conventions, the implications of which – for any government of whatever party complexion – would have been 'grave and far reaching'.<sup>225</sup> Reworking the Suez episode, especially details of collusion, would have roused 'very violent international passions'; in Israel, for example, candour about foreign assistance would have detracted from the image of a dashing military success, and marred the appearance of military strength that its embattled politicians needed to present to the surrounding Arab world.

The collusion jigsaw puzzle, for over a decade pieced together by journalists and opposition politicians, was fitted more firmly into place in 1967. Hitherto, as authors responded to the lure of Suez as an event of high-drama shrouded in mystery and controversy, the treatment of collusion had been somewhat impressionistic. The first accounts to shift the collusion story from the reality of speculation to the reality of authentication were *The Suez Affair* by Hugh Thomas, *Suez: Ten Years On* by Peter

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<sup>222</sup> TNA FO 371/190241, C. Tickell to C. Lush, 9 November 1966.

<sup>223</sup> E. Monroe, 'Suez Secrets: The Jigsaw Continues', *Observer*, 24 July 1966.

<sup>224</sup> TNA CAB 103/628, 'Note to B. Trend', 29 July 1966.

<sup>225</sup> TNA CAB 103/628, Miscellaneous Note, B. Trend. Also see 'Cabinet Still Undecided on Suez Inquiry', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 November 1966; 'Inquiry into Suez Affair Denied', *Guardian*, 12 December 1966.



Calvocoressi and *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* by General Dayan.<sup>226</sup> But it was *No End of a Lesson*, by the former Minister of State Anthony Nutting, which fluttered the most doves. Nutting had been a protégé of Anthony Eden to whom he was much indebted for his political advancement; in Churchill's final years as Prime Minister, he was widely seen as the heir presumptive to Eden, the acknowledged heir apparent.<sup>227</sup> Like his mentor, however, Nutting was one of the great 'casualties' of the Suez crisis. Privy to the secret plot to invade Egypt ('a sordid manoeuvre...morally indefensible and politically suicidal'),<sup>228</sup> on 31 October 1956 Nutting wrote Eden a letter of resignation, stating that he found it impossible to defend such a duplicitous policy in public. On 5 November, the day before British troops landed at Port Said, he resigned his seat in parliament. Recognising that disclosure of the tripartite agreement might result in the fall of HMG, Nutting refrained from making a customary resignation speech in the House of Commons: 'As long as any of the chief protagonists of the Suez War still held high office', he later explained, 'it would clearly have been a grave disservice to the nation...to have told the whole story'.<sup>229</sup> Nutting's silence, while admirable, backfired spectacularly. Feeling betrayed by a man whose career he had personally groomed, Eden spread rumour and innuendo around the lobbies of Westminster, suggesting that Nutting had used Suez as an excuse to dampen constituency trouble emanating from an imminent and distasteful divorce. Many Tory backbenchers regarded Nutting's resignation as malicious and, although he was ultimately proved correct in all his forebodings, the 'second golden boy' became *persona non grata* in the tribal world of Conservative politics. Eden never spoke to him again whilst Selwyn Lloyd brushed off his political estrangement as a case of 'Much Ado About Nutting'.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> H. Thomas, *The Suez Affair* (London, 1967); P. Calvocoressi, *Suez: Ten Years On* (London, 1967); General Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (Jerusalem, 1966).

<sup>227</sup> N. Nicholson, 'Nutting, Sir (Harold) Anthony, third baronet (1920-1999)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, [<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72010>] (11 February 2008).

<sup>228</sup> Nutting, *No End*, p. 14, p. 96.

<sup>229</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>230</sup> *Independent*, 3 March 1999.

Nutting later spoke of being: 'Bereft of friends, a castaway adrift on a sea of anger and recrimination, an object of distrust, torn between loyalty to principle and loyalty to friends and associates'.<sup>231</sup>

Despite being driven out of politics with his integrity impugned, for ten years Nutting did not regard it as within his prerogative to unmask the secrets of collusion. His silence was extraordinary when one considers that it came at the cost of a career that appeared preordained for the premiership. By early 1967, however, with so much being written, Nutting informed HMG that he had a right to tell his side of the story. 'None of those responsible hold office', Nutting wrote to Trend, '[whilst] Britain is now represented by a government which bears no responsibility of Suez'.<sup>232</sup> As the third son of Sir Harold Nutting, a wealthy landowner, Nutting's attitude to his literary wares was not swayed by financial reward. The motive for publication was simple: to answer charges of betraying his leader and patron and to explain the stand that he had taken. Trend received a bound page proof of the book on 3 April to which Nutting had affixed a note explaining that, while he had had no resort to official documents, he was nevertheless happy to make amendments on points of security and Cabinet protocol.<sup>233</sup> With serialisation in *The Times* set for 29 April, thus precluding a lengthy deliberation, Trend sent copies forthwith to Eden, the Foreign Office and the sitting Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. What they received was a flesh and blood recapitulation of the events surrounding the Sèvres Protocol. It revealed, for example, how on 14 October 1956 General Maurice Challe (Chief of Staff of the French Air Force), accompanied by Albert Glazier (Acting Foreign Minister in Pineau's absence), had visited Chequers to present Eden with a plan to invade Egypt on the pretext of 'separating the combatants' and 'extinguishing a dangerous fire'.<sup>234</sup> According to Nutting, who was present at the meeting, this was the *casus belli* for which Eden had been looking.

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Nutting, *No End*, pp. 91-3.

Such was his pathological hatred of Nasser, he 'could scarcely contain his glee' and instructed Guy Millard (the Duty Private Secretary) not to keep a record of what unfolded. With great alacrity, Eden then arranged two more meetings, one at the Palais Matignon, the official residence of the French Prime Minister, and the other at Sèvres, to ratify the secret treaty.

Nutting's revelations were a bombshell. No foreknowledge and no prior agreement: that was Eden's stance at the time, again in *Full Circle* and once more as evidence accumulated over the seven years since publication. 'How can he get away with this', Eden protested in a private letter to Trend; the text was a 'gross breach' of collective responsibility.<sup>235</sup> Eden delineated more specific objections in a series of correspondence with Lord Normanbrook. Nutting's account, he complained, relied upon unsubstantiated reminiscence of conversations with colleagues: 'As to [these] reconstructed dialogues, I have no recollection of a single one of the exchanges here wished upon me – nor do they read like me'.<sup>236</sup> The reference to Eden's bile duct wound as being 'generally affected by nervous pressures' was considered 'erroneous', as was the allegation that he had a 'strangely bitter dislike of the Greeks'.<sup>237</sup> Eden was shocked at how Nutting 'harp[ed] continuously on' about the two men's alleged divergences of opinion: 'If these views were in fact his sentiments, I was not conscious of them'.<sup>238</sup> What really galled the former Prime Minister was the book's portrayal of him as a man 'eager for hostilities' with Egypt: 'The charge of dictatorship on my part can only be described as hysterical. No member of Cabinet would endorse it for an instant'.<sup>239</sup> In the event of the book's publication, however, Eden decided not to issue a statement. To do so, he confided in Brook, would necessitate 'calling in aid of information which I am not prepared to make use of at the present time'.<sup>240</sup> Disclosing such

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<sup>235</sup> Cited in James, *Eden*, p. 614.

<sup>236</sup> BUL AP 20/49/41, A. Eden to Lord Normanbrook, 25 April 1967.

<sup>237</sup> BUL AP 20/49/19, A. Eden to Lord Normanbrook, 20 April 1967.

<sup>238</sup> BUL AP20/49/21, A. Eden to Lord Normanbrook, 24 April 1967.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

information, he argued, would imperil the lives of several state functionaries who were currently active in the political arena. Given the volatile situation on the Syrian-Israeli border, where an Egyptian army was still in occupation, revelation 'could not be other than harmful to the cause of peace'.<sup>241</sup>

The Foreign Office shared Eden's abhorrence of the manuscript. Confirmation of collusion could not but reflect adversely upon the methods by which officials might be thought to practice diplomacy and upon Britain's general probity in its relations with other countries.<sup>242</sup> Since the legality of the Protocol was highly dubious, possibly even a breach of *jus cogens*, its disclosure carried potentially serious ethical and constitutional implications. For Wilson, the real problem was precedence. Nutting had excused himself on the grounds of a self-devised Ten-Year Rule: what was to stop 'someone even more unscrupulous', 'and [even] more speedy with his pen', from doing the same?<sup>243</sup> 'I am not hopeful', lamented Wilson, 'that Nutting will prove to be a gentleman'; the cost to the publisher – and probably to himself – would be too great.<sup>244</sup> Accompanied by Sir Paul Gore-Booth, Head of the Diplomatic Service, Trend met with Nutting on 20 April with a view to enforcing alterations. Nutting ridiculed Trend's suggestion that the manuscript represented a 'serious departure' from the convention of collective responsibility. He pointed to the precedent of Winston Churchill and underlined that Suez had been a 'departure of sorts' from every principle that had guided the conduct of British diplomacy throughout history. While agreeing not to mention the views of certain diplomats, such as Sir Humphrey Trevelyan (Ambassador to Egypt in 1956), Nutting steadfastly refused to omit his discussion of collusion. To delete the relevant chapter, 'Invitation by Conspiracy', would 'be to suppress the essential truth contained in [the] book'.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

On 27 April, following an almighty 'hoo-ha'<sup>246</sup> in Cabinet, it was decided not to prevent publication. Elwyn Jones, the Attorney General at the time, later wrote that Nutting had come within an 'agonising hair's breadth' of being struck off the roll of Privy Councillors and prosecuted under the OSA.<sup>247</sup> This, of course, would have been the first occasion on which such an action had been taken against a former minister. According to *The Crossman Diaries*, 'Burke...made it perfectly clear that he and he alone had taken the decision about Nutting's book because the Prime Minister, like any other Labour Minister, must be denied access to the minutes of the other side'.<sup>248</sup> This assessment, however, is not reflected in the documents. Trend had made it clear that he did not want to be caught in the crossfire between the competing priorities of government and author. Wilson – doubtless protecting his own publishing portfolio – had also emphasised that recourse to legal action would have an inhibiting effect on the memoir industry.<sup>249</sup>

The impact of *No End of a Lesson* was negligible. As David Carlton has argued, the long delay on the author's part, however honourable and constitutionally correct, 'deprived him of his chance to shape history'; for had 'his authoritative revelations come during the 1950s, the political consequences would have been incalculable'.<sup>250</sup> Publication coincided with the outbreak of the Six Day War, when even some of Eden's most concerted detractors were prepared to entertain the possibility that contemporary events may have proved the former Prime Minister to have been right all along. Nutting's most piquant disclosure – from the vantage point of 1967 – was arguably not the full extent of collusion but Eden's opinion in 1956 that the incipient Common Market yielded no benefit for Britain.<sup>251</sup> Publication also failed to affect any further confessionals. Harold Macmillan's

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<sup>246</sup> B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-70* (London, 1984), p. 246.

<sup>247</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>248</sup> R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume 2 Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons* (London, 1976), pp. 343-4.

<sup>249</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>250</sup> D. Carlton, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1981), p. 472.

<sup>251</sup> E. Stock, 'Reviewed Work: *No End of a Lesson* by Anthony Nutting', *Political Science Quarterly*, 84:1 (March 1969), pp. 136-7.

fourth volume of memoirs (*Riding the Storm 1956-1959* [1971]) totally snubbed Nutting's revelations.<sup>252</sup> Selwyn Lloyd's *Suez 1956*, published in 1978, nonsensically maintained that the Sèvres meetings foreclosed rather than approved a secret agreement.<sup>253</sup> Demands for an official history of the Suez-Sinai campaign never took wing; and, despite scores of requests, historians were repeatedly denied access to Suez papers. 'Once we breach the principle of a 'closed' period for the benefit of one individual historian', asserted Trend, 'we open a floodgate which we have thereafter no means of closing again. And on such a sensitive subject as Suez, the water will come through at a considerable rate'.<sup>254</sup> In private, Eden was 'more convinced than ever that the action taken by the Anglo-American forces in 1956 was inescapable', resolute in his personal conviction that military intervention averted an Arab-Israeli war in 'worse and much more dangerous conditions'.<sup>255</sup> In public, however, he refused to speak out. As Nutting had predicted, 'to reveal the truth now would involve an act of confession too mortifying for any man to volunteer'.<sup>256</sup>

Roy Jenkins, when weighing up Eden's career alongside those of Attlee, Churchill and Macmillan, concluded that 'of this quartet his mind was probably the least conditioned by history'.<sup>257</sup> This section, in contrast, has sought to demonstrate how 'history' was central to Eden's make-up. Following the trauma of 1956 – a year that saw *finis* writ to his political career – Eden's antenna was constantly attuned to the views of historians and he appropriated history for the purpose of justification and advocacy. *Full Circle*, to borrow Lasswell's famous dictum, might be best interpreted as a form of literary taxidermy, embalming a corpse under a hefty application of preservatives in order to conceal wounds and prevent decay. The Cabinet Office, somewhat conspicuously, shared Eden's desire to

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<sup>252</sup> H. Macmillan, *Riding the Storm 1956-1959. Memoirs: Volume 4* (London, 1971).

<sup>253</sup> S. Lloyd, *Suez 1956* (New York, 1978).

<sup>254</sup> B. Trend cited in TNA FCO 12/155, H. Harcombe to B. Cheeseman, 30 May 1973.

<sup>255</sup> BUL AP 20/49/21, A. Eden to N. Brook, 24 April 1967.

<sup>256</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'No End of a Lesson by A. Nutting', J.M. Moss, 6 May 1975.

<sup>257</sup> R. Jenkins, *Portraits and Miniatures: Selected Writings* (London, 1993), p. 207.

defend the sorry tale of Suez and, rather than enforce compulsory pulping of the manuscript, afforded the aging statesmen every facility to absolve himself of misconduct. One might speculate that the Cabinet Office was quite happy for Eden to parcel out small, digestible, chunks of the Suez debacle, because, in doing so, he would 'soften the blow' administered by later disclosures. In part, this decision rebounded as Eden employed state papers to shunt the blame, and corroborate the view that the Americans and, above all, John Foster Dulles had undermined his position. With its rich and forthright disclosures, *Full Circle* announced a new mode of candor, irreverence and malice for political memoirs. Its popularity, moreover, confirmed that the public's taste had been whetted for indiscretion. In *Full Circle*, secrecy, as well as disclosure, was seen as vital to Eden's quest for rehabilitation. Ultimately, however, the absence of any reference to collusion proved fatally misplaced. His portrayal of the Anglo-French invasion as the culmination of a consistent policy cut very little ice, whilst the more distance that accrued from the events he described, the more the conviction grew that he had been guilty of fabrication. By 1967, following the publication of *No End of a Lesson*, critics discovered how far Eden had fraudulently reconstituted the anatomy of his own tragedy.

### 6.3 The Crossman Diaries and the Era of 'Instant History'

*Full Circle* confirmed that the era of 'instant history' had arrived. During the 1970s, a growing spate of memoirs began to concern themselves not merely with issues of the remote past, but with contemporary events. The proliferation of 'Instant Memoirs', written by ministers shortly after leaving office, in part reflected a more general recognition accorded to recent history as a respectable branch of scholarship. A more important root, however, was the fact that the market was simply strongest for immediate material. As a general principle, the longer the memoir writer waited, the more the value of the memoir would depreciate. 'I [can] remember very well a certain Chancellor of the Exchequer, who shall be nameless, inquiring as to what his memoirs might be worth', recollected Sir Simon

Jenkins (former editor of *The Times*) in 2006: 'The answer – far from being facetious – was a quarter of a million tomorrow, £100,000 next week, and £10,000 two months from now.'<sup>258</sup> 'Instant Memoirs' presented HMG with several problems. Firstly, the more recent the period to which memoirs related, the more liable they were to deal with matters of current political importance. Secondly, there was a real risk that publication would be the 'thin end of the wedge', provoking anger from historians who were precluded from access to documents by the Thirty-Year Rule. Yet attitudes in Whitehall continued to be heavily modulated by a gentlemanly distaste for legislation. Rather than draw up formal regulations, or enforce a statutory code of conduct, the Cabinet Office for a long time remained hopeful that existing *ad hoc* means of control could be refashioned to meet the new challenge. 'We cannot hope to put this particular clock back', affirmed Trend in July 1970: 'We have to bend our efforts to ensuring, so far as we can, that it does not go too far forward'.<sup>259</sup> Matters, therefore, would continue to be left to the discretion and good taste of the author concerned.

The first tranche of memoirs to fulminate against the principle of an accepted closed season were *Decision in Government* by Dr. Jeremy Bray, *On the Cabinet* by Gordon Walker, and *In My Way* by George Brown.<sup>260</sup> But it was Harold Wilson's memoir, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (1971), which represented all Trends' fears made flesh. Submitted in January 1971, the memoir was not so much an autobiography, but an apologia for the fourth Labour Government. Replete with grammatical errors, and prone to undisciplined ramblings, the draft had every evidence of hasty composition. Trend's immediate concern was the book's portrayal of foreign statesmen. Hastings Banda, President of Malawi, was twice described in 'rather unflattering

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<sup>258</sup> *House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee: Whitehall Confidential? The Publication of Political Memoirs*, HC 689-I (London, 25 July 2006).

<sup>259</sup> B. Trend to D. Allen, 10 July 1970 cited in TNA CAB 164/1295, 'Harold Macmillan Publication', J.M. Moss, 13 May 1975.

<sup>260</sup> J. Bray, *Decision in Government* (London, 1969); G. Walker, *On the Cabinet* (London, 1970); G. Brown, *In My Way* (London, 1971). Also see TNA CAB 164/1332; TNA CAB 164/588.



terms', whilst Alexey Kosygin, Premier of the Soviet Union, was shown on several occasions to possess an embittered opinion of China.<sup>261</sup> The argument was put to Wilson that, if he became Prime Minister once again, and had to deal with any of these individuals or their successors, would he not be embarrassed by such comments? 'From this point of view', emphasised Trend, 'your memoirs present us with a problem which we have never hitherto encountered'.<sup>262</sup> While quick to point out that not all memoirs had been written by politicians who had 'come to the end of the road' ('This was certainly not true of Churchill'), Wilson agreed to expunge all seditious references to individuals with whom he might engage as a future Prime Minister.<sup>263</sup> In other areas, however, Wilson refused to budge. The substance of his acrimonious dealings with President Johnson survived. On page 417, during his coverage of the D-Notice Affair, he retained the *ex parte* comment, 'Lohan *suddenly* [emphasis added] resigned'. Given that Lohan was 'surely sacked', this remark, believed C. J. Child (Head of the Cabinet Office Historical Section), was clearly calculated to infuriate the Colonel and perhaps to precipitate a riposte from the press.<sup>264</sup> On page 240, contrary to secret service taboos, Wilson described how the intelligence community had provided him with evidence attesting to Communist infiltration of the National Union of Seamen. Much to the irritation of Heath's Conservative Government, who had set great store by Britain's membership to the European Economic Community, the memoir gave a detailed account of the so-called 'Soames Affair' – the leaking by the Wilson Government of proposals made by de Gaulle to Sir Christopher Soames, the British Ambassador, in February 1969. As Trend suggested to the Prime Minister, Edward Heath,

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<sup>261</sup> B. Trend to H. Wilson, 12 February 1971 cited TNA CAB 164/1295, '*The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record*', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> H. Wilson to B. Trend, 17 February 1971 cited in TNA CAB 164/1295, '*The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record*', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>264</sup> H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London, 1971), p. 417; TNA CAB 164/887, 'Comments on Harold Wilson's Memoirs', C.J. Child, 18 January 1971.

this disclosure was almost certainly intended by Wilson to queer the pitch of his Tory successor – politics by other means.<sup>265</sup>

Part policy primer, part stump speech, *The Labour Government* would not feature highly in the pantheon of great ministerial memoirs. Wilson's modus operandi was that of a true Labourite whose every meditation had to be evaluated, not for its historical authenticity, but for its impact upon his future career. His discussion of the D-Notice Affair glossed over all the vital elements: the role of GCHQ; his meeting with Lord Radcliffe on 16 May; and the rationale for Lohan's 'sudden' resignation (see Chapter 3). John Grigg, columnist for the *Guardian*, called it 'auto-hagiography'.<sup>266</sup> It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the memoir out-of-hand. Its publication in spring 1971 – only one year after Wilson had left office – confirmed the arrival of 'instant history' and, with its frank revelations, created a significant precedent that future writers would invoke even more uninhibitedly. The erosion of standards gathered pace with the autobiography of George Wigg in 1972 ('I do not consider myself bound to play cricket when others have abandoned the cricket bat, stumps and the ball for a shillelagh'),<sup>267</sup> and then with Harold Macmillan's sixth volume of memoirs, *At The End of the Day* in 1973.<sup>268</sup> Macmillan had been implored not to quote from American sources, especially the transcripts of telephone conversations with President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. 'In the light of the Pentagon papers case', wrote Trend in March 1973, 'we are rather concerned to keep our record clean in this respect'.<sup>269</sup> Citing Wilson as a precedent, whose memoir had completely ignored American susceptibilities, Macmillan nevertheless reproduced the conversations verbatim. The rapid diffusion of full-dress 'instant histories', which blithely disregarded the counsel of the Cabinet Secretary, cast renewed doubt upon the efficacy of

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<sup>265</sup> Wilson, *Labour Government*, pp. 617-8; B. Trend to E. Heath, 2 May 1971 cited in TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>266</sup> J. Grigg, 'Books: Policies of Impotence', *International Affairs*, 48:1 (January 1972), pp. 72-6.

<sup>267</sup> G. Wigg to B. Trend, 14 April 1971 cited in TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>268</sup> H. Macmillan, *At The End of the Day* (London, 1973).

existing vetting procedures. For Sir Douglas Allen, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, the stage had been reached 'in which the best course could be summarised in the cryptic phrase of the Duke of Wellington, "Publish and be Damned"'.<sup>270</sup>

It was against this background that the edifice of Cabinet secrecy faced arguably its greatest challenge. Richard ('Dick') Crossman had been a Cabinet Minister in the Labour Government of Harold Wilson, serving as Minister of Housing and Local Government (1964-66), Leader of the House of Commons and Lord President of the Council (1966-68), and Secretary of State for Social Services (1968-70). While he lived, Crossman was resolute in his conviction that secrecy was a 'chronic ailment of the British Government',<sup>271</sup> an insidious device used to cover up mistakes and keep the electorate ignorant. Unlike most politicians, it has been said, Crossman did not merely talk of the 'public's right to know'; he actually dared to believe it. He also had little time for the secrecies of collective responsibility. As his widow, Anne, told me: 'Dick felt that you should not put forward in Cabinet what you were not prepared to support in public'.<sup>272</sup> Yet for all his exertions, Dick Crossman, the minister, did not shake the Establishment. 'In the high game of politics', opined Anthony Howard, 'he was always the hare, and it is the tortoise that normally wins the race'.<sup>273</sup>

Dick Crossman, the writer, in contrast, had a profound impact – albeit from beyond the grave. Every Sunday, during his six years in office, Crossman would retire to his country home in North Oxfordshire and dictate the week's occurrences into a tape recorder. Chronicled while the memory was green and uncontaminated by corrections, the contents of these tapes (some 1,500,000 words) were intended, from the outset, as the basis for a political diary. Such a book, believed Crossman, would fulfil for a contemporary

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<sup>269</sup> TNA CAB 164/1332, B. Trend to H. Macmillan, 2 March 1973.

<sup>270</sup> TNA CAB 164/1295, 'The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record', J.M. Moss, 12 May 1975.

<sup>271</sup> R. Crossman, 'The Real English Disease', *New Statesman*, 24 September 1971, p. 1.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Mrs Anne Crossman, 19 December 2005.

<sup>273</sup> A. Howard, *Crossman: The Pursuit of Power* (London, 1990), p. 1.

audience the functions of Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution*, providing a window onto the 'secret places of British politics'.<sup>274</sup> More specifically, Crossman wanted to expose how collective government had transmogrified into a command premiership, in which members of the Cabinet had become nothing more than glorified marionettes of the Prime Minister. No academic, he argued, could write such a study; it had to be done by someone who knew the government machine from the inside. Crossman also hoped that publication would weaken the conventions that, in his opinion, had rendered anodyne the writings of most former ministers: 'There have been no valuable political diaries for about 100 years – [they] tend to have no soul'.<sup>275</sup> It was decided, from day one, that publication would take the form of a diary rather than a memoir. Memoirs, considered Crossman, seldom captured the spirit of the moment and were invariably 'cooked'.<sup>276</sup> The diary, moreover, would appear completely unexpurgated; to make editorial improvements, or to remove wounding passages about colleagues, would make the book untrue. Janet Morgan was appointed therefore as the manuscript's umpire. Instructed to 'leave in EVERYTHING',<sup>277</sup> save occasional stylistic alterations, she was a guarantee that the published version was genuine.

The Crossman Diaries did not take Whitehall by surprise. From 1971, until the controversy erupted in 1975, every effort was made to impede Crossman's progress. Diagnosed with cancer, and precluded therefore from making regular trips to London, Crossman made several unsuccessful appeals for his right of access to Cabinet papers to be transferred to Morgan. His first request reminded HMG that neither Churchill nor Eden had been required to exercise in person their privilege of refreshing their memory: 'I find it difficult to believe that no trained academic helper on Churchill's or Lord Avon's staff was permitted access to any Cabinet paper. Does this mean that Churchill was compelled

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<sup>274</sup> R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume 1 Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London, 1975), p. 12.

<sup>275</sup> H. Davies, 'January is Diary Season', *The Sunday Times Weekly Review*, 2 January 1972.

<sup>276</sup> News, 'Crossman Picks Girl Diary Editor', *The Times*, 13 September 1971.

<sup>277</sup> The Modern Records Centre (MRC) MSS 154/3/LIT/32/1-58, J. Morgan to R. Crossman, 21 November 1971.

personally to sit in a room in the Cabinet Office?’<sup>278</sup> These ‘very exceptional’ cases, explained Trend, were justified on the grounds that the ministers in question were in particularly poor health and were working at some considerable distance from London.<sup>279</sup> (Here the Cabinet Secretary exhibited an extraordinary indifference to Crossman’s own debilitating illness.) It was also emphasised that conventions had invariably ‘differentiated’ in favour of former Prime Ministers. Crossman’s second bid therefore pinned its hopes on the precedent set by George Brown. As ‘merely’ a Foreign Secretary, argued Crossman, Brown had no right to be accorded special privileges; yet, in 1969, his application for Jean Elliot to undertake research had been approved.<sup>280</sup> Once again, however, Trend had an answer – explaining that Elliot, as Brown’s former Assistant Private Secretary, had already seen the relevant papers. The Prime Minister eventually settled the running dialectic between Trend and Crossman. To grant an exemption, Heath explained to Crossman in March 1972, would not only breach the confidential nature of discussions between ministers, but would contravene the Thirty-Year Rule governing the public availability of official records.<sup>281</sup> Extending access, moreover, would give Morgan a considerable advantage over other historians who did not enjoy the patronage of a former minister.

Crossman died on 5 April 1974. Honouring his instructions, his literary executors moved to publish the diaries in three volumes, collectively entitled *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*. Although ready for hard-back publication in early 1974, the diaries became becalmed in the Cabinet Office, leading to fears of castration. The Labour MP, Geoffrey Rhodes, even alleged that certain tapes had been wiped clean on their arrival at the publishers.<sup>282</sup> In January 1975, without the imprimatur of HMG, *The Sunday Times* broke

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<sup>278</sup> TNA PREM 15/902, R. Crossman to B. Trend, 13 May 1971.

<sup>279</sup> TNA PREM 16/24, ‘Advice to B. Trend’, 25 May 1971; MRC MSS 154/3/LIT/33/1-26, B. Trend to R. Crossman, 1971.

<sup>280</sup> TNA PREM 16/24, R. Crossman to B. Trend, 20 May 1971; TNA PREM 16/24, R. Crossman to E. Heath, 22 July 1971. The case of George Brown’s Memoirs is documented in TNA CAB 164/588.

<sup>281</sup> TNA PREM 15/902, E. Heath to R. Crossman, 13 March 1972; TNA PREM 15/902, ‘Report of Permanent Secretaries: Access of Former Ministers to Official Papers’, 3 March 1972.

<sup>282</sup> C. Walker, ‘Labour MP Seeking Corruption Inquiry’, *The Times*, 16 May 1974.

the political and bureaucratic breakwater by publishing unbowdlerized extracts. To demonstrate that the diaries were a serious political meditation, and not an assemblage of catty gossip, serialisation initially avoided acrimonious and lurid episodes. The main impression was of a minister cocooned and softly shepherded by his civil servants. By late February, however, the extracts had become more explicit. The picture that emerged was of a government riven by factionalism and torn apart by the clashing of great egos. Extracts immortalised Crossman's struggles to formulate and enact policy against the 'will' of the British Civil Service. Dame Evelyn Sharp, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Housing, was portrayed as an expert of obfuscation and manipulation, symbolising a machine that possessed no gears, only brakes. 'At every stage', considered the new Cabinet Secretary Sir John Hunt, '[the diary] damages the whole principle of collective responsibility'.<sup>283</sup> The problem arose not from avowed violations of national security, but from Crossman's determination to give 'blow-by-blow' accounts of Cabinet meetings, the advice tendered by civil servants and the discussions of senior appointments.<sup>284</sup>

The Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was implored by his mandarins to move for an injunction. The extracts, argued Hunt, represented 'the tip of the iceberg'; the Cabinet Office was already 'slid[ing] down a slippery slope' with memoir writers and, if Crossman were accepted as a precedent, then there would be no hope of preventing future indiscretions.<sup>285</sup> 'If Crossman [is permitted] to break a tradition of mutual trust', declared Sir William Armstrong (Head of the Civil Service), 'nothing will be the same again'.<sup>286</sup> Wilson faced a serious dilemma. In its 1974 election manifesto, the Labour Party had vowed to narrow the OSA and make the processes of government more open. Barring publication, therefore, would represent a cynical betrayal of Wilson's programme. In June 1975, after much hesitation, Wilson nevertheless directed the Attorney General, Sam Silkin, to initiate

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<sup>283</sup> TNA PREM 16/466, J. Hunt to H. Wilson, 27 February 1975.

<sup>284</sup> TNA PREM 16/466, J. Hunt to H. Wilson, 17 March 1975.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> TNA PREM 16/466, W. Armstrong, May 1975.

legal proceedings. To take such draconian action over the writings of a deceased colleague was confirmation that over fifty years of endlessly malleable conventions had come to an end. It concurrently signalled a major metamorphosis in the ecology of controlling information; court action, with the notable exception of Edgar Lansbury, was always regarded as an undesirable outcome.

Unbeknownst to *The Sunday Times* (who had been advised by Lord Lloyd of Hampstead that it had no defence under the OSA), government lawyers had no intention of invoking the ultimate Doomsday weapon. Since Crossman's death had, as it were, severed the link between the information he had learned as a minister and its protection by Section 2, the likelihood of a successful prosecution was slim. Wilson, moreover, was anxious not to bankrupt his election assurances. During an interview on Granada Television, the Home Secretary had promised 'sweeping changes' to the OSA, most notably creating a measure 'to put the burden on the public authorities to justify withholding information'.<sup>287</sup> With the OSA effectively inoperable, HMG sought an advance injunction under the law of confidentiality. During the trial, which began on 22 July 1975, the prosecution submitted that Crossman's breach of confidence was against the public interest, since it undermined collective responsibility and therefore inhibited officials from speaking candidly. Established parameters, emphasised Silkin, governed the publication of ministerial memoirs; yet neither Crossman before his death, nor his executors, had complied with these conventions and obtained permission from the government of the day. Hitherto no Cabinet Secretary had ever testified in court about his official functions. In an unprecedented step, Hunt was constitutionally dragooned into the witness stand, where he provided an encomium on the virtues of closed government:

The principle of Collective Responsibility imposes limits on what former Ministers are free to publish. These limits do not spring from the operation of the Official Secrets Act. They arise from

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<sup>287</sup> TNA CAB 164/1294, 'Drafts: Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs', 1975.

the requirements of good government. If the defendants are allowed to publish...the result will be that it will be difficult for Ministers and senior civil servants to communicate frankly and freely.<sup>288</sup>

As Keith Middlemas has argued, despite all the claims adduced in court, the 'crux' of the whole debate was the age-old proposition that the business of government should, as a rule, be done in secret and that the Cabinet Office was the appropriate arbiter, in scope and time, of what was detrimental to the national interest.<sup>289</sup> The case for the defence was threefold: that confidence actions applied only to marriage and industrial secrets; that confidentiality had been breached by over 300 published memoirs; and that the disclosures contained in the diaries were 'ancient history'. It was also implied that many more 'secrets' were divulged in the lobbies and bars of Westminster, albeit under the cloak of anonymity, than were revealed in the Crossman Diaries.

On 1 October 1975, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, delivered his judgement. Authorising publication of the book, Widgery explained that Crossman's diary dealt with events that occurred a decade earlier and because there had been three general elections held in the intervening years, no verifiable case existed for an injunction. Ergo Cabinet secrecy could no longer be held as inviolable, and the time limit for collective responsibility – hitherto of 'infinite duration'<sup>290</sup> – now had a *de facto* shelf-life. At the same time, however, Widgery supported Silkin's contention that in certain circumstances the law should protect collective responsibility and ruled that in the publication of future memoirs each case had to be decided on its own merits. In obtaining judicial recognition of the *principle* that a legal obligation of confidentiality attaches itself to Cabinet proceedings (even though the court agreed that the Crossman Diaries no longer retained their confidential character), HMG had – to quote press headlines – snatched victory from the

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<sup>288</sup> Cited in H. Young, *The Crossman Affair* (London, 1976), p. 77.

<sup>289</sup> R.K. Middlemas, 'Cabinet Secrecy and the Crossman Diaries', *Political Quarterly*, 47:1 (January 1976), pp. 39-51.

<sup>290</sup> B. Trend to G. Wigg, 2 April 1971 cited in TNA CAB 164/1296, 'The Memoirs of George Wigg', J.M. Moss, 30 May 1975.



jaws of defeat. The hearing also introduced a potentially prohibitive economic sanction.<sup>291</sup> The total cost of the case was £70,000 – a figure that neither the publishers nor the executors could have afforded had *The Sunday Times* not defrayed the expenses. ‘I would never have taken on Dick’s crusade without their financial backing’, Crossman’s widow told me.<sup>292</sup> There was a danger, therefore, that the publishers would henceforth err on the side of caution, and censorship would be achieved by stealth.

A triptych on Government versus Party, Westminster versus Whitehall, and Cabinet versus Prime Minister, publication delighted the chattering classes, not least because official records of the period were closed for another twenty years. Though, by design, prolix and conversational, the diary provided an intriguing keyhole into previously forbidden areas. ‘It really strips a veil away from the way we are governed’, declared Harold Evans, editor of *The Times*. ‘It tells the nature of civil service advice, the way it is given, and the way the press is manipulated’.<sup>293</sup> The political and legal furore that attended its publication generated valuable debate on the issue of the public’s right to know. Many contemporary commentators saw the diary as a decisive victory in the march towards openness and predicted a moratorium on government secrecy. For the polemical correspondent, Bernard Levin, Crossman’s ‘greatest service was to help ensure that the doors of secrecy, so firmly shut and so zealously guarded, were forced upon’.<sup>294</sup> In truth, while it might be argued that Crossman sentenced secrecy to a period of probation, the pendulum soon swung back to closed government. The Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs – itself officially secret – was a perfect illustration of Whitehall suspending the cultural clock. Commissioned in April 1975 with Viscount Radcliffe as chairman, and formally welcomed by HMG as an Annex to the Ministerial

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<sup>291</sup> D. Leigh, *The Frontiers of Secrecy* (London, 1980), p. 71.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Mrs Anne Crossman, 19 December 2005.

<sup>293</sup> TNA PREM 16/466, ‘Transcript of the Programme ‘The Editors’, Recorded and Transmitted BBC1, Sunday 22 June 1975.’

<sup>294</sup> B. Levin, ‘The Light that Mr Crossman Let in Can Never Again be Shut Out’, *The Times*, 3 June 1976, p. 14.

Code in December, the Report redefined the basic principles governing the publication of memoirs. Covering a broader range of offences than was at stake during the Crossman trial, the Report recommended that authors should be prevented from publishing information which:

- i) May cause damage to national security;
- ii) May cause injury to international relations;
- iii) May be destructive to collective responsibility.<sup>295</sup>

The third category included accounts of Cabinet meetings, discussion of particular advice given to ministers by named civil servants, and disparaging references to public servants by ministers or vice versa. Only fifteen years after the relevant events – ‘enough to cover the life span of three successive Parliaments’<sup>296</sup> – would it be permissible to disclose such matters. The same confidentiality clause would apply to civil servants, diplomats, and special advisers.

The Report adumbrated a perennial problem: persuading authors to self-censor without recourse to legislation. In view of the high offices potential authors would hold, coupled with a residual distrust of the courts in protecting sensitive subjects, a legislative solution was once again dismissed as inappropriate. ‘There [may] well be an occasional rebel or an occasional breach’, considered the Committee:

But so long as there remains a general recognition of the practical necessity of some rules and the importance of observing them, we do not think that such transgressions, even though made the subject of sensational publicity, should be taken as having shattered the fabric of a sensible system.<sup>297</sup>

Harold Wilson, who would soon be writing his own second volume of memoirs, was extremely reluctant as Prime Minister to institute constraining parameters. It is

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<sup>295</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, *Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial Memoirs* (London, 16 December 1975), Cmnd. 6386.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

unsurprising, therefore, that he wholeheartedly supported a scheme that foreclosed the enactment of legislation: 'Compliance should be allowed to rest in the free acceptance by the individuals concerned of an obligation of honour'.<sup>298</sup> In the absence of statutory control, procedural protections would be paramount. Hitherto one of the most significant hurdles was the lack of adequate guidance on the clearance process. Radcliffe recommended therefore that every crown servant, on taking and leaving office, sign a declaration abstracting the substance of the Report and making clear that they will abide by the rules. A signed document would prevent prospective authors from claiming that they were unaware of the restrictions on their ability to publish; the criteria against which the acceptability of manuscripts would be judged; or the way in which restrictions would be applied to politicians or to public officials. The Code also underlined that authors were expected to submit their manuscript *in good time* before publication to the Cabinet Secretary. As Head of the Cabinet Office, possessing at his command reports and precedents of previous administrations, few were better qualified to act as a central repository of Ministerial practice or to make a calculus of the benefits and risks of openness. 'There is no one else', claimed the Committee, 'to whom Ministers, past and present, can look with the same confidence on what is essentially a question of Ministerial conduct'.<sup>299</sup>

## Conclusions

By 1975, it had become a rite of passage for leading figures in government and politics to write a memoir, even if it caused a stir within Whitehall. The memoir industry had become big business, drawing large and expectant readerships, and involving hefty advances and heavily plugged serialisations. Why did people write them? Someone like Churchill, one might argue, was destined to erect his own monument. Here was a man who welcomed attention; who needed to be a force; and who wanted his name to echo

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<sup>298</sup> TNA PREM 16/904, H. Wilson, January 1976.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

down through the ages. Common to all memoirists was a deep concern for what historians would make of their political record. Memoirs, therefore, were a form of 'legacy writing' designed to entomb reputations and justify unflinching beliefs before the court of history. During the period of this thesis, it is noticeable that more and more memoirs were being written to erase the stain of humiliation, a reflection perhaps of politics itself becoming more heartless and unforgiving, and the media growing more aggressive in airing scandals. With fewer politicians leaving the political stage with their reputations intact, so the memoir industry afforded them the opportunity to set right their place in history. It might be added that the British experience was not unique in this respect. In America too, political careers were seldom ending on a high, and apologies became commonplace. In 1978, for example, Richard Nixon led his own defence in *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*.<sup>300</sup> Like Eden, however, the disgraced President failed to alter the trajectory of historiographical opinion, and the ghastly albatross of Watergate would circle over him until his death in 1994.

Political memoirs have long been accused of being unreliable and self-serving. Authors, it is argued, will rewrite history in accordance with their political objectives, while even those with honest intentions will have had their memory contaminated by the encrustations of time. This chapter has provided several examples of this. *Full Circle* was a classic case of a memoirist bending and breaking the historical record. As a *pièce justificative*, Harold Wilson's *The Labour Government* was less than sincere, covering up many embarrassing aspects of the D-Notice Affair, for example. One should remember, however, that both Eden and Wilson wrote their memoirs almost certainly believing that the most sensitive documents of their stewardships would remain closed for 75 years, if not indefinitely.

The state has done what it can either to bar memoirs altogether, or to choreograph and manicure accounts in the service of protecting the nation, collective responsibility and

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<sup>300</sup> R. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978).

matters of privacy. National security, in truth, has never been at stake. Anxieties invariably surfaced over accounts that spoke too freely about views expressed by ministers and their official advisers. The Foreign Office was always on the look out for anything untoward said about other countries, especially America and the Soviet Union, for fear of destabilising international relations. In a time when the private lives of politicians were supposedly sacred, quite often what really riled departments were 'spit-and-tell' memoirs, enlivened by personal touches of anecdote and portraiture. Ironically, while many authors aspired to write history of Rankean proportions, they ended up being drawn into relatively trivial issues, such as whether 'X' or 'Y' was a heavy imbibor. In many cases, it was not the memoir itself that caused the problem, but rather the timing of its publication. As a rule of thumb, the longer the author waited, the more he or she could reveal. The danger, of course, was that someone from outside the fraternity (i.e. foreign statesmen, journalists or enterprising historians) could scoop them. In policing memoirs, the Cabinet Office depended on tacit agreements, bluff and whim. Negotiated blue-pencilling, especially in dealing with former Prime Ministers, who had little regard for rules and regulations, was instinctively preferred to legislative control. No government, after all, was going to frogmarch a statesman of the first rank off to court. One might speculate that officials also feared that the OSA would lose its deterrent value in the event of an unsuccessful prosecution. Whitehall, it could be argued, proved remarkably successful in managing the past. No published memoir contained something so startling that it changed historiography overnight. This leads me to believe that officials might have pursued a policy of deliberately parcelling out small instalments of information in order to preclude a more damaging sensation further down the line. For example, were it not for hints of collusion emerging fitfully since 1956, *No End of a Lesson* would have set the literary world alight. By late 1975, following the Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors, Whitehall's procedural protections were never stronger. For all its freshness, candour and insight, *The Crossman Diaries* had the net effect of producing more, not less, secrecy.

## CONCLUSION

Writing in 1978, the veteran parliamentary correspondent, James Margach, said of Britain: 'Secretiveness is more firmly entrenched than it ever was; it has become a way of life.'<sup>1</sup> At first glance, this assessment seems apposite. The OSA, which conditioned civil servants towards reticence, and journalists towards timidity and self-censorship, was still on the statute book, despite constant appeals for its abolition. Though its judgements were not accomplished without some 'pull devil, pull baker' between HMG and Fleet Street, the D-Notice system continued to restrict the flow of information. In Whitehall, secrecy was a largely mindless reflex, and the default rule remained, 'When in doubt, classify'. The Higher Civil Service, in particular, treated secrecy with great seriousness. Sweeping sociological abstractions, however conveniently indeterminate, fail to capture its commitment to discretion and impassive countenance. Its values inherited from generations of rule, and perpetually replenished by the material benefits of a public school education, the Higher Civil Service interpreted government as a private affair, to be conducted by a small circle of trusted and like-minded acquaintances.<sup>2</sup> When presented with the beast of open government, the topmost mandarins ran Machiavellian rings around their ministerial masters, reminding them of the political dangers that would befall those who opened Pandora's box. The main pieces of Britain's constitutional furniture, including neutrality and anonymity, were still very much intact. One might argue that the preservation of closed policymaking was essential for effective public administration. Ministers engaged in discussing, formulating and agreeing upon a course of action rely on the deliverance of considered judgements and the provision of forthright, fearless advice from their civil servants. Too much openness could lead to a situation where officials become courtiers, mindful of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Margach, *The Abuse of Power: The War between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (London, 1978), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> H. Hecló and A. Wildavsky, *The Private Government of Public Money* (London, 1981).

what they say and reluctant to identify options that would be novel or contentious to the public.

By the mid-1970s, thanks in large part to a spate of spy scandals and a heavy cultural dose of memoirs and spy fiction, there was growing public awareness of intelligence and some knowledge of its ebb and flow. Though many were inaccurate and sensational, books about intelligence rolled off the presses at an extraordinary rate, while the jargon of espionage ('letter boxes', 'moles', 'sleepers') had firmly entered common parlance. In 1974, Whitehall broke a lifetime vow 'NEVER' to disgorge its Sigint secrets, by authorising the publication of Winterbotham's memoir, *The Ultra Secret*. Official histories also brought intelligence into the public eye and betokened willingness on behalf of authorities to move with the times. Despite these grudging concessions, the intelligence community remained the 'invisible man' of government, a state within a state, about which officials talked *sotto voce* and questions were never asked, even in Parliament. So far as government policy was concerned, clandestine operations had been shut down in August 1945, while all documents that referred to secret services found themselves in a historical 'Never-Never Land', withheld indefinitely from release to the Public Record Office.<sup>3</sup> In his evidence to the Franks Committee in 1972, the still unnameable Director-General of MI5, Sir Martin Furnival Jones, encapsulated the intelligence community's obsession with secrecy: 'It is an official secret if it is in an official file'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in 1973, the author and MI6 alumnus, Malcolm Muggeridge, wrote: 'Secrecy is as essential to British intelligence as vestments and incense to a Mass, or darkness to a Spiritual séance, and must at all costs be maintained, quite irrespective of whether or not it serves any purpose.'<sup>5</sup> How much secrecy surrounding intelligence was really necessary? As far as operational secrets were concerned, secrecy was entirely justified. An effective intelligence agency cannot

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<sup>3</sup> W.K. Wark, 'In Never-Never Land? The British Archives on Intelligence', *The Historical Journal*, 35:1 (March 1992), pp. 195-203; TNA CAB 185/13, 'Release to the Public of Records Relating to Intelligence', JIC (A), 20 September 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Franks, *Departmental Committee on Section 2 of the Official Secrets Acts 1911* (HMSO, September 1972), Cmnd. 5104, Volume 3, p. 249.

<sup>5</sup> M. Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time, Volume II* (London, 1973), p. 123.

function in a goldfish bowl, and needs to protect its operations, methods and sources. Intelligence gathering will be jeopardised if its capabilities are prematurely disclosed, especially in the field of Sigint, where counter-measures can be developed and implemented reasonably quickly. Concealing the identity of operational staff (or foreign nationals who put their lives at risk) was also entirely warranted. Indeed, as the danger of retribution against individuals is not necessarily restricted to a single generation, one should not assume that the passage of time concomitantly diminishes the hazards of disclosure. Moreover, unless intelligence agencies can guarantee the safety of their sources, they will struggle to recruit future agents. During the height of the Cold War, when Britain relied on its technological edge to counter overwhelming Soviet superiority in conventional forces, the same religious dedication to secrecy was also perfectly permissible with regard to details of weaponry or scientific research. This said, government sensibilities often ensured that secrecy went beyond legitimate security concerns, sometimes irrational to the point of absurdity. Walled off from public view for over fifty years, much of what we now know about the Crabb Affair is somewhat mundane, revealing a system wedded to a culture of undue secrecy, haunted by political embarrassment, and saddled by petty rivalries and intra-state conflict.

The American experience was rather different.<sup>6</sup> Though inheriting many of its traditions and habits from the British, by 1975 the CIA was the most open and scrutinised intelligence body in the Western world. Its inception in September 1947 was preceded by several months of heated debate in Congress, with some senators, most notably Edward Robertson, fearing that such an organisation had 'all the potentialities of an American Gestapo'. From Harry Truman through to Gerald Ford, no administration ever attempted to hide the CIA's existence, and its Director was publicly named. Whereas British intelligence operated from 'invisible' buildings (or 'blanks on the ordinance survey map'),<sup>7</sup> CIA Headquarters at Langley, Virginia, was an American landmark. By June 1961, the motorist entering Washington from the South would pass

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<sup>6</sup> See A.S. Hulnick, *Fixing the Spy Machine: Preparing American Intelligence for the Twenty-first Century* (London, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> B. Porter, 'Boarder or Day Boy?', *London Review of Books*, 21 (15 July 1999), p. 13.



a large road-sign bearing the legend, 'Keep Right for the CIA'.<sup>8</sup> Public enquiries routinely dragged US intelligence into the sunlight. Set up to investigate the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Report of the Warren Commission (1964) referred to the extreme physical and psychological pressures applied by the CIA to the Russian defector, Yuri Nosenko. In December 1974, *The New York Times* reporter and muckraker, Seymour Hersh, published a full-blown exposé on illegal activities by the Agency. Based on a Top Secret Report (known as the 'Family Jewels'), Hersh's front-page splash revealed that the CIA had carried out assassination attempts on foreign leaders; had burgled and bugged American homes; had conducted 'experiments' (including mind control) on US citizens; and had infiltrated anti-war movements and other dissident groups. Over the next twelve months, both the Rockefeller Commission and the Church Committee would corroborate many of these damaging charges in a full blaze of publicity, with the latter comparing the CIA to a rampaging 'rogue elephant'. Confirmation of widespread 'intelligence abuses' led directly to the establishment of congressional oversight committees. President Ford even issued an Executive Order, available as a public document, prohibiting the assassination of foreign leaders.

Whitehall's undaunted commitment to keeping intelligence matters out of the public domain was later famously demonstrated by the 'Spycatcher Affair' in 1986-8, when Margaret Thatcher tried unsuccessfully to suppress the memoirs of Peter Wright, an embittered former Assistant Director of MI5. Ghost-written by Paul Greengrass (who would later direct the Jason Bourne films), *Spycatcher* alleged that the late Sir Roger Hollis, a former Director-General of the Service, had been a Soviet mole, and accused MI5 of plotting against, snooping on and defaming, Harold Wilson in the mid-1970s. Wright's allegations were not particularly novel. In March 1981, Chapman Pincher had published *Their Trade is Treachery*, which forced Thatcher to admit before a hushed House that Hollis had been investigated some years earlier as a possible Russian spy. Unlike Pincher, however, Wright was an insider who had taken a lifelong

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<sup>8</sup> TNA CAB 21/5163, 'President Kennedy's Difficulties with the Press', H. Caccia to A. Douglas-

oath of silence and whose account was less easily 'deniable'. What made *Spycatcher* objectionable to Whitehall was the fact that the allegations had come from the horse's mouth. '[This] has nothing to do with freedom of speech', stated a senior official, 'but everything to do with the notion that if you're a secret agent, you bloody well stay secret.'<sup>9</sup> In 1987, HMG banned *Spycatcher* in the UK; prohibited newspaper reportage with a series of gag orders; and sought a court injunction to halt the book's publication in Australia. The insistence on a blanket ban was absurd. *Spycatcher* had already been published in the United States and ranked first on *The New York Times* best-sellers list. Thousands of copies had crossed the Atlantic and were washing up in second-hand bookstores. Tony Benn even read aloud from the memoir before a large crowd of listeners at Hyde Park's Speaker's Corner.<sup>10</sup> The Affair descended into complete farce when the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, was dispatched to the Australian courtroom to present the government's case. His appearance in the witness box made him a 'household name' and cast serious doubts on the principle of anonymity.<sup>11</sup> It also led to accusations of improper loyalty and politicisation of the Higher Civil Service. The Liberal leader, David Steel, labelled the Cabinet Secretary as 'damaged goods' – hijacked by HMG to act as a 'garbage operator' for what was ultimately a political matter. During his time in the spotlight, Armstrong endured a torrid time, harried by a brash young advocate, Malcolm Turnbull, and ridiculed by the world's media for refusing to accept that MI6 existed. The Cabinet Secretary's credibility was fatally undermined when, caught off-guard under cross-examination, he was forced to retract his earlier evidence, conceding, in a priceless admission, that he had been 'economical with the truth'.

Attempts to squelch publication failed and brought mockery upon official attitudes to disclosure. The judge said of Armstrong's testimony that it must be approached with 'considerable reserve'. Open sales of *Spycatcher* overseas, coupled with the fact that no action had been taken over numerous other memoirs about intelligence, had rendered the question of secrecy a moot point. Mr Justice Kirby

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Home, 14 June 1961.

<sup>9</sup> L. Zuckerman, 'How not to Silence a Spy', *Time*, 17 August 1987.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

branded the book: 'One rather cantankerous old man's perspective of technology long out-dated, people long since dead and controversies tirelessly worked over by numberless writers.'<sup>12</sup> According to some estimates, HMG spent nearly £3m in worldwide legal fees trying to protect its policy of blanket secrecy. The media frenzy and public debate that *Spycatcher* generated would, over time, lead to a relaxation of strict intelligence taboos. The Security Service Act (1989) and the Intelligence Services Act (1994) placed MI5, MI6 and GCHQ for the first time on a legislative footing. In 1992, Stella Rimington became the first Director-General of MI5 to be publicly named, and a year later the first to be photographed while in office. As part of the Waldegrave Initiative on Open Government, in 1993 the first tranche of SOE and (pre-1909) MI6 papers were declassified, thus negating the platitude that intelligence archives were a 'Never-Never Land' that no independent scholar was ever going to visit.

Ostensibly, then, Britain's empire of secrecy proved to be remarkably durable. The *Spycatcher* Affair illustrates that a stolid and settled habit of administrative secrecy was very much alive beyond 1975. That said, I would argue that secrecy at the end of my period was a different animal to what it had been in 1945. Generally speaking, although certain pockets within government refused to accept this development, the era of 'total secrecy' in which an ossified state could operate completely hidden from a deferential public was over. The Cold War saw a proliferation of discourses concerned with openness, as secrecy began to assume a slightly furtive, conspiratorial implication, which, in itself, provoked opposition. The retreat from total secrecy was in part the consequence of state expansion. As the activities of government grew exponentially (especially in the spheres of health, pensions, and education), Whitehall accumulated more and more information about private citizens, who, in turn, demanded assurances that these actions were being carried out in professional and ethical ways. For ministers and their policies to be respected, it became axiomatic that government should open up. Recognising that too much secrecy only fed suspicion, Edward Heath, in particular, did

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<sup>11</sup> P. Hennessy, 'Profile: Sir Robert Armstrong', *Contemporary Record*, 1:4 (Winter 1988), p. 28.

what he could to put a public face on private government. Whether through officially sanctioned memoirs, official histories or liberal declassification policies, disseminating more information was gradually considered vital to restoring public faith in the state. Spy scandals, not to mention the Suez debacle, had undercut Whitehall's adage, 'We Know Best', and dishonoured the deference and trust that had justified its claim to operate in silence.

Governments would, in time, be expected to enact legislation designed to prevent the unsanctioned invasion of personal privacy from information-hoarding public authorities. Since the mid-1970s, following remarkable advances in the fields of digital technology and computerisation, one of the distinguishing features of the modern state is its increased collection of data about private citizens, from employment, medical and criminal records, to intimate details about property ownership, student loan applications, and the like. The fear that officials might mishandle such personal information, or that it might become nothing more than a commodity, readily trafficked in a panoptic marketplace regulated only by the capricious whims of consumer taste and behaviour, led HMG to pass the Data Protection Act in 1998. Providing the legal framework to protect privacy, the Act gives individuals the right to know what information is held about them, and imposes obligations on departments who process, exchange and store it. The Act has nevertheless proved to be something of a mixed blessing. In September 2008, the Information Commissioner's Office accused public bodies of blocking FOI requests, and filleting documents released to the National Archives, under the false cover (or 'duck out') of data protection. It remains to be seen whether governments could in fact exploit the Act to sequester embarrassing documents already available in national repositories. In America, especially since 9/11, similar legislation has helped security apparatchiks to 'reclassify' some 55,000 pages of previously 'open' material, and thus roll back transparency.<sup>13</sup>

By 1975, many of the mechanisms for controlling information had been severely weakened, if not altogether compromised. Ironically, whereas the rank-and-

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<sup>13</sup> 'Spycatcher: A Diverting Obsession', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 October 1988, p. 1174.

file respected the culture of secrecy and seldom broke the 'rules', the elite nonchalantly discarded restrictions. Rightly or wrongly, this thesis has often bordered on 'family history', illustrating a small subculture of narrowly recruited men, who used their standing and personal connections to bypass regulations they had themselves created. Former Prime Ministers looking to cash-in on their fame and notoriety were the worst offenders. In strict defiance of the OSA, not to mention *ad hoc* directives regarding the handling of Cabinet documents, every Prime Minister published with total impunity a gold-plated account of his stewardship. Whereas comparatively lesser lights, such as Richard Crossman, were taken to court, Anthony Eden, for example, ransacked departmental records and included a tissue of secret documents in his Suez autobiography. It was not only Prime Ministers who enjoyed the benefits of status. In 1972, on account of his Old Boy contacts, John Masterman was permitted to drive a coach and horses through the rules regarding intelligence memoirs. Globalisation was also destabilising the ability to maintain effective control. Frustrated by the obstructionism and narrow-mindedness of the state censor, many authors began shipping their exposés to American publishers, where both the OSA and the D-Notice Committee had no jurisdiction. More ominously, enterprising authors, such as Sefton Delmer and Anthony Cave-Brown, had demonstrated that UK secrets could be prised out of the archives and libraries of foreign states. With its 'sunset laws' and landmark Freedom of Information Act, passed by Congress in 1966, America was a potential Aladdin's cave – or 'wonderland' – where all sorts of treasure might be unearthed.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout this thesis, archival evidence has demonstrated that officials routinely sought to halt the release of secrets from the past, in order to safeguard both present-day agendas and potential future scenarios. Looking back with the advantage of hindsight, one might think that concealing Ultra was counter-intuitive, since it denied governments the opportunity to bask in the glory of an undoubted success story. At the time, however, its non-disclosure was deemed absolutely necessary, for fear that war

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<sup>13</sup> S. Shane, 'U.S. Reclassifies Many Documents in Secret Review', *The New York Times*, 21 February 2006.

<sup>14</sup> See R.J. Aldrich, 'Never-Never Land and Wonderland? British and American Policy on Intelligence Archives', *Studies in Intelligence*, 38:5 (1995), pp. 17-26.

might once again engulf Europe, thus necessitating the reactivation of Bletchley technology. Only in the early 1970s, when the techniques of wartime Sigint had been rendered obsolete, was it considered safe to startle the world with the mysteries of Station X. In 1945, preventing the hand of the past from adversely sculpting the landscape of the future was an altogether easier task. The absence of a thirty or fifty-year rule ensured that departments could withhold papers well beyond the life span of any government or individual. With few exceptions, statesmen were happy to wait ten, twenty, sometimes thirty years, before publishing reminiscences of their official life. The press, arguably still on a 'war footing', was neither fearless nor unfettered, and regarded the immediate exposure of great secrets as anomalous and indecent.

In 1975, the situation was very different. The Public Records Act (1958, 1967) made certain that a goldstream of material would become available sooner or later, and prompted the rise of contemporary history, unconcerned with dead issues of the long-distant past, as a respectable branch of scholarship. The memoir industry was now offering handsome financial incentives to authors willing to publish explosive material within months of leaving the political stage. Some, like Harold Wilson, were still treading the boards when making their first foray into print. Interestingly, archival evidence has tended to reveal that departments were often most concerned with memoirists who flouted the rules of privacy, by peppering their accounts with tittle-tattle and harmful portraiture. Whether 'John Smith' was a hard-drinking and libidinous pleasure seeker might seem like trivial matter; to an enemy, however, on the look out for character flaws, knowledge that a politician or civil servant was a creature of undisciplined urges could prove extremely valuable. In Fleet Street, it had become commonplace for 'diggers' to ferret out political and administrative miscues, within days of their happening, while increased rivalry between newspaper empires ensured that each story was sensationalised. Chapman Pincher, whose talent for nosing out secrets and stirring up trouble was unrivalled, promised the public – 'tomorrow's news today'. Press revelations often shaded over into conspiracy theory. During the Crabb

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Affair, madcap stories succeeded, where polite appeals to the national interest had previously fallen short, in forcing (albeit fleeting) parliamentary discussion about the intelligence services.

None of the press disclosures discussed in this thesis smacked of reckless opportunism. Though renowned for being waspish and unforgiving when it came to executive foul-ups, Chapman Pincher never put lives or operations at risk. The same perhaps cannot be said of mainstream American journalists during the same period. As Sir Harold Caccia, then British Ambassador, underlined in June 1961, 'Even the most responsible [US] papers rate topicality of news before security considerations'.<sup>15</sup> American hacks, continued Caccia, routinely published full and detailed reports of military thinking, weapons developments and 'other information of great value to the enemies of the United States'.<sup>16</sup> For example, months before the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961, the American press brought to light what should have been a covert action, by reporting that anti-Castro Cuban exiles had been spotted in CIA guerrilla training camps around Miami and Guatemala. When the invasion came to grief, *The New York Times* correspondents, James Eston, Wallace Carroll and Turner Catledge, said flatly that the botched landings had been planned, financed and organised by the CIA and that the man primarily responsible was Richard Bissell, its Director for Plans. 'If I have any regrets about this story', proclaimed Catledge, 'it is that we didn't get into it a great deal earlier'.<sup>17</sup>

The thirty-year rule, coupled with the 'instant history' of memoirs and press reporting, created a rival public sphere and had the cumulative effect of bringing the horizon of the future a little closer than it had ever been before. In Whitehall, discussion had left the pitfall of whether secrets could be kept forever, and had segued into the more pertinent issue of how to control inevitable disclosure. Without wanting to hurtle into an undesirable future, officials increasingly stared into a crystal ball and asked the question, 'How is this going to look *when* (rather than *if*) it comes out'? This

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<sup>15</sup> TNA CAB 21/5163, 'President Kennedy's Difficulties with the Press', H. Caccia to A. Douglas-Home, 14 June 1961.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

strategy was as much 'policing the future' as 'policing the past'. No government could clearly afford the luxury of inaction. Certain things, if revealed by the wrong people and at the wrong time, had the potential to cause serious embarrassment. As this thesis has shown, officials tended to lose most sleep over disclosures that threatened the special relationship with the US, which remained at the centre of British foreign and defence policy during the Cold War. With fewer secrets seemingly safe from future exposure, government-led publicity, once anathema, assumed a greater prominence in information management. By volunteering more information under the aegis of official histories or carefully preened memoirs, Whitehall attempted to pre-empt 'outsider' accounts and ensure that its skeletons would emerge in progressive stages, rather than plunges. One might argue that such pre-meditated gestures of openness also served as a matador's cape, making sure that the bull – whether he be the public, parliament or the press – huffed and puffed at the cape, and not at subjects that were thought better left undisturbed.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



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