Jock Kane's story

THE IBA'S DECISION to block the showing of the World in Action film on GCHQ's security deficiences and financial laxity was a further demonstration of the power that GCHQ can exert beyond the shores of its own lush empire, through ritualistic references to the alleged requirements of 'national security'. The importance of GCHQ to the security of this nation is considerably called into question by the secret Department's own behaviour.

The Prime Minister's admission, earlier this week, that some of my allegations were 'well founded' is welcome. But her repudiation of security deficiences and financial laxity was a demonstration of the power that GCHQ can exert beyond the shores of its own base and our working areas. They are not supposed to be a target, and yet they are monitored by GCHQ's security department.

This was just part of a casual pattern: up to the time I left Little Sai Wan there was a cameraman at a point of easy access for many of staff, who used it for all purposes, quite without check. One confidential clerk used to cheerfully churn out numerous copies of classified documents on this machine. She thought nothing of this as a security problem so long as she had the original.

Little Sai Wan is supposed to be a sensitive and important operation. It almost passes belief that its security is placed, presumably by deliberate choice, in the hands of 60-year-old men, who go out for three-year tours as GCHQ's Security Office Far East (SOPE) to wind-up their official careers.

GCHQ's curious willingness to see its highly-secret personnel in the hands of financial predators lasts to the very end of each tour, when it is time to pack and go home. Three packers' estimates are required, and GCHQ administration in my time recommended Shanghai Packer Koo, who (discreetly) offered free metal trunks and charged HK$10 per cubic foot. In order to meet the regulations, Koo kindly offered to provide estimates in three names — his own being the lowest. His charge, however, was exactly twice that of, say, Crown Packers, who were never recommended by GCHQ. (Details of administrative changes and staff movements, in this sensitive establishment were known to landlords, packers and so on, even before staff themselves were told.)

Incidents in the United Kingdom, too, show that 'security' is a convenient pretense, not an operational reality. At the Scarborough station, one senior officer used regularly to remove the most highly-classified documents he could find in the secure areas of the station. He was quietly moved sideways to a high-ranking post in the Department of the Environment, and has since been twice promoted.

On more than one occasion at Little Sai Wan, I found the Chinese cleaners calmly shifting around documents in order to polish underneath. These documents bore a codeword identifying them as the most sensitive and restricted material in GCHQ.

On one occasion a Duty Officer left four Chinese carpenters in a room full of Top Secret and Secret documents. They had moved them locked away — while he slept in a room on another floor. The four carpenters were alone with the documents for 6 hours.

When I started complaining about these incidents, I became the target of what can only be taken to be a hostile intelligence service. I was photographed close-up in the middle of a Hong Kong street by a Chinese, who quickly transferred his camera to an accomplice for a quick getaway. Although I reported this incident — which was clear evidence of continuing Chinese penetration of the station — the mystery of the photographer was never solved by GCHQ's security department.

Clean up the secrets

An investigation into the missing documents mentioned last week might usefully examine the disregard of official regulations affecting local Chinese staff who cleaned the base and our working areas. They are not supposed to be a target, and yet they are monitored by GCHQ's security department. Attitudes in no way changed since 1973.