

Destabilising the 'decent people'

It is now accepted that phone-tapping levels in this country are far higher than Parliament has been allowed to know. Further disclosures in the NS about the spread of bugging techniques, and about the cost, extent and complexity of the security empire, have been greeted with tacit, sullen acknowledgment.

This week, we open up a more general issue. First, we deploy evidence which stiffens the long-held suspicion that MI5 employs another classic device of arrogant surveillance agencies – 'black bag jobs', or, more bluntly, breaking-and-entering. But the same evidence also shows how far we have gone towards the position where the real 'targets' of the intelligence agencies turn out to be the democratic institutions they are supposed to be defending. The limits of free press inquiry, as defined here by MI5 officials, are frighteningly low: what is worse is that they are prepared to use selective disinformation against citizens of any political colouration who dare to challenge that definition. The case for an overall inquiry into the operations of the security services becomes steadily more difficult to resist. Report by DUNCAN CAMPBELL, BRUCE PAGE and NICK ANNING.

IN NOVEMBER 1978 the Official Secrets trial collapsed, amid lurid manifestations of official buffoonery. Worldly-wise opinion now treats it as merely an ill-omened jape on the part of MI5.

New evidence presented here re-emphasises that its initial character was far from humorous. Recent NEW STATESMAN issues have exposed the snooping technologies employed by Britain's free-booting intelligence agencies: phone-taps, mail-interception, elaborate bugging devices. We now offer a case-study in the uses made of the material they gather: specifically, a campaign to transmit McCarthyite smears through the news media, intended to influence both political opinion, and the likely course of criminal proceedings (that is, the Official Secrets trial itself).

The main document is an office memo written by Gerry Gable, a reporter for London Weekend Television, which he says follows a lunch with a Security Service employee in May 1977. It reached us without illegality. It is not published out of any gratuitous desire to embarrass LWT – which has an impressive record of editorial independence – or Mr Gable himself, who enjoys considerable standing among other journalists, particularly because of his investigations of the National Front. But it provides a rare example of hard evidence about a subject which generally remains shadowy: the strategy and tactics of news-media manipulation, as employed by MI5 and the Special Branch.

The wording of Mr Gable's memo suggests clearly that he was engaged in a two-way transaction with his security sources ('I have now given the names I have acquired to be



London Weekend Television

From: Gerry Gable
 Date: 2nd May, 1977
 About: Agencies
 To: Julian/Mike Braham/Barry Cox (Please keep these reports secure)

Phil Kelly was a member of the Young Liberals who in the sixties joined what was known as "the Red Guard". Young Liberals like Peter Hain and Peter Hellyer went against the traditional Liberal line and started campaigning along lines more akin to the Radical left. They stood out against the Vietnam War/Apartheid and for the Palestinians against the Israelis. At home they were for direct action on housing and other evils in our society.

I have now given the names I have acquired to be checked out by British/French security services, especially the French and German connections and the South American stuff is being checked by Geoffrey Stewart-Smith's institute. He has strong CIA links. I may try somebody in the Israeli Foreign Office that I know for some checks on Kelly. It is now a time of waiting for a feed-back and also further checks here.

I have attached a number of documents including the transcript of Kelly's interview with World in Action. It goes without saying that I would like this kept strictly secret.

GERRY GABLE

'Strictly secret'; one of a series of reports on other journalists which London Weekend TV researcher Gerry Gable prepared with the assistance of propaganda input by MI5. Much of the information thus supplied was wholly untrue or misleading.

checked out by British/French security services...'). The nature of the official material received and recorded by him – interleaved with considerable quantities of random gossip – suggests that much of it was coloured by phone-tap information and informers' reports.

What is firstly conspicuous about it is that it consists almost entirely of libellous untruths about a group of 'target' individuals – the Official Secrets defendants, the American deportees Philip Agee and Mark Hosenball and several of their acquaintances. In certain respects, material from Special Branch inquiries must have been deliberately falsified in order to deceive Gable and his employers.

What is secondly conspicuous about the material is that it parallels, in documentary form, the vague but minatory briefings which were dispensed in 1977 by Home Secretary Merlyn Rees to any MP expressing concern about either the Agee/Hosenball deportation, or against the savage use of the espionage sections of the Official Secrets Act against Crispin Aubrey, Duncan Campbell and John Berry (the 'ABC' trio). Naively enough, Gerry Gable has performed the valuable service of recording the Security Service's justification – as served up to tolerably credulous recipients – for the great 'national security' scare of 1976-8. The fact that it has since been exploded should not obscure recollection of how near it came to being a self-proving proposition.

A more complex and more explosive aspect of the matter lies in the timing of MI5's briefing to Gable. The memo, written on 2

May 1977, clearly shows MI5's intense interest in manipulating events around the Agee/Hosenball case and the beginnings of the ABC prosecution.

But the person mentioned most frequently – and libellously – in its pages was not directly involved in either case: Philip Kelly, a young journalist who was indeed well-acquainted with both sets of accused men. Kelly, on the account of Gable's 'top-level security service sources', is presented (absurdly) as the 'KGB man' deriving treasonable benefit from all their activities.

Kelly was around this time one of the victims of a number of London thefts and burglaries which were clearly designed to gather information and documents, rather than loot. As Robin Cook MP has said more than once, suspicion has always inevitably pointed towards MI5. Up to now, pressure for any full inquiry has always been met with bland refusal. Now that it can be shown that MI5 had at the relevant time a deep fascination – not to say berserk obsession – with Kelly the 'master spy', such a refusal becomes rather harder to justify.

THE MEMO, ADMITTED to be one of a series, is headed 'Agencies', presumably a reference to Gable's information sources (named, apart from MI5, as the CIA, French and German security and the 'Israeli Foreign Office'). The addressees are Julian Norridge and Mike Braham, both producers on LWT's *London Programme* and Barry Cox, the company's Head of Current Affairs.

London Weekend never produced a full-

Phil Kelly: one target of MI5's smear operations in the British media



scale programme about either the ABC case or the Agee/Hosenball deportation. Barry Cox says that neither subject would have fallen readily into the remit of either the *London Programme* or LWT's other current-affairs show, *Weekend World*.

How much was executive opinion influenced by the Gable memo and its still-unrevealed companion pieces? Barry Cox points out that (a) he was not substantially influenced himself, since he offered to give evidence for the ABC defence, and (b) that LWT's *Saturday Night People* broke the story of the Official Secrets juror who turned out to be a highly biased ex-SAS soldier, forcing a new trial with a major prosecution count excluded.

Would the existence of a secret memo naming Kelly as a KGB agent affect his prospects of employment with LWT? Mr Cox said that, as the story had never come to anything, it would not do so. However, we have established that a year later it was still being suggested that LWT might look into the proposition that Kelly's then employers Interpress Agency were receiving improper foreign subventions.

The 'Agencies' memo mixes up some perfectly accurate facts with a number of half-truths – and constructs upon them a series of fantasies, linking the Young Liberals with Cubans, Palestinian and German terrorists, various contributors to *Time Out*, members of the London Co-Op, and of course the KGB, into a deadly, all-encompassing conspiracy.

It correctly states that Kelly, its neutral character, became involved in politics as a Young Liberal, though incorrectly states that he came from a 'strictly working-class background'. The detail is slight, but reflects on Mr Gable's claim to have gathered much of the material 'not from the security services, but

from people I have known on the Left for 20 years'. Anyone of the Left seriously acquainted with Kelly would know that both of his parents were teachers.

Correctly, it states that he campaigned against the Vietnam war, but continues:

It was suggested that in either late '67 or early '68 he travelled to Cuba and was trained as was 'Carlos' during the same period . . .

Kelly's comment on this is to state that he has never been to Cuba, and that examination of his passport will prove it. Even if he had been, it would scarcely justify associating him with the notorious killer 'Carlos'.

The memo is too lengthy (and confused) to quote in full, especially as each of its numerous defamations requires an accompanying disclaimer. However, the chief features of the Kelly 'profile' must be dealt with.

. . . in the summer of 1969, Kelly went to Jordan, not, as he told people, to see the refugee camps, schools and medical aid groups, but to a proper Fatah training camp. Members of the Baader-Meinhof group also attended these camps and learnt their bombing and killing skills in them. Kelly was taught firearms/explosives and went out on some treks to the Israeli border with Fatah patrols . . .

Kelly agrees that he went to Jordan with a group of British left-wingers sympathetic to the Palestinians. But he totally denies having received any military training during the trip (which he has never concealed). He was stopped at London Airport on his return, and grilled by Special Branch detectives about his imagined military exploits. The source of these accusations made to Kelly appears to be one of his companions on the trip who, after demonstrating violent anti-semitic tendencies (and a propensity to behave in the manner ascribed to Kelly) was then detached from the group, and returned to London two weeks early. As much is acknowledged by Gable, who asserts that an 'eye-witness' has backed up his claims.

This 'eye-witness' is apparently a person well known to Gable, who suggests that on several later occasions Kelly had again encountered him. At that stage, the man, says Gable:

had infiltrated the Palestinians and some left groups.

There is remarkably close congruence between the information which the Special Branch had received at Heathrow Airport in

1970, and the 'eye-witness' story Gable was retailing in 1977. The implication must be that Gable was at least aware of the infiltration of a Special Branch or MI5 informer among left-wing groups.

These remarkable insinuations continue into the early Seventies, when Kelly

went to work in West Germany and was away for around two years, I understand that he worked as a sports reporter (he was there at the time of the Munich massacre). He also had a German girlfriend whose name is either Gerde Jager or Jaeger, the daughter of a rich lawyer . . .

The 'rich lawyer', to connoisseurs, suggests a Baader-Meinhof connection. Kelly's version is that he worked for seven-eight months in Germany from autumn 1974. He never visited Munich (where the Olympic massacre took place in 1972). He did have a girlfriend (of a similar name) whose father was a prosperous electronics engineer.

THESE, AND OTHER colourful if shaky tales build up a picture of Kelly the master-spy and overall fixer: 'Since the Agee/Hosenball expulsion notices were issued, Kelly is being seen more and more running around organising things . . .' And this brings us firmly back to the timing of the memo: 2 May could hardly have been a more critical day.

After hearings before the Home Office's panels of 'wise men' in January and February, Hosenball took his case to the Divisional Court in March, while Agee tried for a hearing before the European Commission for Human Rights. Both failed.

Then on 28 April the Law Lords refused, Hosenball leave to appeal. Home Secretary Merlyn Rees promised that no final deportation order would be served before a House of Commons debate scheduled for 3 May.

To the ABC defendants, the timing was even more crucial. The three had just appeared in court, on 26 April, expecting the Attorney-General's decision on whether Official Secrets charges could stand. It was, they learnt, to be delayed to 10 May, and then 24 May, because of pressure of business. In the meantime, it was critical for MI5 to influence opinion at every possible level: to obtain adverse news coverage, or at least discourage interest and concern.

And there was another parliamentary occasion impending while Gable recorded the thoughts of his 'top-level security sources'. Labour back-bencher Robin Cook had been allotted an Adjournment Debate on the Special Branch for 5 May: it was his well-publicised intention to place before the House details of a startling series of document thefts and other crimes which had affected members of the Agee/Hosenball and ABC defence committees.¹

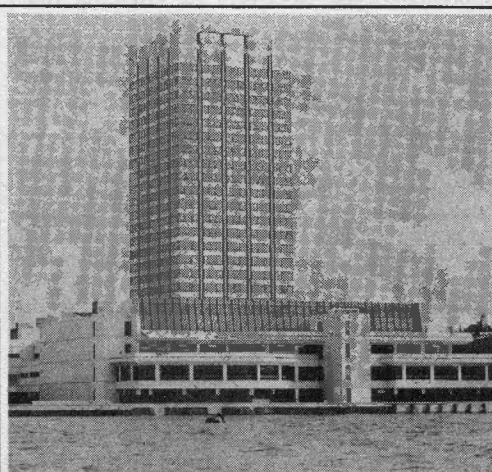
Meanwhile the Special Branch were conducting a widespread and noisy inquiry, under MI5's direction, which was presumably aimed at obtaining further 'evidence', but was chiefly attracting unwelcome notoriety. Raids on students, and the almost random questioning of journalists, were beginning to make the inquiry look ridiculous.

On the evening of 3 May, the Commons held its remarkably well-attended debate on 'Mr Agee and Mr Hosenball', and Rees swayed the members to his side by suggesting – with further vague hints provided in private

1. He published an article on the subject in the NS on 6 May.



Left, MI5 headquarters at Curzon Street House, Mayfair, London W1. Callers who ask for the Press Section on its well-known telephone number – 491 4488 – are put through to an office with several extensions. But the Press Section appears to be more concerned with spying on journalists than answering outside inquiries. Right, London Weekend TV's studios on the South Bank of the Thames.



– that he had seen secret material of deadly import.

Some people . . . object to my decisions in the particular cases. I understand that, *but I have the information before me* (emphasis added). It is my decision.

Was this the same information that was laid before Gerry Gable, and expounded in his memo:

The arrest of Campbell/Berry and Aubrey has caused a civil rights row, but according to my top level security sources, they inform me in strictest confidence that for about four years Campbell/Berry/Kelly and others have been systematically gathering top-level security material. Campbell, who claims to have only an interest in technological matters as far as the state is involved, had done four years detailed research into the whole structure of the other side of not only our Intelligence services but those of other NATO countries. He has also gone to people who work on top security contracts and started off by asking them about open commercial work their companies do and then gradually asked them for information on top secret work, including that on under-water detection hardware, which he clearly knows is beyond the pale.

Politically it appears the group have no one political guiding light or line, but Kelly is the KGB man who reaps the goodies gathered by other people . . .

Mr Gable strenuously contends that most of this passage came from his own 'contacts on the left', and not from security men. But this claim is almost impossible to reconcile with the words employed. The first point about this thesis is that it would alarm anyone – from a Home Secretary downwards – who took it at face value. And Mr Gable's contacts made it quite clear that they expected people to be frightened by the 'information':

The security service accepts that once the real nature of this case begins to emerge they expect people like Jonathan Aitken (the Tory MP, who had expressed support for ABC) will fade away fast. The security service accepts that a number of decent people have been signed up to support these people on civil rights grounds and they also unofficially accept all the shortcomings of the act they have been held under, but they say they are sure this has gone well beyond the bounds of Press Investigation.

It is, of course, notorious that the ABC prosecution failed practically across the boards but there is, in a sense, less objection to matters which could just about be dressed up credibly enough to go to court. More serious is the fact that several of the things which the spooks retailed to Gable – and by implication, to Rees and 'decent people' everywhere – were things which they must have been known to be untrue.

Centrally, they held the tape-recording of the interview held on the night when all three ABC defendants were arrested, and which proved conclusively that John Berry and Duncan Campbell, so far from being seasoned conspirators, were meeting then for the first time in their lives. Certainly the Special Branch had been conducting a massive series of interviews with electronics firms, in an eventually unsuccessful attempt to show that Campbell's inquiries amounted to something more than pertinacious journalism.

Of course, the whole intimidating structure, as retailed to Gable, depended upon the idea of the un-charged and un-deportable Kelly as the KGB mastermind of the whole conspiracy. Whether they seriously believed this is impossible to say: it would not be credible to

anyone personally acquainted with the people involved, and aware of the relationships between them. It might be credible to someone working on telephone-tap information, well-fertilised by a compost of gossip.

BEFORE EXAMINING the implications of the 'Kelly theory', it is worth recalling that the Spooks' strategy did not fail by a wide margin. Many other journalists undoubtedly received briefings similar to Gable's, even if they did not record them in writing. Defence lawyers seeking for senior journalistic witnesses ready to testify to the orthodoxy of the practices under attack in the ABC case did not find their task easy: some progress was made in isolating the defendants from 'decent people', and this was accompanied by harassment clearly calculated to depress their morale and tempt them into indiscretions.

In the end, many 'decent people' remained as defenders of ABC's cause (conspicuously including Mr Jonathan Aitken). It may be doubted whether the present editor of the NEW STATESMAN counts as a decent person, but the *Observer* columnist Anthony Sampson remained unshaken in his willingness to testify.

The security services' aim, clearly, was to have a largely secret trial, surrounded by thick rumours of KGB plots, after which a group of isolated radicals would receive stiff jail sentences. Thus, of course, all of the fantasies they were broaching in 'strict confidence' to their admirers would be neatly validated, and a sharp lesson taught to all dissident reporters.

Very plainly, they gained considerable acceptance among senior Labour politicians for the proposition that the two deportees and the three ABC defendants were merely foot-soldiers in a much larger espionage army led by the fearsome Kelly. In the words of Phillip Whitehead MP, another of the stubbornly adhesive 'decent people':

What Rees hinted was that there was a terrorist/Irish/Baader-Meinhof connection . . . which had serious security implications. He gave no written evidence to support this statement, but rested on his connection with the security services . . . Bearing in mind that this was the time when Baader-Meinhof activity was at its height in West Germany, it wasn't so hard to imagine that there might be things we didn't know.

Still, if MI5 and the Special Branch were as deeply committed to their story as the Gable memo suggests, they would no doubt have appreciated the discovery of anything that might be purveyed as evidence. Here are the details of the series of break-ins to which Robin Cook MP had drawn attention more than once, and which now urgently required explanation.

● Monday, 7 February 1977, Winchester Mews NW1. Quarterlight forced on a car belonging to the treasurer of the Agee/Hosenball Defence Committee. Handbag with paying-in and paying-out record of the committee is stolen. But a passport, driving licence, diary, cheque-book and card are all handed into Barclays Bank, South Hampstead, a few days later, by an anonymous caller.

● Friday 11 February, outside London College of Printing near Elephant & Castle, Philip Kelly's car broken into while he attends a dance. The car contains no documents or papers, and nothing is taken.

● Monday 21 February, outside King's Cross. Another break-in to the car of the Agee/Hosenball treasurer. Papers rifled through, but nothing taken.

● Wednesday 23 February, Tottenham Magistrate's Court. Address book belonging to William Nash, a defence solicitor, vanishes inexplicably.

● Saturday 26 February. Car belonging to Roger Protz, journalist, of the newly-formed ABC Defence Committee, is broken into.

● Monday 25 April, London E5. House of Aidan White, journalist and a member of both Agee/Hosenball and ABC committees, is ransacked. Papers rifled, files entered. No valuables taken – not even a bag lying open with £3-4.

There were many lesser incidents suggesting energetic surveillance: the ABC arrests clearly followed from interception of mail bound for the National Council for Civil Liberties (to which Berry first wrote). This was followed on 14 February by a tap on Berry's phone. After the ABC arrests, a Post Office engineer called anonymously at the NCCL and told them that all their lines, and all of *Time Out's* had been tapped from 5 pm on Sunday 20 February (involving more than 30 lines).

Robin Cook suggested in Parliament that the break-ins were likely to be the work of a 'group of persons' prepared 'to break the law in search of information on the two defence committees'. He invited Merlyn Rees to give an assurance that no British security agency had been involved in any of the incidents.

Rees has never done so, although at the end of 1977 he wrote a letter which suggested, with bland assurance, that such a thing was impossible on general grounds:

. . . whatever may have happened in other countries, neither the police nor the security service nor anybody else in this country has authority to commit criminal offences.

'Authorisation', as Mr Rees ought to know, avoids the issue. Telephone taps may require some notional flummery of warrants, but only to salve the Post Office's residual conscience.

The ex-Metropolitan detective Dick Lee, in his honest and controversial account of the Operation Julie drugs case, makes it breezily apparent that the investigation was helped along more than once by a little illegal entry – and that nobody fooled around looking for 'authorisation'. It seems unlikely that MI5, committed to obtaining evidence for the imposing scenario they unfolded to Mr Gable, would act with greater restraint than Dick Lee and his police colleagues. (The difference, of course, is that Lee wasn't judging other people's politics.)

It may be worth emphasising that Mr Gable was certainly not the only person on the receiving end of vast quantities of MI5 flak, designed to eliminate or emasculate the news media's response to a basic attack – made, of course, through the traditional radical targets – upon all their liberties. And he did perform a kind of service by recording it all in copious detail.

What is saddest is to quote from the last few words of his memo:

I have now given the names I have acquired to be checked out by the British/French security services . . . it is now a time of waiting for a feed-back and also further checks here.

Of course, the feed-back never came, because the whole story was essentially black propaganda. It should be recorded that Mr Gable says it was just bad grammar that made him use the plural of 'names': but the text suggests that at the end of the exercise a few more snippets of gossip found a place in the MI5 distortion machine.