

GCHQ's lost secrets

GOVERNMENT Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the electronic spy agency at the centre of the continuing security row, has covered up the loss of many top secret documents from an intelligence station specially built to spy on the Chinese space and missile programme. According to GCHQ staff who have been in touch with the *New Statesman*, the documents – prominently marked TOP SECRET UMBRA – disappeared from the Stanley Fort Satellite Station in Hong Kong almost two years ago.

Further loss of information from GCHQ is bound to aggravate intelligence relations between Britain and the United States. The US has already asked for an account of the alleged spying activities of Geoffrey Prime, who stands trial at the Old Bailey later this month. The Stanley Fort station and related facilities are 'relied on' by the United States 'for national intelligence purposes', according to another document marked TOP SECRET UMBRA (obtained this time by the *New Statesman*) an assessment of intelligence activities in Asia and the Pacific prepared by the Australian

Joint Intelligence Organisation. The report identifies the most critical spying priority of the joint Australian/British station in Hong Kong as: 'Chinese nuclear, advanced weapon and space-testing activities.'

The satellite station at Stanley Fort was built by GCHQ in 1977, with substantial help from the Royal Air Force. Because it is so close to the Chinese mainland, it can monitor the signals of Chinese satellites and space vehicles when they communicate with their controlling stations on the ground in China.

According to people inside GCHQ, the loss of a 'whole book full of top secret documents' was blamed on a monitoring supervisor. An RAF tribunal found him guilty of negligence but failed to discover where the documents had gone. But GCHQ's security division decided not to take disciplinary action, in order to avoid any consequent publicity about the loss of the documents.

Seven months before the documents were lost, corruption and espionage at the station had been the focus of a well-publicised row, after

an inquiry by the *New Statesman* and the *Daily Mirror* (NS 23 May 1980). The government claimed then that the allegations were trivial but that 'such minor (security) improvements as seemed to be called for were put into effect'.

The loss of the book of Top Secret documents was in fact the second loss, and the third serious security breach in Hong Kong during 1980. Other secret documents had already been lost by another supervisor and in an unrelated incident a third monitoring supervisor was arrested on the base after giving a false name to security police when challenged. He had left his post monitoring Chinese signals to go to a party, returning later, very drunk.

The implications of GCHQ's continuing inability to keep its secrets intact will rebound in the United States, where NSA officials have 'made a convincing case concerning the value of the Hong Kong operation' both to GCHQ and its Australian partner, DSD. The marking applied to the documents, 'UMBRA', meant by international agreement that they contained special intelligence from monitoring operations. Even an ordinary Top Secret clearance does not allow civil or military officials

to see such sensitive 'codeword' material. According to another, ex-GCHQ official the lost Stanley Fort documents contained details of how to pick up, follow, and understand radio signals from Chinese satellites and rockets.

Armed with such information the Chinese, or other target countries could change their codes and frequencies. Such an event – immensely damaging to the GCHQ or NSA monitoring capacity – occurred in 1973, when two Taiwanese linguists defected to China from the Hong Kong station. Shortly afterwards, communications at the Lop Nor nuclear test site which had been intercepted in Hong Kong were rerouted by cables.

The Foreign Office says that it will not comment on any stories about leaks at GCHQ. But one ex-government intelligence official was willing to explain why the secrets haemorrhage from GCHQ goes on:

Other agencies produce only a handful of digested reports. But GCHQ's daily reports come by the sackful . . . I've seen the communications officer just tip them out all over the floor . . . there's no way you can keep track of every Top Secret bit of paper in such a mountain.

Duncan Campbell

MISCELLANY

Left on show

About 1700 people made their way to Queen Mary College, London, last weekend for the Moving Left Show, organised by *Marxism Today*, the 'theoretical' magazine of the Communist Party. Reflecting *Marxism Today's* aggressively non-sectarian spirit, the event attracted participants not usually associated with left-wing gatherings, such as Anna Ford (from breakfast television), Peter Jenkins (from the *Guardian*) and David Putnam (producer of *Chariots of Fire*). There were discussions on an extraordinary range of subjects, including films, feminism, eroticism, comedy, trade union democracy, language, Ireland, the Falklands, the media and – probably the most intriguingly titled session of all – 'boyfriends and all that'. An evening cabaret was provided by those who are usually the targets of stand-up comics.

The organisers of the Moving Left Show are delighted by its success. 'The predominant ethos of the weekend was that it was extremely open-minded and non-sectarian,' says Martin Jacques, editor of *Marxism Today*. 'It emphasised that culture is important as well as politics, and that people outside the Left are important to the development of the Left.'

New Plaid rules

The Left wing in Plaid Cymru consolidated their position at last weekend's annual conference when they

defeated the nationalist Old Guard on an important constitutional amendment. The aim of Plaid Cymru, thought the older nationalist wing, should simply be 'to secure self-government in Wales.' The socialists, who have for the last year been organised as the National Left, changed this to 'self-government for Wales through the establishment of a democratic socialist State.' Their argument is that Tory home rule would do no more for the Welsh than Tory Westminster rule – and that the Labour Party in Wales is now just a shell; its actual function is to provide the establishment for the administration of Wales. Although Plaid Cymru has not always been a socialist body it has, according to E. P. Thompson who spoke at a fringe meeting, been the most consistent of all political parties in its opposition to nuclear weapons.

Film over truth

At its first public showing, the Ministry of Defence's anti-CND film, *The Peace Game*, has found new admirers even among the pro-nuclear arms lobby who were hoping for something rather less embarrassingly hysterical. So unconfident was Armed Forces Minister, Peter Blaker, that he was clutching a script of what the questions and answers would be at the press conference. When genuinely critical, unscripted questions were asked, Mr Blaker announced his time was up. The history of the cold war, according to the Ministry of De-

fence, is that it was the USSR's first 'A' bomb test in 1949 which ended hopes of preventing the arms race. The previous US testing of five nuclear weapons apparently played no role at all. NATO, in MoD-speak, was a 'defensive' response to the USSR test. The fact that the Warsaw Pact was only formed some years later is not mentioned. The USA's refusal to ratify SALT II is due to their un-macho lack of enough nuclear weapons as the USSR won't 'negotiate seriously with military weaklings.' One other true fact MoD researchers failed to find out is that the *Peace Game* is also the title of another film by Peter Watkins – maker of the banned-in-perpetuity *War Game*.

Siege of London

Londoners who prefer to turn their backs on unemployment and other unpleasant facts like the rest of the country may be in for a rude reminder. The proposal to set up a 'tent city' of unemployed in London to campaign for jobs and peace was warmly supported by delegates to the North West TUC's People's Conventions on Jobs and Peace in Manchester last weekend. (Jobs and peace are linked because of the amount of work provided by the armaments industry). Among the proposals discussed by the Convention were plans for another People's March from Glasgow to London next year and the formation of 'broadly based' towns' committees to campaign on unemployment.

Plans for the march already have support from the North West, South East and West Midland Regional TUCs. But 'tent cities' – which were set up in the 1930s – may prove more controversial. Having marched to London, the unemployed would stay there, under canvas, and force the legislators to take notice.

Steelyard Reds

Has Yorkshire, the home of English trade union militancy, been hit by a bout of 'I'm all Right Jackism'? In the miners' strike ballot the 60,000 strong Yorkshire NUM, relatively secure in their jobs, voted by 56 per cent in favour of industrial action. In the strike ballots of the previous two years the area returned majorities of 65 and 66 per cent. Within Yorkshire it has been Sheffield and steel that have been hit by the recession, as documented in the Sheffield Trades Council report, *The Second Slump*. The report admits that 'the trade union movement in the area has taken a hammering. 20,000 redundancies in two years has seriously weakened shop floor organisation; it has thrown many active union members on the dole; it has demoralised those left in work'. The Council has now organised a Day School on 13 November to discuss the unions' and communities' response to mass unemployment. It is at the Chaucer Adult Education Centre. Many local figures will be present including the President of the Yorkshire NUM.