

MI5 put union leaders and protesters under surveillance during cold war

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The extent to which the Security Service suspected trade union leaders and protesters of being potential subversives during the cold war has been revealed with the publication of the official history of [MI5](#). Targets for surveillance included [Jack Jones](#), the doyen of the Labour movement, and the [Greenham Common women's peace camp](#).

The book, *The Defence of the Realm*, suggests that leaders of both main political parties were often more keen than [MI5](#) to monitor the activities of their MPs or trade union leaders.

The authorised history, by the Cambridge historian Christopher Andrew, says Jones, who the Guardian has been told was the subject of more than 40 volumes in MI5 archives, was not "being manipulated by the Russians". But Andrew says MI5 was "right to consider the possibility that he was".

Britain's top spy in the KGB, Oleg Gordievsky, said Moscow "regarded Jones as an agent" and he provided it with Labour party NEC documents, Andrew writes. He adds that Jones received some money from the KGB, though the trade union leader broke contact with Moscow after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Three Labour MPs are named as Soviet bloc agents: John Stonehouse, who became postmaster general in Harold Wilson's government, Bernard Floud and Will Owen. The three were "outed" by a Czech defector but there is no evidence they passed over sensitive information.

MI5 opened a file on Wilson under the name Norman John Worthington. Officials were alerted by his east European friends and his role in trade with the Soviet Union. Andrew dismisses claims of a "Wilson plot" under which MI5 tried to smear the Labour prime minister and destabilise his administration. However, a footnote in the 1,000-page history says that claims Wilson was a Soviet agent derive from conspiracy theories perpetuated by a KGB defector, Anatoli Golitsyn. Andrew adds: "Sadly, a minority of British and American intelligence officers ... were seduced by Golitsyn's fantasies."

The book confirms that MI5 held files on CND leaders during the 1970s and 1980s and provides fresh explanations why it did so. It described Bruce

Kent, one-time CND chairman, as a "possible Anarchist". Andrew notes that the case for holding a permanent file on him "now appears distinctly dubious". Kent yesterday called the description "pathetic and ludicrous".

MI5 also opened a file on Joan Ruddock, the Labour MP who later chaired CND and is now minister for climate change, on the grounds that she had meetings with Mikhail Bogdanov, who unbeknown to her was a KGB agent. There is no evidence she gave him any sensitive information.

Andrew observes that MI5 took such steps though CND was critical of the Soviet Union. It also opened a permanent file on the [Greenham Common](#) women's peace camp on the grounds that it was "subject to penetration by subversive groups".

"More often than not", Andrew said yesterday, "the government was more excited about countering subversion [than MI5]". Even when they were in opposition in the early 1960s, Labour party leaders passed MI5 a list of MPs they suspected of being influenced by Moscow, so the Security Service could check up on them.

The book describes how successive governments wanted MI5 to expand its role during industrial disputes, including the seamen's action in 1966. It reveals that Wilson's attack on the union leaders as a "tightly knit group of politically motivated men" was coined by MI5.

During the miners' strike 20 years later, Margaret Thatcher encouraged MI5 to monitor the leaders' activities and communications, notably those of Arthur Scargill and the NUM's communist vice-president, Mick McGahey. One unnamed senior MI5 officer noted in the files that the Communist Party of Great Britain was seeking, unsuccessfully, to exert a "moderating influence" on the miners' leader, rather than inflame the dispute.

Andrew had exclusive and unrestricted access to almost 400,000 files in MI5's archives, many of them consisting of several volumes. He was vetted and so was his manuscript - to protect "national security" rather than the agency from embarrassment, says MI5.

Andrew concludes that MI5 greatly exaggerated the efficiency of Moscow's intelligence agencies under Stalin, and was slow to appreciate the significance of Northern Ireland-based terrorism and clues pointing to the existence of the Cambridge ring of five top Soviet agents.

MI5 virtually gave up its counter subversion activities in the mid-1980s after the miners' strike to concentrate first on Northern Ireland and, later, on countering Islamist-inspired terrorism.

The official history also reveals that MI5 was well informed about Hitler's intentions before the second world war, largely through the espionage of Wolfgang zu Putlitz, an MI5 spy in the Germany embassy in London whose controller was "Klop" Ustinov, Peter Ustinov's father.

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