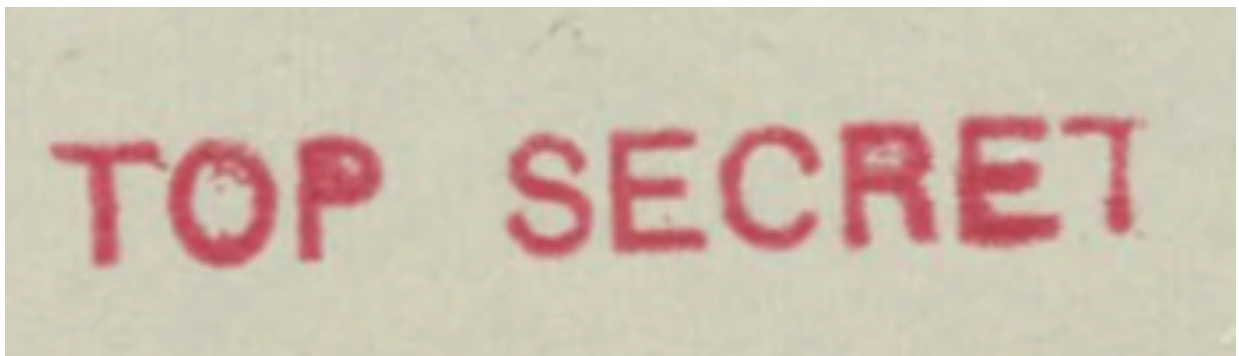




Super Blog:

The Real Story of the SDS

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Intro: the UCPI story and the real SDS story

The Prime Minister could, and should, be a core participant in the UCPI. But the misdirection of the UCPI by his first two Home Secretaries could prevent it from reaching the correct conclusion....

Twenty years ago revelations started to emerge that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS or Scotland Yard) had placed officers in “deep cover” in left-wing political campaigns. It then emerged that some of these officers had been involved in intimate relations with activists and had spied on trades unionists and social justice campaigns.

The judicial Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) was appointed by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary in 2015, with the purpose of examining undercover policing practices since 1968, including oversight, misconduct, and impact on public trust.

The inquiry started collecting documentary evidence almost immediately. but it was fully 5 years before any evidence could be gathered from witnesses in public. The delay had been caused by Scotland Yard and its support for the identity, not only for real names but for the fake cover names, to be withheld from the victims of the officers’ abuse. The inquiry’s concession of this in a substantial number of cases, and its selection of only a small number of many victims named in the officers’ intelligence reports means that the full scale of the abuse will never be known and many victims and their relatives will never know what was done to them. This terrible failure has only been exacerbated by the Inquiry team’s, failure to even index victims with anonymised “nominals”, as was done for officers in the Herne and Ellison Inquiries.

Only after 5 years did any documentary evidence start being published. As of September 1, this year (2025), 7,495 documents and now been published. Most of these had not been previously published. A large proportion are intelligence reports and correspondence between MI5 and the MPS, deliberately destroyed or “lost” by Scotland Yard but fortunately scrupulously retained by MI5.

There is published evidence on the UCPI’s website which shines a light on the political and parapolitical decision-making that lead to creation of the SDS. But the UCPI that it has not drawn on it to explain the political and historical origins of the SDS, with the result that once again in opening statements the Home Office’s lawyer has made the in defensible claim that the home office had nothing to do its creation

The UCPI Inquiry is not a politically impartial manifestation of the due process of law, responding to revelations of unlawful behaviours. It was political commissioned, and it is politically controlled. This is particularly problematic when the sponsoring politicians and their predecessors are also participants.

Initially commissioned by the Conservative and Liberal coalition government, it was when implemented by a series of increasingly unstable and eccentric Conservative governments until 2024 when it became the responsibility of the current Labour government. Unfortunately, there is no reason to believe that the apparent change in the complexion of the government in 2024 will now make it easier for the UCPI to get to the root cause of the deliberately subversive actions of Scotland Yard since 1968.

This was only further underlined when latest Home Secretary – like the previous ones a core participant as well as its sponsor – once again repeated the deliberate mis-direction that the Home Office played no part in its establishment or “tasking” of the SDS. There is already in the UCPI evidence base enough to indicate that tasking of the SDS was a (historically top secret) process involving a hierarchy of organisational stages decision makers.

This does not mean that it was a complicated or difficult to understand. What made it easier to understand in terms of how the decision was made to use police to collect information on political organisations the deeply deceptive and intrusive undercover operation was that the process used had been at existence for at least twenty years and all the key players in been engaged in it had for many years, and the Prime Minister at the head of the hierarchy, Harold Wilson, had been a member of the Cabinet at the time it was created and finalised in 1948.

The civil service head of the process was the cabinet Secretary reporting directly to the prime minister– Bert Trend in 1968

The cabinet was responsible for two top secret Official Cabinet Committees dealing with counter-subversion, one concerned with subversion in the British Isles and the other with Subversion overseas particularly (but not exclusively) focussed on the British Empire and Commonwealth.

In respect of the SDS in 1968 the Official Cabinet Committee Subversion (Home) was the main oversight, tasking, and “customer” committee.

The principal Cabinet Civil Service leads were the permanent under-secretaries (PUS) at the Home Office (Phillip Allen in 1968), Defence (James Dunnett) and Labour (Denis Barnes) beyond that the cabinet had discretion about who should attend. This might include the Cabinet Office press secretary (Don Bullock/Joe Haines) The MI5 Director General would be represented by the Director Of F Branch (Counter Subversion and CPGB)(Richard Thistlethwaite). The Metropolitan Police Commissioner would be

represented by Assistant Chief Constable “C” (Peter Brodie) Allen would be represented or accompanied by the Home. Office Deputy James Waddell who as chief B Department oversaw both MI5 and Scotland Yard.

Until 1968 Wilson had an additional Cabinet Minister dealing with the Security Service. This was George Wigg, in effect by-passing the rather too liberal minded Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins. But when he replaced Jenkins with Callaghan in the Autumn, he no longer felt the need for this.

Since the National Union of Seamen’s strike and its ensuing state of emergency in the summer of 1966, Wilson had been used to being briefed directly by the Director of F Branch. F Branch provided Subversion(Home) with regular briefings on the subversive threat to the UK. The acceptance of these by the Cabinet Secretary and the PUSs, with the approval of the ministers to whom they were accountable, established the UK counter subversion-priorities for MI5 and Special Branch.

Combatting trade union militancy and frustrating the CPGB’s encouragement of was at top of the priorities established by Subversion(Home). Between 1947 and 1951 it devised and introduced three nationalised blacklisting schemes that used MI5 registry files to exclude CPGB members and trade union militants from the Civil Service, firms and their subcontractors involved in secret government contracts and final in pro-active and ongoing surveillance of those engaged in sensitive research and development programmes.

These blacklists continue today in the form of the UK Security Vetting (UKSV) a government agency still within the Cabinet Office. Since 2015 CGI a French-Canadian company has provided the UK National Security Vetting Solution (NSVS) at a cost of just short of £50m pa. The NSVS solution includes all Britain’s intelligence registries. It has recently been migrated to a dedicated cloud service.

CGI’s contract envisages in excess of 200,000 applicants being vetted every year, the migration to the cloud took 8 weeks to complete and included the details of two million vettings done since the contract commenced.

Mike Hughes
2025

1 The prehistory of the SDS

1968 was chosen as the start date for the UCPI inquiry because it was only in about July 1968 that Scotland Yard created the unit that placed officers in “deep cover” in political campaigns and organisations. Unlike “Plain Clothes Policing”, which Scotland Yard had been doing (albeit very controversially) since it was set up, “deep cover” is a CIA/FBI term for long-term, highly concealed undercover operation in which an officer assumes a fraudulent identity which was maintained for two or three years.

The unit was at first called the “Special Operations Squad” recalling the name of “The Special Operations Executive” [SOE] set up in WWII to work undercover behind enemy lines to “set Europe Ablaze”. Within months this was quickly changed to the less honest name Special Demonstration Squad (SDS). The UCPI refers to the SOS/SDS as the SDS from July 1968 until it was wound up in 2008; and all of its “black operations” were transferred to even more deceptively names National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU).

In 1945, Labour Party politicians in Parliament and in the trade unions, initiated within the British secret state, an unprincipled and abusive determination to frustrate the political aspirations of anyone to the left of the Labour Party’s right wing Christian democratic centre ground.

Subsequently, in and out of office, they nurtured and encouraged that obsessive abuse, until they once again secured a workable majority in Parliament in 1966 when they secretly took political policing in the 1940s to a new, deeper and darker level of abuse.

By the time the leaders of the Labour Party had achieved their first Parliamentary majority in 1945, they been involved in a relentless twenty-five-year struggle for the hearts and minds of the Labour, vote not with Conservatives or the Liberals but with the Communist Party of Great Britain (**CPGB**). Of Course, radical economic and social welfare reforms were high on their public political agenda. But they also had an unpublished agenda in both in Great Britain, its colonies and on the wider world stage. They would mobilise the not inconsiderable power of the British State and its Secret State to crush communism and thwart Stalin’s expansionist foreign policies.

There was an in formal cabinet group responsible for taking forward this undeclared policy forward, which consisted of Attlee himself, Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), A V Alexander (First Lord of the Admiralty, Later Minister of Defence), James Chuter Ede (Home Secretary) and George Isaacs (Minister of Labour and National Service).

An “**Official Cabinet Committee on Anti-Communism**” was convened. [the National Archive reference is known as **GEN 163**]. It was chaired by Attlee and met on January 17 1947 to hear a paper by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) that assessed the threat posed in the UK and the world by the CPGB. It was to be an object lesson in how “group-

think” could develop in public policy making before the convention of systematic risk assessment, due diligence and SWOT analyses became routine.

There is little evidence that that committee ever met again, but it was the spark that initiated an un-constrained and un-questioned chain reaction that has, so far, lasted 80 years. The first reaction was to establish a committee to concentrate exclusively on disrupting the CPGB. This was **“Official Cabinet Committee on Anti-Communism (Home)”** [the National Archive reference is known as **GEN 183**] which met first in June 1947 with A V Alexander the newly appointed Minister of Defence in the chair.

Gen 183 regularly throughout the two Attlee Ministries which ended with a lost election in 1951 in which they had the largest share of the vote. GEN 183 actually changed its name quite quickly during the first ministry to the **“Official Cabinet Committee on Communism (Home)”**. Although no explanation is given in the official records it is clear that someone in the decision-making process was sensitive to what would now be called the “optics” of turning into an enemy of the state a political party that returned two MPs. But GEN 183 didn’t end with the Attlee government’s demise. It continued to meet regularly for another thirty years through to the Thatcher Government although it had undergone another name change to the **“Official Cabinet Committee on Subversion (Home)”**. It was joined early on in its history by the **“Official Cabinet Committee on Communism (Overseas)”** run by the Foreign Office which also had an internal counter-subversion organisation **Information Research Department** which from 1951 had a **“Home Desk”**.

In terms of blacklisting and spycopperry, the “Home” committees were most important and later on one set up to look at **“Subversion in Public Life”**. During the Attlee government’s ministries it established three separate subcommittees to design three anti communist **“purges”** using data from **MI5’s registry, which had** and collected by **MI5** itself or **Scotland Yard’s Special Branch** and **Regional Police Special Branches**.

Of these purges only one had any public scrutiny, which was the first **civil service purge**. This one was announced in Parliament, although not voted on, negotiated with trades unions and had a limited appeal mechanism. It was not admitted that MI5 registry files were being used as the blacklist, and it was not possible for blacklisted to see or challenge the information. In the end a small number of people were sacked, redeployed or left the service as a result of the purge.

There was no acknowledgement that following the Civil Service purge MI5 files would continue to be used to vet everyone applying to join the professional civil service and this continues today.

The second and largest “purge” was of workers working on secret government contracts or in the supply chain for them. After a negative joint consultation with the TUC General Council and Confederation of Employers the government were persuaded to abandon to

drop an elaborate scheme based on the civil service purge. Neither side tried to persuade the government to abandon blacklisting, just to achieve it quietly on a contract-by-contract basis, rigorously applying the standard contract terms that the name of those engaged in confidential work had to be submitted in advance to the commissioners of the contract. Today the Civil Service Blacklisting and Industrial Blacklisting using MI5 registry files in the UKSV system,

These were up and running by 1948, when MI5 approved the appointment of a former Yard Detective to the Economic League who could act as a liaison to Special Branch. By around 1975 there were around 7500 names of CPGB members on the Economic League's central and regional registries,

The third and final Purge-and-Blacklist is more often described by its methodology – **positive vetting** – than its target groups - **research and development scientist and workers**. In an attempt to get the US government to lift its ban on sharing weapons secrets, Attlee needed to persuade J Edgar Hoover that the UK was actively investigating the background of these workers before employing them, and was then continuing to vet them while in employment. It was introduced by Attlee's government in 1951 but only made public when Churchill was visiting America a year later.

It is hard to see how the Labour Party can atone for the blighting of so many lives through the three nationalised blacklist processes they introduced after the purges. An apology hardly seems to cut the mustard. Of course we do not have data on the numbers of people vetted and negatively vetted. But it is perfectly believable that MI5 do have it. The UKSV checks over two hundred thousand jobs being undertaken a year.

There was something personal and visceral in Attlee's and his closest political allies' dislike and distain for the CPGB. But it was also driven by the prospect of immediate party political advantage in the event of the CPGB's destruction, and that made it constitutionally insidious.

As a person, Attlee was not the sort of politician to be visceral about anything, Beatrice Webb an important political ally told her diary in 1940:

"His hour's lecture was pitiable. He looked and spoke like an insignificant elderly clerk, without distinction in the voice, manner or substance of his discourse ... To realise that this little nonentity is the Parliamentary Leader of the Labour Party ... and presumably the future P.M., is humiliating."

But after his time in Downing Street when he was again leader of the opposition there was one occasion when he showed a little fire. It happened in 1953, after he was critical of Joe McCarthy's attempts to unilaterally organise an economic blockade of Russia in pursuance of the Korean War, The America went on the warpath against Attlee as a crypto communist, and Churchill as weak for not standing up to him. Attlee did

not take it lying down but took the unprecedented step of issuing a press release reported widely in America:

“The British Labour Party and I myself have been vigorously opposing the Communist Party in this country ever since its formation – long before Senator McCarthy was ever heard of.”

2 The Parapolitical History of the SDS

Attlee's government played a key role shaping political policing in the second half of the twentieth century. Although the UCPI has not admitted into evidence any of those earlier documents I have studied them at the national archives and used them as the basis for my account of Attlee's blacklists.

But later documents from those committees have been admitted into the UCPI published evidence. There are 54 documents from 1967 and onwards covering the remaining four years of Wilson's majority government. They are the minutes of the later incarnations of Attlee's McCarthyite Cabinet Committees containing reports of the risk of subversion compiled by F Branch of MI5. Altogether they extend to 315 pages. . There are precious few signs of any evolution in the intervening quarter of a century and plenty of similarities in the politicians paranoia, the Secret Service's exaggeration and the overall dominating impression of parapolitical group think and constitutional negligence.

The UCPI evidence database is not the easiest to navigate, so I have gathered these Cabinet counter subversion documents together in single document broadly arranged chronologically. These documents explain the context and set the scene for the creation and development of the SDS. They also bear testament the credulity of the most senior political leaders and civil servants.

The story of their reaction and response is to be found in other documents in the published evidence. This was the period immediately before the SDS creation and continues into the period the UCPI calls the "first Tranche". Unfortunately, the Inquiry has already published an interim report on this Tranche 1 period, but this newer material suggests that it was something of a rush to judgement. The interim report's very opening paragraph deals with the creation of the SDS:

"The Special Operations Squad (SOS) was the brainchild of HN325 Detective Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon. It was established on or immediately before 31 July 1968. Two surviving founder members of the SOS, HN218 ("Barry Morris") Barry Moss and HN328 Joan Hillier, have described the circumstances in which they were recruited. Their recollection differs in immaterial details explained by the passage of time, but both agree that a group of Metropolitan Police Service Special Branch (Special Branch) officers were invited to attend a meeting addressed by Conrad Dixon, at which the purpose of the squad was explained"

Dixon's explanation was that it was initially to be a discrete operation specifically to gather intelligence in advance of a particular demonstration being organised by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign.

Without evidence of any assessment or description of how much further beyond plain clothes policing and into “Deep Cover” this specific exercise went, it is difficult at this distance in time to gauge whether it was more effective in gaining intelligence, than any methods that were already being employed and which didn’t involve deception and aggravated trespass.

But there were plenty of senior officers in the Yard who were ready to attest to its unique effectiveness, and so a one-off exercise became a one-year experimental unit within C squad of Scotland Yard. This squad is mostly responsible for, and engaged in, monitoring the CPGB also other political movements to the left of the Labour Party.

DCI Dixon became head of the unit. But the notion that it was his “brainchild” deliberately ignores the political and parapolitical decision-making process that preceded the first experimental operation. That decision-making had involved the state’s two domestic paramilitary forces, Scotland Yard and MI5, and the Home Office and Home Secretary to which the paramilitaries were accountable, But it had also involved the Cabinet Office and Cabinet Secretary reporting directly to the Prime Minister.

That decision-making had begun in 1967. By then Harold Wilson had been Prime Minister for three years although during the first two of those years he only had a Commons Majority of 4. But he had done enough with that to win a snap election in 1966. with a handsome majority of 96.

Wilson’s politics were always hard to pin down and hard to categorise. He had been a young cabinet minister in Attlee’s government but had resigned with Nye Bevan over the introduction of prescription charges. But then in 1955 he supported Gaitskell in the Party leadership vote then stood against him forcing a leadership vote in 1960. In 1963 Gaitskell died suddenly, and some suggested mysteriously, of Lupus following a visit to Moscow. Wilson competed successfully against George Brown to become Gaitskell’s successor. In the leadership contest he had become viewed as the unity candidate. The truth is he was a political opportunist not an ideologue.

He had been elected leader of an avowedly socialist party during the most febrile period of the Cold War and there was a conspiracy theory developing in the FBI that Gaitskell had been killed by the Russians in order to put a Soviet sleeper in a position to become Prime Minister. This was taken up by some elements in MI5 and military circles in the UK, and in the right-wing media, The smear campaign against Wilson would later be characterised as “The Wilson Plot”.

Since Christmas 1965 the Home Secretary had been Roy Jenkins. He was the most liberal-minded Labour appointment to the role, ever, bar none. In November 1967 he was replaced by James Callaghan. Nevertheless, Labour’s journey to the creation of the SDS was sparked off by a remark made by Jenkins to the Civil Service head of the Home Office, the Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), Sir Phillip Allen.

Allen wrote on March 1 1967 to Peter E. Brodie. Assistant Chief Constable "C" at Scotland Yard, the head of Special Branch, explaining the task and setting in motion an informal review:

I mentioned to the commissioner that the home secretary noticed in the report on the work of the Special Branch in 1966 a good deal of material about communists, Trotskyists and similar organisations. He has from time to time being kept informed on these matters by the Security Services and asked me whether there had been any recent review to ensure that the area of responsibility of Special Branch and the Security Service was clearly defined and that there was no risk of duplication in the work of the organisations. I said that I had no ground for supposing that there was any duplication, but I had to say that this was not a matter which had been looked at very recently; and the Home Secretary said that although he did not want any formal inquiry he would be grateful if the Home Office would discuss with the organisations whether there were any problems arising in this matter. He was quite prepared to find that at the end of the day he would be told that everything was in order but he never nevertheless thought that the position could with advantage be looked at.

*As I explained to the commissioner I have accordingly asked Waddell, to arrange this discussion it would probably take only two or three meetings I hope that you would come bringing Ferguson with you and anyone else you would like to have with you I am writing in similar terms to **Sys officer***

Letter from Sir Philip Allen to Brodie concerning a review of possible overlap between Special Branch and the Security Service. UCPI0000035123

James Waddell was Phillip Allen's number two in charge of the Home Office's B Branch which was responsible for the Metropolitan Police and the Security Service, Brodie is to represent the Yard but the name of the Security Service officer is redacted. Given the seniority of the other two participants there really can only be one name under that redaction and that is Richard Thistlethwaite the Director of MI5's F Branch, responsible for domestic subversion and the person who would be made immediately responsible for tasking the SDS on behalf the Home Office and Cabinet Committees.

If by any chance it was a more Junior officer, possibly James Elliot or Charles Ellwell, Dick Thistlethwaite would have appointed them to the role and be keeping them on a tight leash. The redaction is mysterious because in the Subversion (home) documents up to his retirement in 1972 his name has not redacted.

The discussion occurred over the summer of 1967 culminating in a final meeting at the Home Office on November 13th, The minutes of that meeting are in the published UCPI

evidence showing the meeting was attended by Waddell and two other more junior Home Office officers, Brodie and Ferguson-Smith from the Yard and two unnamed MI5 representatives one of whom would have Thistlethwaite and the other may have been either the DDG or the more junior Charles Ellwell or James Elliot. Those minutes are at UCPI0000034284, But the conclusions had been simply summarised in a note from MI5 to the Home office immediately after the meeting

“(a) S.B. "tops up" Security Service information but in the Communist field almost all of it originates from the Security Service®

(e) S.B. makes ad hoc enquiries on behalf of the Security Service

(f) S.B. acts as the executive arm of the Security Service in cases involving the Official Secrets Act in the Metropolitan area

(g) S.B. and the Security Service do not share information about their agents in the subversive field proper but have now initiated discussions to rationalise agent coverage where law-and-order might be involved

2. Our conclusion is that there is necessary duplication between the Security Service and Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police because of their different functions but since our recent discussions there is no unnecessary duplication.”

UCPI0000035121

Another key piece of evidence tying the foundation of the SDS in to Waddell's Home Office-led review is UCPI0000030044 which is an internal note for file from MI5 reporting that Ferguson-Smith had secured agreement and funding for the Dixon's "limited" pilot that would become the SDS.

NOTE FOR FILE

On 19th September Chief Superintendent Cunningham telephoned. He was happy to be able to tell me that he had had another word with Deputy Commander Ferguson Smith who had now agreed to our scheme being put into practice on the limited front we had discussed together.

2. Chief Superintendent Cunningham asked for a supply of our forms and so I suggested that Inspector Dixon and [REDACTED] might profitably tie-up the details of this arrangement together as soon as possible. Chief Superintendent Cunningham agreed with this idea and said that he would get Inspector Dixon to telephone [REDACTED] in the near future.

F.4.

20th September, 1967.

3 The Secret History of Dick Thistlethwaite



DT in 1957, MH2025

There is no doubt that by the end of his political career Wilson was thoroughly alienated from, and by the secret state, but that was not the case during his second term of office when London was swinging, English football was the best in the World and the city which was his constituency was the epicentre of pop world. Up to 1967 he had used the Paymaster General, George Wigg, as an intermediary or moderator with the secret state. Wigg had no personal experience of the intelligence but had played an important role in keeping the Profumo Affair in the public eye.

Wilson himself also engaged and expected to be personally briefed. This was perhaps no surprisem since the man in MI5 responsible for counter-subversion throughout the second Wilson term of office was Dick Thistlethwaite. He was a year younger than Wilson,; he was a northerner from the other side of the Pennines; they both went to Oxford just a year apart; they both studied PPE where they were taught by the same people including Isiah Berlin and G.D.H. Cole; they both took firsts; Wilson's College – Jesus College- was just 300 yards from Thistlethwaite's – Queen's College in the city.

Even in the unlikely event that they had they had not known each other in Oxford, over the five years they worked together they must have worked out they had a great deal in common.

If MI5 is responsible for the redaction of DT's real name from the documents concerning the 1967 internal review of the MI5-Scotland Yard Special Branch relationship this should be no surprise. DT worked for MI5 for 31 years from 1941 to 1972 and by as early as 1947

was operating in high profile and often self-contained roles in the organisation. He retired at the age of 55 or 56, two years into Heath's brief three-year spell as Prime Minister.

Like Wilson in the early stages of his premiership, Heath moderated his relationship with the intelligence community by means of an informal but interfering ministerial intermediary. In Heath's case this was Lord Rothschild who unlike Wigg did have a background in MI5 where he organised wartime counter-sabotage operations and would have absolutely known DT. Heath himself would have been suspicious of DT and his apparent closeness to Wilson which he had personally witnessed. DT's comparatively early retirement may have been prompted by an awareness, as early as 1971, that his age and Conservative mistrust meant he was unlikely to rise further to become DDG or DG.

What is interesting about DT is that when it came to commissioning an authorised history – Christopher Andrew's *"The Defence of the Realm"* (2009) – although MI5 could not write him completely out of its history they only allow him to be mentioned in respect of two and half years of his long career. The six years that preceded that and at least twelve of the of the twenty or so other years are discussed in some detail without any reference to DT's pivotal role.

I am in the process of trying to remedy this, providing all the necessary authorities and references but that will take time. The nub of the story here is Tjistlethwaite's relationship with Wilson and his role in reshaping MI5's relationship with Scotland Yard and the creation of SOS/SDS. To tell that story it is important to understand DT's back story. This makes it clear he was not, like Peter Wright the author of "Spycatcher", a self-important and opinionated minor character in the operations of MI5.

In 1939, recently graduated and a fluent German and French speaker, he had been volunteering in a Nazi Party-run Aryan social welfare programme in Hamburg. With War seeming inevitable in August he left for Strassburg on the French bank of the Rhine, where the British Consul took him on as a volunteer. After the declaration of war, when the British consulate was evacuated twice in the direction of the Swiss border. DT went with them, but by Christmas he had resolved to return home. Immediately after Christmas he returned Burnley hoping to join up with the Military Police Corps.

He was at this stage in his life a 22-year-old who could barely pass for 18 and unsurprisingly he was unsuccessful in his application. Undeterred he signed up as a private in the East Lancs Regiment. By the time he had completed his basic training the remains of the regiment's units that had made it home from Dunkirk were back in Lancashire. At some stage however, towards the end of 1940, he volunteered or was put up for a War Office Selection Board for consideration as an officer. He was successful and after 14 weeks of basic officer training he was made a second lieutenant and posted to the Intelligence Corps.

This meant additional specialist intelligence and intensive language learning. Since he was already a good French and German speaker this would have been another language. In 1941 the only place where there was any military action taking place other than at sea and in the skies was in the middle east. It may be assumed from where he was posted for active service that his language learning was Arabic.

While he was completing his specialist intelligence training British commonwealth armies were securing British influence in the Middle East overcoming an Axis inspired coup in Iraq, defeating Italian East Africa and taking over the Levant – Syria and the Lebanon – from Vichy France. Hitler had also torn up the non aggression pact with Stalin and the British ambassador in Moscow, Stafford Cripps, had persuaded Stalin not only to fight Hitler but to become Britain's first fighting ally.

Neutral Persia was now the last place in the Middle East where the Axis powers still had any influence and diplomatic presence. It also had a land border with Russia and the Caucasus. In August 1941 British and Russian forces launched a coordinated invasion from north and south. Resistance by the Iranian Army collapsed within days and the Shah called for an armistice. The terms of the Armistice were the standing down of the Iranian Army and the immediate abdication and exile of the Shah in the custody of the British. The Crown Prince became the new Shah and ruled until 1979.

For the remainder of the war Persia was occupied by the Russians in the North and British in the South, A north-south land corridor was opened up between the British held ports and oil fields in the south and Russia. This became the safest Russian supply route for oil and American lend-lease materiel for the Red Army.

Since 1937 MI5 had been establishing a presence in overseas British-controlled territories; by posting MI5 officers called Defence Security Officers (DSOs) to embassies and consulates. By 1941 there were three original DSOs in Cairo, Gibraltar and Palestine had been added to DSOs in Malta, Aden, and Iraq. In Iraq a Combined Intelligence Centre (CICI) had been opened. These were all brought together to create a joint Military/MI5 - controlled Security Intelligence Middle East **SIME**.

After the invasion a DSO was established in Tehran responsible for a new CICI in Persia. By the end of 1941 DT had been seconded to MI5 and posted to CICI Persia. DT would spend the whole of the War and in fact his five remaining years of military service at the CICI in Tehran, rising to the rank of Major. It was a prolonged, intense and immersive induction into quite literally all the techniques and experience required in counter-espionage intelligence work, and also many of the developing techniques of counter-subversion.

When DT was demobilised from the intelligence corps, in September 1946, there cannot have been many intelligence officers who had the breadth and depth of experience of fieldwork or inside knowledge of the working of Russian Intelligence services that he had

acquired in Persia. It is no surprise he was demobbed in Tehran straight into MI5. But he was not immediately repatriated but posted as DSO to the postwar tinderbox that was Palestine.

However, he was not there for long and by spring he had been repatriated to England. He was only there long enough to be prepared for his new posting. With peace, the DSO posts were to be rapidly phased out but this did not mean that MI5 was to be returned to being a purely domestic intelligence service. While the DSOs had been posted to British-controlled territories – the new posts to be called Security Liaison Officers (SLO) would be posted to a wider range of foreign embassies. The model of linking Defence Security Officers and Offices was seen as highly successful in the case of SIME, and in 1946 a second organisation called Security Intelligence Middle East (SIFE) had been established.

However a similar arrangement, British Security Coordination (BSC), that had been set up in North America, had been less successful. This was partly because of the insensitivity of its head, William Stephenson, to the Anglophobic inclinations of the FBI director J Edgar Hoover, and as a result BSC had been shut by 1946.

But the British Embassy in Washington was the first to be given an MI5 SLO whose objectives would be to try to negotiate a rapprochement with the FBI director with the aim of prosecuting the Cold war effectively but also in the hope of re-establishing nuclear cooperation with the US to enable Britain to win the nuclear Arms Race with the USSR.

The man given the task of achieving these objectives and establishing the role of SLO was 29 years old Dick Thistlethwaite who had been on MI5s civilian payroll for less than nine months.

On April 26, 1947, he was aboard the Mauretania in Liverpool, setting sail for New York. On the US immigration form he is identified as one of five Civil Servants travelling in Diplomatic cabin class, two with their wives and one with a maid. Dick was travelling with a personal assistant Margaret I. Maconochie. His fellow passengers included Percival P, Howse and his wife Joan E. Percival Phillip Howes and his wife Joan Ellen, nee Old. are both on the Bletchley Park roll of honour and could have been sailing out to represent the newly forming GCHQ.

DT's time in Washington is the only part of his long career until recently acknowledged by MI5. It is told colourlessly without any back story in Christopher Andrew's "Defence of the Realm". It will give you a simple account of how things went, but it does not tell us when his posting ended or any of the extraordinary and controversial things in which he was later involved, though they themselves are mentioned.

In October 1947 DT and this PA were married in Washington Cathedral, with a reception in a large house at 1325 Thirtieth Street. Their first child, a son, had been born in July 1948 11 months later they were setting off for Liverpool from Montreal on the liner the Empress

of France. Their address on the manifest was a c/o of Margaret's family in Dolphin Square in London but they would soon have their own home in Bromley.

He had barely set foot in the UK for a decade and he may have been keen to re-establish some UK roots for himself his wife and his young family, and there seem to be no overseas travel records for him until 1955. Their second child, a daughter, was born in 1953.

I have not been able to account for these next five years of his career, although given the direction his career would take it must have been a fairly significant role. His experience of MI5's overseas operations during and after the war would suggest a desk role in MI5's new OS (overseas) Division which was about to be created as he arrived home. That is speculative, but it is strongly supported by the next known move he makes.

On July 23 1955 he and his family are on board the P & O ship "Corfu" heading off for a new overseas posting in Singapore, He is off to become the Chief of SIFE. Top of his agenda is co-ordinating intelligence to end the "Malayan Emergency."

Seven years earlier members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had discovered their leader was a British agent. He was swiftly assassinated and the MCP and Malayan National Liberation Army began an armed struggle against British rule. The British government dubbed it the Malayan Emergency refusing to recognise it as a struggle for liberation and preferring to present it as a struggle to prevent a communist takeover.

By 1955 after seven years of struggle the insurrection in Malaya was losing momentum, with many of its most able and experienced leaders killed or in custody. Shortly before DT and his family arrived in Singapore, Malaya had held its first national elections for a federal government. The turnout at over 82% was impressive and an alliance of parties had secured an overwhelming majority. However about a third of the adult population were not British citizens and were therefore disenfranchised. Although an amnesty was offered by the new government and peace talks took place, they broke down and fighting would continue until after DT left the post in 1959. But by 1957 the chance of a communist takeover seemed unlikely and Malaya had been granted independence. SIFE HQ was therefore moved to Hong Kong.

As chief of SIFE He did not only coordinate counter-subversion and counter-espionage in Malaya but the whole region including Vietnam, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. It also involved close liaison with intelligence services in Australia and New Zealand which had been actively supporting the Malayan Troops.

When he had been demobbed after the War he was allowed to keep the courtesy title major, but the quasi-military nature of the SIFE post saw him now given the rank of brigadier. This was a title he used when he took the family on a business trip to Japan in 1957.

When he returned to England with his family in 1959, he had been working for MI5 in high profile overseas positions for at least thirteen of the previous eighteen years. He had known the Director General, Dick White, personally for at least fifteen years and he had been appointed by him to the SIFE position. But there was another senior officer, a lawyer and a conservative political activist more than ten years older than him who had only joined MI5's civilian establishment at the outbreak of the War. His name was Alexander Kellar and DT had for most of the eighteen years of his service been following in Kellar's footsteps. Kellar had been the Middle East desk of MI5, SIME's first civilian chief, then chief of SIFE at the start of the Malayan emergency.

When Dick White became Director General of MI5 in 1953 he rationalised and clarified the structure into 6 Branches, all of the OS division's responsibilities were transferred to E division, and a new F division responsible for domestic counter subversion including the CPGB was created. As Chief of SIFE, DT was part of E Branch and in 1958 Kellar was appointed director of that Branch.

On his return to England from the Far East DT was awarded a CBE but disappears from the radar again for a shorter while than in the 1950s. It is highly likely that he was given a role in E Branch's London team and quite possibly as Kellar's deputy. But in 1962 Kellar was moved to a more-high profile and mission critical role as Director of F Branch.

In a service where most officers retired aged 60 this was likely to be Kellar's last posting. It is not clear at what stage DT was himself transferred to F Branch as part of succession planning for Kellar. However, the change of government in 1964 meant that Kellar's appointment to F Branch had been an unfortunate one, and it is no surprise Kellar retired within a year, and DT had replaced him.

Andrew's authorised MI5 history does discuss in some detail how Wilson "came to depend" on F Branch's intelligence on militant trade unionism and CPGB. However it coyly references "Director F Branch:", without ever naming Thistlethwaite, and even quotes him in relation to the 1966 Seaman's strike.

This strike had been called in May 1966 two months after the election which had given Wilson a workable majority. Wilson believed this posed a serious threat to overseas trade and his economic strategy.

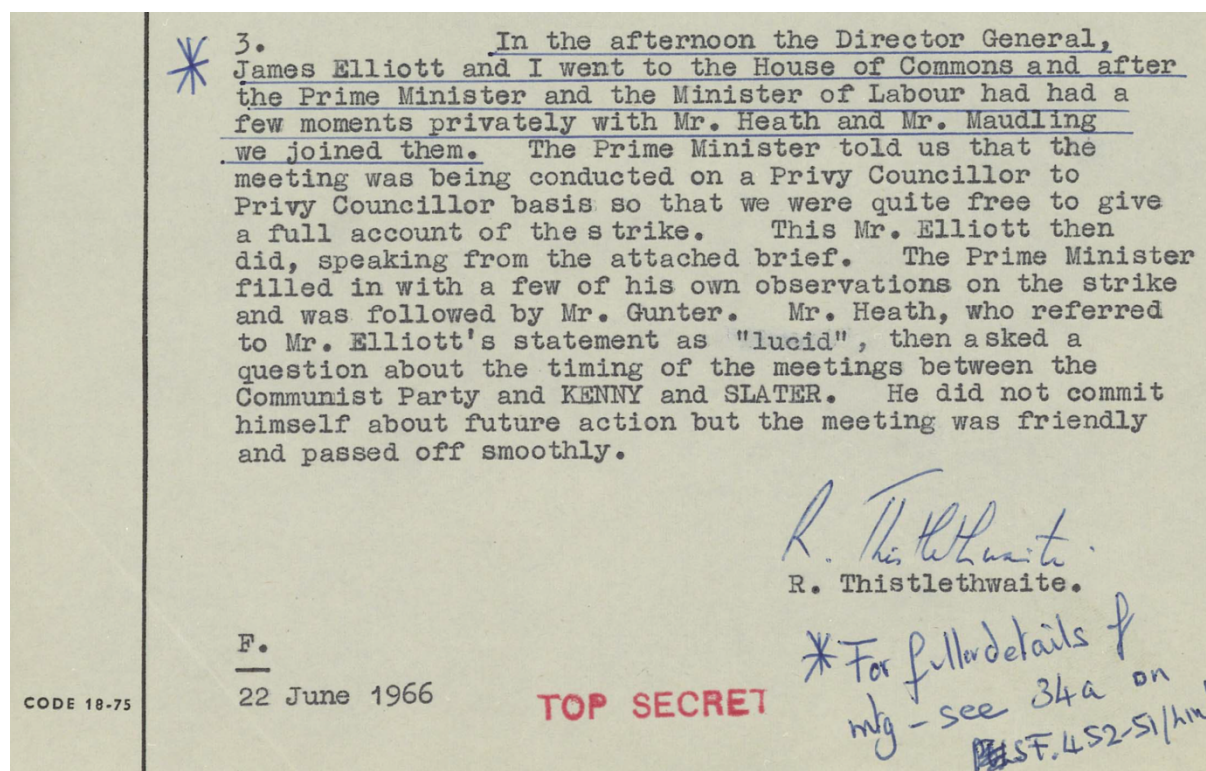
MI5 had already been bugging the CPGB headquarters for a long time and its "A2A" transcription service employed more than 50 English language s and 30 linguists to transcribe its taps and bugs. Andrew/MI5 tell us that A2A routinely sent transcriptions through to F Branch, and from this it was known "two NUS militants" were getting advice on how to run the strike from the CPGB Industrial Organiser Bert Ramelson. The two men getting the advice were Joe Kenny from Liverpool and Jim Slater from South Shields.

From May 24th the Prime Minister and his security advisor were briefed at least once a day by Thistlethwaite, or the DG Martin Furnival Jones, or occasionally F1/A Jams Elliot. Andrew does however give us an anonymised description of a DT briefing within the wider Civil Service:

"Director F already had a reputation as a popular briefer with a more extrovert manner when dealing with Whitehall audiences than most of his Service colleagues; Wilson's private secretary Michael Halls, who had heard him speak on previous occasions, called him 'Comic Cuts'. Director F was worried by the 'danger that the Government would look at these problems through Communist eyes as we were forced to do' and take too little account of the non-Communist influences on the strike which MI5's charter did not allow it to cover."

Andrew, Christopher. *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (p. 528). (Function). Kindle Edition.

In January 2025 a folder was declassified that contains some of Thistlethwaite and Furnival Jones correspondence about the Seamen's strike its reference is KV4-480 and the typescript daily briefings can be found in KV 3/448-1 and KV 3/448-2, The following extract give a flavour about of the close working relationship.



Wilson was narrowly defeated in the 1970 General Election and Heath start his short three year occupation of Downing Street, As can be seen DT had a high profile with the new PM. But though he was just as interested subversion as Wilson he was also like him circum spect about the service, He appointed his own interfering intermediary in the

sahep Lord Rothschild. Unlike George Wigg he was an intelligence insider having worked in counter sabotage around the world including with DT in Persta. DT had other friends in the government including Peter, Lord Carrington who had been High Commissioner to Australia all the time he was at SIFE.

It may be that Heath viewed him with some some suspicion because of he apparently enthusiastic support for Wilson. By 1971 he was seeking information about his pension from the Army and he retired the following year.

Perhaps this reflects the ironic difference in attitude of the two main political parties to the CPGB, and therefore to the work of F Branch, For Labour there was a definite narrow party political interest in the destruction of the CPGB both in benefits at the ballot box, control of trade unions and constituency parties. The Conservatives' narrow political interest was served by the continuing existence of the CPGB and its apparent common interests with Labour. If the CPGB had never existed the Conservatives would have had to invent it. However when the CPGB did cease to exist in 1991 the Militant Tendency stepped up neatly to fill the gap left.