

THE OBSERVER, SEPTEMBER 29, 1963



ANTHONY SAMPSON

Security without responsibility

He that has a secret should not only hide it but hide that he has it to hide.—CARLYLE.

TIP-TOEING through the pages of the Denning Report is the most mysterious character of all, the man known as the "Director-General of the Security Service."

More simply, he is the head of MI 5, the chief spy-catcher. Journalists are forbidden to mention his name and we must, therefore, call him M. Normally it is considered rather bad form even to mention his existence; but now it is difficult to avoid that.

For M is one of the central figures in Denning's drama. He is popping up everywhere, even writing a memorandum (in the best urbane style of James Bond) about the Ward "galère."

It was M who suggested to Sir Norman Brook that Profumo might be warned about seeing Stephen Ward, and that Ivanov might possibly be persuaded to join our side. It was M to whom Profumo admitted his connection with Christine, on January 28, 1963, and who (to his credit) refused to issue a "D" notice to suppress publication of the scandal on security grounds. It was M who decided the next day that it was not his business to find out whether Christine had been Profumo's mistress, and that "no approach should be made to anyone in the Ward galère."

Was M to blame? Lord Dilhorne and Macmillan blamed him for not having passed on the information about the Profumo-Christine affair. But Lord Denning, having studied the Directive of 1952 (which strictly limits the scope of MI 5) exculpated him.

But what is clear from the Denning Report is that M is not only very important; but even more mysterious than people thought. For no one seems to know whom he is responsible to.

Maxwell Fyfe, in his 1952 directive, explained that he was responsible to the Home Secretary. But Lord Dilhorne, when he gave his report to Macmillan, didn't seem to know about the 1952 directive: nor, apparently, did Harold Wilson, who made no mention of the Home Secretary in his attack: and Macmillan kept very quiet about it. Even Henry Brooke himself, as Home Secretary, had to send for M in March, 1963, to find out the facts; and when M told him the story about Christine being asked about the bomb, he didn't realise that he was the first Minister to be told about it.

The position would seem to be quite absurd. Here is a crucial Civil Servant, in charge of our security, and no one knows who is his boss. He pops up one moment talking to Sir Norman Brook, one moment to Profumo, one moment to Henry Brooke, and eventually to the Prime Minister. Parliament will be cross (though not wholly surprised) to discover that this elusive man is quite out of its control.

But, looked at a little further, it may not be quite so silly. For the fact must be faced that MI 5, in its day-to-day workings, is responsible to no one. Whatever the technical arrangement, MI 5 is free to roam almost anywhere. MI 5, more than any other department, must have no political allegiance, and must trust no one. "Having got the right man," Sir Findlater Stewart wrote in 1945, "there is no alternative to giving him the widest discretion. . . ."

When an M.P. asks a question about security, it doesn't make much difference whether the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister fobs him off: a serious matter (such as Philby) will be settled in private between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

But if M is so important, and invulnerable to Parliament, must he remain a secret? Doesn't the public have a right to know who is, almost single-handedly, guarding them?

The Government's answer is that a service dealing with secrets is much easier to operate if it is itself secret. M, they argue, can operate much more efficiently away from the public gaze.

The Americans, of course, provide a spectacular contrast. There, the FBI—the rough equivalent of MI 5—is run with a blaze of publicity and its head, J. Edgar Hoover, shows some signs of being fame-hungry. And its spy organisation, the CIA, the equivalent of MI 6 (our spies) is run from a big well-known building in Washington by John McCone. Of course, inside the large public outfit there is a smaller secret one, and the apparent key figures may not be the real ones. But still, the public and Congress know whom to blame, and to cross-examine; if a major blunder occurs.

The Russians, on the other hand, are more secret than we are; and their secret services are apt to be secret from one another. Between these two extremes, Whitehall likes to think it keeps the right balance: MI 5 is secret, without being secret from everyone; and responsible, without being responsible to anyone very particular.

But now that M has emerged, through the Denning Report, in such an important light, it is essential that his responsibility should be clearly defined. The trouble with Whitehall is always that they do not know where secrets should end.

Either one Minister—preferably *not* the Home Secretary—must be in charge of security, both MI 5 and MI 6, with no actual Ministry of his own but with large powers of inquiry. Or the present boss, who is M, must be revealed to the public. They should be allowed to know who M is, who appointed him, when, and where he came from.

We do not think he should be fired, but we would like to know who *could* fire him. And having found that, we would promise to leave him alone, to be as secret as he liked until the next scandal.