

Doubtful company

THE REAL SPY WORLD

By Miles Copeland.
Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 351 pages.
£3.50.

The CIA is in bad odour these days. Unlike many of his ex-colleagues who exploit their inside knowledge of "the Company" by fresh and sensational disclosures, Miles Copeland actually rallies to its defence. Not in any officially inspired or romantic spirit, but by leading us deep into the "special and private world" of intelligence (of which espionage proper—or improper—forms only a part), explaining, assessing and generally justifying.

Mr Copeland is no ordinary guide. A former officer of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, he played an important part in setting up the CIA, became a competent Arabist and one-time adviser to President Nasser, hobnobbed with Philby ("I knew him as well as anyone did"), and matched his wits against, and even conceived a personal liking for, his Russian counterparts ("a friend of mine in the KGB office in Cairo . . ."). He has combined a career in intelligence with those of international business consultant, jazz musician and author.

For all its picturesque detail and anecdotes (sometimes doctored so as not to compromise operations or techniques still on the secret list) this is an informative and sobering book.

It tells us much about the origins and organisation of the CIA, the various categories of agents used on both sides, their motives, methods of recruitment and operation and their career prospects. Jobs are apparently easier to get with Soviet intelligence than with the CIA. For the former "pay is good and steady"; probably not more than three out of ten Soviet agents get caught, and of those who do, a few get off fairly lightly, though others "die of the measles" in circumstances "that are so terrifying as to defy description". The CIA's agents are mostly citizens of eastern block countries, many of them in government or party posts. Most curious of all is the allegedly large category of informants who believe they are working for an industrial body, crusading newspaper or other organisation, but are in reality being manipulated by some intelligence service.

Mr Copeland describes the "alternative means" for gathering intelligence which range from minuscule microphones to the sophisticated scrutiny of scientific journals, official directories and so on and the brain which collates this plethora of information—the data bank. The CIA has become "the world's repository of political, sociological, economic, military and scientific data". "Octopus", the computerised files held at the CIA's headquarters at Langley, Virginia, is proving an effective weapon for detecting terrorists and hijackers, as well as enemy agents. But Mr Copeland predicts that, by the time the present drive for data is completed, its tentacles will hold "a file of some kind on practically every person in the world who in any way comes to the official notice of his own government or of the US Government".

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