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Soc 4-014 Lt. Hillen

(Agent 8 3/4)

## When a Spy Doesn't Know He's Out in the Cold

### "AGENT 8 3/4" and "UNDER-WORLD INFORMERS"

#### NEIGHBORHOOD THEATERS

"Agent 8 3/4." A screenplay by Lukas Heller, directed by Ralph Thomas, produced by Betty E. Box, a Walter Reade-Sterling, Inc. Release through its Continental Distributing Division. Running time: One hour and 28 minutes. With the following cast:

Dirk Bogarde.....Nicolas Whistler  
Sylva Koscina.....Vlasta Simenova  
Robert Morley.....Colonel Cunliffe  
Leo McKern.....Simenova  
"Underworld Informers." A screenplay by Alun Falconer, based on the novel "Death of a Snout" by Douglas Warner, directed by Ken Annakin, produced by William MacQuilly, a Walter Reade-Sterling, Inc. Release through its Continental Distributing Division. Running time: One hour and 55 minutes. With the following cast:

Chief Inspector Johnnoe. Nigel Patrick  
Mory Johnnoe.....Catherine Woodville  
Maisie.....Margaret Whiting  
Charlie Ruskin.....Colin Blakely  
Berlie Hoyle.....Derren Nesbitt  
Leon Sale.....Frank Finlay  
Bestwick.....Harry Andrews

#### By Robert Salmaggi

In "Agent 8 3/4," British producer Betty E. Box had a cute gimmick going for her and let it slip partly through her fingers. We've seen cinema Bond-type spies who hate their work, or who are all thumbs, but agent 8 3/4, as delightfully played by Dirk

Bogarde, is blissfully unaware that he is a spy in the first place. Through the chicanery of British Intelligence chief Robert Morley (and Morley is delicious) Bogarde thinks he's working as a glass-goods salesman.

To be sure, he's slightly puzzled at Morley's peculiar instructions. Bogarde is to fly to Czechoslovakia for the firm, and, for openers, he's told to use an identifying "business" code phrase ("It's rather hot for this time of year—almost like June, what?"). It's funny when most of the people he approaches merely shrug their shoulders or act bewildered.

Further, the British "contact" in Czechoslovakia has been instructed to slip the "info" into a Czech travel guidebook that 8 3/4 is conspicuously carrying. But Bogarde is nonetheless sublimely unaware of the cloak-and-dagger boiling kettle he's been thrown into, and innocently goes about his business duties,

while porters, waiters, hotel clerks, factory workers, and Czech secret police cast furtive, suspicious glances his way.

But it is at this point that the light-hearted, amusing flavor is abruptly dissipated, and once 8 3/4 finds out he's actually a you-can-get-killed agent, with everybody playing for keeps, things take on a quasi-serious turn, for the worse, even though comedy is still the hoped-for course.

Certainly, there are some funny situations and lines to be relished: there is Robert Morley's all-too-brief straight-faced frolicking (he has merely to stand there with that great big pouting face of his to prompt laughter); Leo McKern's tight-lipped dressing down of his bungling Czech secret - police aid ("What further disasters have you to report?"), and Bogarde's succession of quick costume-changes in his big-chase dodging of Czech agents. There are other plusses—

Sylva Koscina makes a delectable, lithe-figured spy and romantic interest for Bogarde, for one—but the full potential of the film isn't realized. "Agent 8 3/4" never quite becomes 9.

The associate feature, "Underworld Informers," looks at Britain's "snouts," those grimy characters who sell information to the police. One such snout gets "shopped," done in, after he turns in evidence to Inspector Johnnoe about a big bank heist. Johnnoe goes after the mob, but finds himself beautifully framed and thrown off the squad.

The plot and the characters are overdrawn, and the direction lags, but the acting is first-rate. Nigel Patrick is effective as Johnnoe—un-glamorous, middle-aged, a man doing a job; Harry Andrews adds a good turn as his Chief, while Margaret Whiting, as a disillusioned tart and Derren Nesbitt, as a high-living hood, are excellent.