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Moles

“Moles”—those most top-secret of secret agents—are all the rage these days. In Washington, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is probing the case of an American mole in the Kremlin named Anatoly N. Filatov, who was exposed and possibly executed by the K.G.B. Edward Jay Epstein, who wrote a book describing how James Jesus Angleton, the former Central Intelligence counterintelligence chief, was fired by Director William Colby because of his too-energetic hunt for a Soviet mole, weighed in with an article called “The Spy War” in *The New York Times Magazine* of September 28. In his piece, Epstein says that, although the Agency refuses to admit it, there are undoubtedly Soviet moles at this very moment punching the clock in Langley. And all this coincides with the showing on public television of a dramatization of John Le Carré’s novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, which is about the efforts of a drab British intelligence agent called George Smiley to dig out a mole in the “Circus.” Graham Greene also celebrated a mole in his recent novel, *The Human Factor*. (The best mole novels are by British writers—perhaps because British moles tend to move in the same Oxbridge circles that British writers do. *Vide* Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean—not to mention the flamboyant Kim Philby, who knew *everybody*. As did Anthony Blount, the most recently defrocked British

mole. Blount’s ties reached beyond the old-boy network to the royal family, a connection that proved quite valuable. When he was found out, he was treated like a gentleman and the matter Kept Out of the Papers—until papers found out. American moles tend to be non-U, colorless people with names like Bernon F. Mitchell and William H. Martin.)

What differentiates moles from your garden-variety spies is their penetration into the upper reaches of the intelligence hierarchy of a rival nation. So if the intelligence services are all doing their jobs, they have infested each other’s command posts with moles. Thus, we have the K.G.B.’s moles in the C.I.A. telling Moscow that *they* know that *we* know all about thus-and-such, while simultaneously telling the C.I.A. what the K.G.B. wants *it* to know. Meanwhile, in Moscow, the C.I.A. mole is telling *his* control in Langley that that last hot bit of intelligence from confidential agent Y was actually a K.G.B. concoction. As the channels of communication back and forth become saturated with this kind of stuff, each intelligence agency will eventually know just about everything that its opposite number knows. Furthermore, maybe one of these moles, having kept his nose clean, has even worked his way up and is now running the agency in which he was planted. Perhaps the C.I.A. is now run by a Soviet mole and vice versa. In that case, instead of purging only one section, as Angleton did in his campaign against Soviet moles in the C.I.A., the entire Agency should be cashiered. We can see the headline now: “C.I.A. Fired as Security Risk.”