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A Gaggle of Spies To Giggle At

THESE ARE dark days for spies. Everywhere you look, they are in trouble; and so are the governments which engaged them.

In New Zealand, two officers of the French CIA are in jail, charged with blowing up the nuclear protest ship, the Rainbow Warrior, and murdering one of its passengers. Three alleged confederates fled back to France. New

Zealand, the world's most antinuclear nation, plans to put the birds in hand on trial on Nov. 4. Authorities promise an airtight case.

France is mortified. An official report, commissioned by the government and written by Bernard Tricot, erstwhile chief of staff to Charles DeGaulle, has occasioned the worst reviews in the genre since John Dean's inside account of the Watergate coverup. Essentially, it said, "Moi?" and there is much derision of the type the French find hard to bear.

Tricot concedes that the Secret Service sent frogmen to investigate the peaceniks and that there were explosives on the yacht they rented for their endeavors, but no smoking gun was found.

Perhaps the French CIA has its share of rogue elephants — of the breed that sought to poison Fidel Castro's cigars. At any rate, the government of Francois Mitterand is tottering as the scandal unfolds.

The chagrin of France, however, has been exceeded by that of West Germany, whose chief counterspy, Hans Joachim Tiedge, has jumped the wall, following four other counterspies, who were secretly working for East Germans.

The secretary of the president of the West German Republic also has been arrested, and 11 of her sister secretaries are under suspicion. East German counterintelligence has special Romeo agents trained to romance lonely Freitag Madchen, as Girls Friday would be known in Germany.

The recriminations are flying. Tormentors of Chancellor Helmut Kohl are demanding to know why Tiedge, an overweight, debt-ridden drunkard, who hasn't turned in an East German spy since 1979, was kept on the job so long.

Spying in West German is a growth industry. Ten thousand are working there now, and more are being trained. There is no easier job in the world — no new language or culture to learn, no gaps in the knowledge of current events.

But now that the East Germans and their Soviet masters know all about the West German operations, Bonn has two choices. One is to fire everybody and start all over again. The other is to declare a moratorium on

espionage until they can sort things out and get all their secretaries accounted for.

America was number one in the great worldwide spy uncovering. The spy family Walker led the way, when John Walker, a flamboyant private detective who served in the Navy for 17 years, was apprehended, having been turned in by his ex-wife. His son John turned up on the carrier Nimitz, with 15 pounds of classified papers in his possession, ready to turn over to Dad. Walker's brother Arthur, also a Navy man, a retired lieutenant commander, was taken in tow for passing confidential documents to brother John. A friend named Jerry Whitworth also has been charged.

The Walkers did it for money, although not a great deal.

Another American spy who worked for the enemy did it for love. Sharon Scranage, 29, of the CIA, gave her Ghanaian lover "a favor" documents of interest which came into her hands in the course of her duties as a support assistant in the CIA station in Ghana. She was arrested July 11.

Charles Peters of the Washington Monthly asks the most pertinent question about her. "Why does the CIA need spies inside the Ghanaian government? What threat does Ghana pose to our national security?"

The Soviets have not gone scot-free. They, too, have red faces. Ronald Reagan recently revealed that they dusted Americans in Moscow with a spy powder that made it easier for the KGB to track them. A team of U.S. doctors was dispatched to the Kremlin to check the substance for lethal properties.

Soviet spies are just as crude and stupid as their peers. They might recoup by proving their powder has peaceful uses, can be benevolently applied to truant boys, errant husbands and no-show plumbers and add years to the lives of their trackers.

If Reagan and Gorbachev cannot negotiate a test ban in Geneva, they could work out some sort of a ban on espionage. Verification, which has been a stumbling block in warheads, would be relatively easy. All the exposed spies could be put back spying on the spies they used to shadow.

Reagan will claim that the Soviets are ahead. And for once, he will be absolutely right. With the haul from the Walkers and their perfidious Germans and their lonely secretaries, the Kremlin is awash in our state secrets. But they will be immobilized for quite some time while they try to file it all.

There may never be a better time to think about a freeze on spooks.

Mary McGrory is a Washington Post columnist.