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MI5 to investigate weaknesses in defence security

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

The Government has ordered the Security Service (MI5) to conduct a comprehensive overhaul of security inside the Defence Intelligence Staff after an investigation by the Security Commission, which produced its report yesterday, disclosed weaknesses and inadequacies in present arrangements.

Security failings inside the Ministry of Defence's intelligence operation came to light as the commission inquired into the case of a young lance corporal in the Army Intelligence Corps who attempted unsuccessfully to pass secrets, gained while on temporary secondment to the Ministry, to the Russians.

In its report to the Prime Minister, the commission, chaired by Lord Bridge of Harwich, expressed concern over a "general laxity of approach" in the DIS to restricted positive vetting certificates.

It also raised questions over the rules governing the destruction of classified documents and the complex security instructions given to staff, and made clear its view that an internal investigation by the Ministry since the case had been inadequate.

The critical commission report came on the same day that the Minister admitted that British military secrets had fallen into "unauthorized" hands in Cyprus.

This followed allegations that young soldiers had been black-

mailed into giving information.

Lord Trefgarne, Under Secretary for the Armed Forces, said in a letter to a Labour MP that it now seemed likely that classified information has been passed to unauthorized recipients. Investigations were continuing and it was too early to assess the significance of the matter and what charges would be made.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher last night announced the Government's acceptance of the commission's recommendation for a review of protective security in the DIS. About 1,000 staff are employed there, gathering technological, economic and military intelligence from the Soviet bloc.

The Government has also accepted the commission's general recommendations, which will apply to all government departments, the security and intelligence agencies and the armed forces.

These were: that guidance should be issued on the employment of holders of restricted positive vetting certificates, with special consideration to the circumstances in which people under 21 are allowed access to top secret material; that rules governing destruction of documents be reviewed; that security instructions be written in clear and unambiguous terms.

The commission investigated the case of Philip Aldridge, who was sent to prison for four years at the Central Criminal Court in January, 1983. He had stolen a

secret document, believed to be a weekly assessment produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee, while seconded for two weeks in August, 1982, to a small section in the DIS covering intelligence from Argentina after the Falklands war.

The court was told that Aldridge made contact with the Russians through coded messages in the personal columns of the *Daily Telegraph* in which he was referred to as "Spider" and the Soviet Embassy as "Mum". He was unmasked when various telephone numbers for the Soviet Embassy were found in his diary by his commanding officer.

Although the commission concluded that Aldridge's attempts to sell secrets were frustrated, it found that an undoubted breach of security gave him the opportunity to remove the document.

Aldridge had restricted positive vetting clearance because he was under 21, which should have meant that he had access to secrets only on a "need to know" basis and under strict supervision.

● The Government has begun to operate a tougher, more intensive system of security screening for officers in Whitehall's secret services in an attempt to reduce the chance of KGB penetration. (Peter Hennessy writes).

The security authorities are

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Overhaul of defence security

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in the process of adopting a practice used by the CIA known as "neighbourhood inquiries". That involves an examination of the background of an intelligence official by Whitehall investigating officers in which neighbours and acquaintances are asked questions about the individual's character and social habits.

Security officials in MI5, in the secret intelligence service, MI6, and the Government Communications Headquarters have already started using the neighbourhood inquiry technique as a part of their positive vetting procedure.

In the past, only character referees nominated by the official under investigation were interviewed although something comparable to neighbourhood inquiries has been applied to members of the armed forces, for example those engaged in the operating of the nuclear deterrent.

28 March 84

No intention of Secrets Act change—PM

SECRETS ACT

By Colin Brown

THE Prime Minister told MPs yesterday that the Government had no plans to change the Official Secrets Act, despite criticism of the law after the prison sentence on Miss Sarah Tisdall for passing classified information to the Guardian.

Mrs Thatcher also won strong support from Tory MPs when she told the House of Commons that no government could carry on its business unless it could trust its civil servants to keep secret documents to themselves.

The call for section two of the Official Secrets Act, under which Miss Tisdall was charged, to be changed was made by Mr David Winnick (Lab, Walsall N).

Mrs Thatcher said, "The Franks Report on the Official Secrets Act was published in 1972: the Labour Government was in office from 1974 to 1979 and did not, over five years, introduce legislation. It could have done so but it didn't. In 1979 we introduced legislation which did not find favour in the House and we have no inten-

tion of introducing further legislation at present."

Mr Tony Blair (Lab, Sedgfield) said the Government should not conceal from the British public and Parliament the scale of what it was doing.

Mrs Thatcher said, "I do not believe any government can carry on its business unless it can trust those in the Civil Service who have charge of secret documents to keep those documents to themselves."

Labour MPs shouted: "There are leaks every day."

Mr Terence Lewis (Lab, Worsley) called on the Prime Minister to review sentencing policy in view of the way the Official Secrets Act had been applied.

Mrs Thatcher said she did not believe that a review was necessary. Sentencing was a matter for the courts.

There was a roar of surprise when she added, "We are in certain cases proposing next year to introduce a right of appeal against sentences. But it would not apply to the particular case — it would only be where it was thought a sentence was actually too low."

Mr Cranelly Onslow (C, Woking) was loudly supported by Tory MPs when he said that the Government



Mrs Thatcher: 'Must be able to trust Civil Service'

could not effectively carry on its business if the Official Secrets Act were to be amended to legalise "the wilful betrayal of secrets."

Any civil servant in any grade who found him or herself in conflict with the Government should transfer to non-controversial work or resign from the service, Mr Onslow said.

Mrs Thatcher replied, "I agree wholly with you and I note that when the matter came up during the lifetime of the last Government in

June, 1976, the then Prime Minister (Mr Callaghan) said there must be absolute confidence that papers and discussions that take place are kept within the circle to whom they are given."

Mrs Thatcher also noted that, as the leader of the Opposition, she had then fully supported Mr Callaghan, saying it was essential that confidentiality should be maintained over all secret documents. "He was right then and I was right to support him."

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