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Security to be reviewed after spy case indictment

By Ian Aitken

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The Prime Minister yesterday authorised a review of the Defence Intelligence Staff at the Ministry of Defence as a result of a Security Commission inquiry into a bizarre spy case in which an army lance corporal tried, but failed, to convey a secret document to the Soviet embassy.

The Security Commission has also recommended changes in the circumstances in which

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Lord Trefgarne—wrote to MP

people under the age of 21 should be allowed access to top secret material, and has suggested changes in the degree of supervision to which they should be subjected.

The Prime Minister also accepted this recommendation, which has a bearing on the Government's reaction to the case of Miss Sarah Tisdall and her access to sensitive material in the private office of the Foreign Secretary.

She made it clear that all the commission's recommendations will apply to the whole of Whitehall — including the Foreign Office.

A further aspect of the commission's report also touches on the current mood of economy in Whitehall. More than once the commission's report refers to security problems created by the workload of the DIS, and by the shortage of staff involved in protecting secret information.

The commission's report concerns the case of Lance Cor-

poral Philip Leslie Aldridge, of the Intelligence Corps, who was seconded to work at the Ministry of Defence in a department concerned with destroying secret documents.

Aldridge pleaded guilty to an offence under the Official Secrets Act on January 18 last year, and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, even though the evidence showed that he had not committed a direct offence but had perpetrated a preparatory act to the commission of such an offence.

In other words, he intended to communicate secret information to the Russians but was caught before he could do so.

The commission report (Command 9212, Stationery Office, £2.25) states that Aldridge's attempts "to sell his country's secrets to Russia were frustrated by the alertness and efficiency of the security service, so that

Aldridge was in due course unmasked and brought to justice."

But it does not tell the story of how this was achieved, noting that the account of "these highly successful operations" was set out in an appendix deleted from the published version. It recognises that this is unfortunate, since Britain's counter-intelligence service could have been seen at its best, had it been possible to publish the facts.

By an unhappy coincidence a Defence Department minister confirmed yesterday that an inquiry was continuing into another case in which it seemed likely that British military secrets had fallen into Soviet hands.

To the embarrassment of senior ministers, Lord Trefgarne, Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces, confirmed in writing to an MP that there was a possibility that young British servicemen working at a branch of GCHQ in Cyprus might have fallen victim to Soviet blackmail.

The admission is embarrassing to ministers because the inquiries are still being made after a newspaper report about the activities of attractive dancehall hostesses in entrapping young soldiers.

Lord Trefgarne told Mr Ted Leadbitter, the Labour MP who specialises in security matters: "It now seems likely that classified information has been passed to unauthorised recipients."

But it was the Security
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Thatcher reacts to spy case inquiry

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Commission report which had the attention of MPs last night. Its compliments to the Security Service stopped with the capture of Lance Corporal Aldridge, and virtually all the rest of its findings represent a condemnation of security arrangements at the Ministry of Defence.

The report says: "We have become increasingly concerned about the state of security in the Defence Intelligence Staff generally."

The commission urges the authorities to review the circumstances in which young people should have access to top secret material, and the degree of supervision to which they should be subjected. It recommends that senior officers should name responsible officers to supervise them.

But the commission acknowledges reality by saying that when a spy, or potential spy, gets into a position where he has access to secret documents supervised destruction "is unlikely to frustrate him in obtaining a document or copy at some stage in its life before destruction."

It goes on to draw attention to its persistent criticism of the "over-classification" of documents — a practice which it believes "must do a positive disservice to the interests of security," since it is likely to discredit the whole system.

The commission dismisses the MoD's Manual of Security practice as a "massive, complex, and indigestible document which is not always drafted in such a way as to provide a simple answer to a simple question."

The facts of Aldridge's behaviour appear ludicrous, insofar as they are recorded. The commission reveals that he worked in a room in which classified documents awaiting destruction were stored in a canvas bag after being torn in pieces. It was from this bag that Aldridge, in his confession, claimed to have taken a document which had only been torn in half. In his original confession this document seemed only moderately sensitive.

But after his conviction Aldridge asked to alter his confession and claimed that the document was substantially more sensitive than he had originally admitted. He stole 17 material which he intended to convey to the Russians.