

Berlin's motives are also enigmatic. Through his biography of Karl Marx, published in 1938, he helped to make Communism more respectable, but it may be that his dealings with the Soviet Government erred on the shady side. Evidence exists that Moscow may have threatened him with ill-treatment of relatives left behind in the Soviet Union – Berlin was born in Latvia, but always thought of himself as a Russian – if he did not provide them with strategic information. Berlin's role as a don at All Souls, where he mixed with the politically powerful, represented an attractive connection for the Comintern, and he may well have acted indiscreetly. His ill-judged cultivation of the spy-handler Gorsky later in Washington suggests a highly dubious track-record. In 1940, his role as Burgess's sidekick was presumably justified internally as an interpreter for Burgess, and explained openly as a way of assisting the Ambassador in Moscow, Stafford Cripps. Yet Berlin had been recruited by MI6 by then, and may also have been anxious to pursue his own Zionist goals in Moscow.

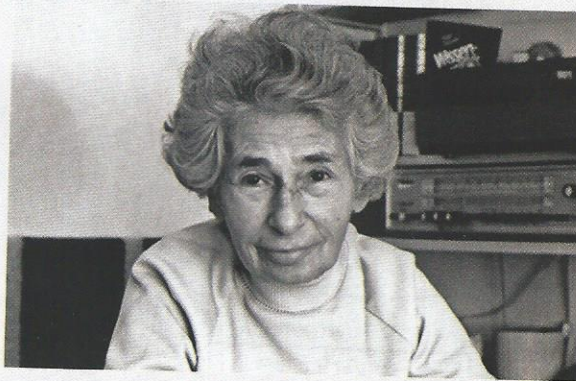
From that summer of 1940 on, however, MI5's resistance to the Soviet menace gradually ebbed. It moved out its chief expert on Communist subversion, Kathleen Archer (who had, in fact, led the interrogations of Krivitsky). Other 'agents of influence' contributed to the appeasement of Communism, with the Soviet desk in the Ministry of Information also coming under the control of a Soviet spy. In February, 1941, Soviet assassins caught up with Krivitsky, and staged his 'suicide' in a Washington hotel, thus eliminating any possibility of further leakages. When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, and Churchill immediately responded by promising support to the new ally, a well-established group of fellow-travellers was in place to complement those who were regularly leaking secrets to the Soviet Union, predominantly Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt, Cairncross, and Long – but also several others.

The risks were immense. If the spies had revealed to their masters the source of much vital intelligence, namely the decrypts known collectively as 'Ultra', and the secret had leaked back to the Germans, it would have been disastrous for the war effort. Yet another insidious exposure came to light. By an intensive study of the archives at Kew, and a meticulous examination of contemporary memoirs and biography, Percy has discovered that a massive cover-up occurred over the espionage of atomic secrets undertaken by Klaus Fuchs. When the treachery of Fuchs was discovered in 1949 through the decryption of Soviet diplomatic traffic, the reaction of MI5 was first to conceal the fact that Fuchs could have passed through their net, even though he was known to have been a Communist in Germany in 1933, and second, to modify the official record to suggest that Fuchs had not started his spying until after the invasion of the Soviet Union (when the alliance would have given it, to some, a veneer of moral justification).

The reality was very different. While Fuchs had been interned, as a German, in the panic of 1940, his communism was well-known, and he had in fact been brought specifically out of internment from Canada by his sponsor and collaborator, Rudolf Peierls, abetted by Max Born in Edinburgh, who had employed Fuchs before the



Left:  
Klaus  
Fuchs



Left:  
Ursula  
Kuczynski

war. Peierls himself had very dubious associations with the Soviets, and also conspired to conceal his true role in the affair. Yet MI5 successfully pulled the wool over the eyes of the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and even ensured that the official history of atomic research misrepresented the truth.

Percy reveals many more facts about the pusillanimity of MI5 and the cover-ups that occurred – including the remarkable information that the less-heralded spy, Leo Long, was discovered red-handed passing on secrets when working for MI14 in 1943, yet was allowed to work again in Germany as the war wound down. He highlights the efforts of leftist MPs such as Ellen Wilkinson and Dennis Pritt, who were shamelessly allowed to defy the more sensible entreaties of MI5 officers who warned of the perennial danger of Communism. He sheds fresh light on the extraordinary decision to allow the spy Ursula Beurton (née Kuczynski) to operate a radio unhindered in Oxfordshire during the war. She turned out to be Fuchs's courier.

Percy does not believe that a super-mole at the heart of MI5 was responsible for the calamity, a theory that has been espoused by others. It is, on the other hand, a story of incompetence, of dithering and an unprofessional lack of preparation for the unexpected, of the failure to acknowledge that espionage comes along with subterfuge, of a lack of resolution and insight in following up leads, of a succumbing to the watery but superficially attractive story of the moral advantages of Communism as espoused by intellectuals, and the belief that native British communists must be harmless. When the truth was unavoidable, the impulse of its leaders was to 'Save the Service' (and their careers) rather than 'Defend the Realm' – a lack of integrity that has sullied MI5's reputation until this day.

Percy is preparing a book from his thesis, which will be published in time for the centenary of the October Revolution. ■