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978-1-107-00099-5 - Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain

Christopher Moran

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Classified

Classified is a fascinating account of the British state's long obsession with secrecy, and the ways it sought to prevent information about its secret activities from entering the public domain. Drawing on recently declassified documents, unpublished correspondence and exclusive interviews with key officials and journalists, Christopher Moran pays particular attention to the ways that the press and memoirs have been managed by politicians and spies. He argues that, by the 1960s, governments had become so concerned with their inability to keep secrets that they increasingly sought to offset damaging leaks with their own micro-managed publications. The book reveals new insights into seminal episodes in British post-war history, including the Suez Crisis, the D-Notice Affair and the treachery of the Cambridge spies, identifying a new era of offensive information management, and putting the contemporary battle between secret-keepers, electronic media and digital whistle-blowers into long-term perspective.

Christopher Moran is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. His previous publications include *Spooked: Britain, Empire and Intelligence* (as co-editor, 2009).

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FOREWORD

Chapman Pincher

During my sixty-five years of investigative writing, thirty-four of them as a Fleet Street journalist, there were many occasions when I knew that I was being secretly subjected to the Leak Procedure – a systematic Whitehall inquiry to discover the source of my offending information. I also assumed that the inquiries had failed but had seen none of the evidence until 2007 when the author of this book, who was researching official documents, consulted me in connection with his Ph. D. thesis. He had managed to secure declassified Cabinet papers and other documents which described my Leak Procedure cases in detail, along with the consoling news that not one of them had ever been successful. Now, in this remarkably detailed and entertaining account of the machinations of the ‘Secret State’ to prevent intrusion into its activities, he has produced documentary evidence of its ruthless attempts to have me, and others, prosecuted as criminals for giving the public information which was being withheld to avoid political or official embarrassment rather than because of genuine national security concerns.

My respect for security classification was sullied on a pitch-black night of torrential rain in 1942 when an army dispatch rider, soaked to the skin, arrived at my unit, near Newark, where I was the officer on duty. I had to sign for an envelope marked ‘Secret’ and, on opening it, read ‘Tinned sausages are now available.’ As we were in the heartland of Bomber Command, we had been warned that German paratroopers might drop near us any time so I imagined that it might be a coded message requiring urgent action. I made immediate telephone

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inquiries only to find that the message meant what it said – our unit could now get access to this welcome addition to our rations.

This experience may have conditioned my rather cavalier attitude to the Whitehall concept of secrecy when, after becoming a Fleet Street defence reporter in 1946, I was loftily told by a civil servant that an official secret is ‘official information of any kind which has not been officially released’. To me this was a challenge to assault the bastions of the Secret State by methods which I have since expressed in my *Who’s Who* entry, concerning my hobbies, as ‘fishing, shooting, ferreting in Whitehall and bolting politicians’.

As someone who was deeply aware of the relentless threat posed by Soviet espionage, I remained so conscious of the need for genuine security that I have always had a golden rule that I would never touch or look at any classified documents. So, through Dr Moran’s enterprise, it is especially interesting to see some of them now they have been released. (What might be considered as the sole breaking of my rule concerns my private briefing before I travelled to an Australian desert to observe a test of Britain’s first useable atomic bomb in 1953. Sitting at a large desk opposite a senior Supply Ministry official, I noticed that the folder he was about to open bore the word ‘TOTEM’. Clearly, it was the code name of the operation and when I used it in my dispatch describing the successful test there was a second explosion, both in Whitehall and Australia, to discover the source of the leak. It failed, as did so many other inquiries, wasting the time of so many senior officials and Forces’ chiefs. Another released document shows that, as far back as 1958, the Permanent Secretary of the Defence Ministry had advised his minister against any more time-wasting ‘witch hunts’ of me (which were to include having me watched), stating ‘I believe that we must live with the man and make the best of it. We can console ourselves that his writings, though embarrassing at times to Whitehall, disclose nothing that Russian intelligence does not already know.’ That sage advice was ignored and in good *Yes Minister* style the security ‘mandarins’ insisted on continuing their sterile activities.

Some of Dr Moran’s discoveries have astonished me. The serious concept in the minds of some security officials that I would put my head on a block by disguising myself and using a false name to gain entry to a secret establishment beggars my belief.

As someone who witnessed most of the action described here, being personally involved in much of it, and has a full, quickly

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consultable record of most of it in my forty thick volumes of newspaper cuttings, I congratulate Dr Moran on producing an accurate and enthralling read which captures the excitement, the conspiracy and the tragedy of historic events like the ‘D-Notice Affair’ while providing a reliable work of reference on events which impacted on the nation’s history.

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Thanks go to the espionage writer Chapman Pincher, who, as well as being gracious enough to write a foreword to this book, welcomed me into his home in Kintbury to discuss my project. It was in this setting – with a ‘Gone Fishing’ placard hanging disingenuously on the front door – where *Classified* really took shape. I wish to express my gratitude to Pincher for the insight, colourful vignettes and access to private papers he gave me, but also for reminding me of Gibbon’s

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apothegm that history should not only educate, but amuse. The history of British secrecy has moments of genuine high comedy, and it is thanks to Pincher's wise counsel that I did not resign these moments to the cutting-room floor.

For astute suggestions, incidental kindnesses and much else besides, I should like to thank a number of academic friends and colleagues: Christopher Andrew, Peter Gill, Andrew Hammond, Michael Herman, Robert Johnson, Christopher Murphy, David Robarge, William Rupp, and Nicholas Wilkinson. I should also like to acknowledge Sir Harold Evans, whose knowledge of the Crossman Affair – imparted to me during an extended interview in the back of a New York taxi – is unsurpassed. Sadly, I have not had the opportunity to meet in person a number of scholars whose work I frequently cite in this book. My understanding of certain episodes would have been greatly reduced without the earlier studies of John Naylor, David Reynolds, Andrew Suttie and David Vincent, in particular.

A host of institutions warrant special praise, not least the libraries and archives from which the primary materials of my book were located. Honourable mention should go to the following for permission to quote from their collections: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles; Bodleian Library, Oxford; Churchill College, Cambridge; Harry Ransom Center, Texas; House of Lords Records Office, London; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston; Lauinger Library, Washington, DC; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London; Lilly Library, Indiana; London School of Economics, London; Modern Records Centre, Coventry; National Archives (UK), London; National Archives (US), College Park; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; Seely G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton; Trinity College, Cambridge; Worcester College, Oxford; University of Birmingham Special Collections; Warner Bros. Archives, Los Angeles; and West Sussex Record Office, Chichester. I am deeply grateful for the assistance of the staff at these institutions, whose willingness to go beyond the call of duty in search of documentary jewels and nuggets was often remarkable.

At Cambridge University Press, Michael Watson has been unfailingly helpful, offering sage advice about content, argument and style, as well as providing much-needed reassurance when the going got tough. At the Press, Chloe Howell has been instrumental in escorting

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this work through to publication. The end product has also benefited from the astute comments of several anonymous reviewers and the copy-editing skills of Pat Harper. Finally, I should like to thank my parents who have endured my obsession about this book with admirable patience.

ABBREVIATIONS

BSC	British Security Coordination
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency [US]
DG	Director General [MI5]
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
D-Notice	Defence Notice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation [US]
FO/FCO	Foreign Office/Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GC&CS	Government Code and Cypher School
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GRU	Soviet military intelligence
HMG	His/Her Majesty's Government
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HO	Home Office
humint	human intelligence
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JSM	Joint Services Mission
KGB	Soviet secret service/security police
MI5	The Security Service
MI6	The Secret Intelligence Service
MI9	Wartime Evasion and Escape Service
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSA	National Security Agency [US]
OIA	Official Information Act
OSS	Office of Strategic Services [US]
PRO	Public Record Office
PWE	Political Warfare Executive

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RAF	Royal Air Force
sigint	signals intelligence
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service [MI6]
SOE	Special Operations Executive
TNA	The National Archives
TSR2	Tactical Strike/Reconnaissance 2 aircraft