

CHAPMAN PINCHER, in the introduction to his recent book, *A Web Of Deception — The Spycatcher Affair*, warns us that much has been written and said about "the Wright affair" by the half-informed, the ignorant and the malicious. He is good enough to tell us that much of the Peter Wright trial in Sydney last year, including the judgment, was based on "untrue information and totally unfounded allegations." His own work, however, he assures us, will provide "an historic testimony." Alas, the book does not live up to his hopes.

I have always thought that the Government money which has been poured into the Spycatcher case would have been better spent on finding a friendly writer to denigrate Peter Wright. After reading Pincher's book (and bearing in mind his very genuine efforts for the greater freedom of information), I confess to being puzzled why he should voluntarily and perhaps unwittingly have taken on this unpaid role.

Despite having been greatly enriched by Peter Wright, Pincher attacks him in his book with venom. It is a striking contrast with the praise he lavishes on the then Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers (who was the plaintiff in the Spycatcher litigation), and the principal witness, Sir Robert Armstrong.

Anyone still reading Pincher's book by page 175 may be surprised to learn that the author thinks that "the Attorney General kept the prosecutions of newspapers to a minimum, founded by the circumstances created by their actions." Well, Havers didn't do badly, restricting himself only to contempt prosecutions against the London Daily News, the Evening Standard, the Independent, the News on Sunday and the Sunday Telegraph, not to mention breach of confidence actions against the Guardian, the Observer and the Sunday Times.

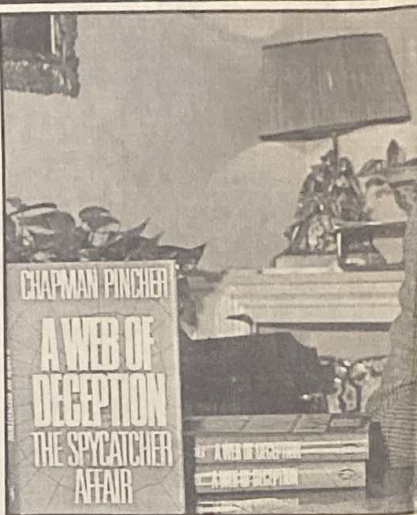
In the course of the Peter Wright case I had reason to examine the 70 or so letters that Pincher wrote to Wright in the period between 1981 and 1983, at the time of the publication of Pincher's earlier book, *Their Trade Is Treachery*. They tell a rather different story to the one detailed by Pincher in *A Web Of Deception*.

In this, his most recent book, Pincher makes it abundantly clear that he is totally opposed to Wright writing Spycatcher. Indeed he tells us that after the trial he offered to give evidence for the Government against Wright. "My own view, as a citizen and taxpayer, is that the Government had no alternative [to taking action against Wright] and that it would have happened even if Labour had been in office at the relevant time. The principle of confidentiality could hardly be more important and not just regarding secret service officers but all former servants of the Crown who have had access to secret matters."

Pincher's views have clearly changed since 1982 when he was actively encouraging Wright to produce his book. This is an odd attitude for Pincher to take, bearing in mind the fact that he was sharing the profits of *Their Trade Is Treachery* with Wright. In the letter to Wright he wrote: "The only thing I doubt about your project, is a book. Clearly if you could write one under your own name you could probably make a killing.

A book under a pseudonym would not have the same impact and its contents would not doubt reveal its author. What is the position about your book? Is it for posthumous publication, by which time (I hope) interest will have waned still further. Would you like someone else's name attached to your name about a publisher? Have you thought about an American outlet?"

But that was in 1982. Pincher now, with a zeal upon which the Government could not attack, has motives of Peter Wright. An examination of Pincher's letters to Wright shows that he himself was a pretty mercenary individual in those far-off days. Pincher has obviously forgotten his letter to Wright where he



Chapman Pincher with his historic testimony against the "half-informed, the ignorant and the malicious."

The author Chapman Pincher hasn't always been so opposed to security service disclosures by Peter Wright, the man at the heart of the Spycatcher storm. David Hooper asks

The man who traded horse with the spycatcher

wrote: "The great thing is to have the meat and then we can make and market the rissoles." In his letters, which use a fairly rudimentary code, he refers to himself in the third person in an attempt to conceal the identity of the person writing the letter. He said, for example: "To stimulate sales of his paperback, CP hopes to induce the Mail to let him write a feature on March 22 (1982)" (that being a year after Mrs Thatcher's statement in Parliament on Hollis). In another letter he writes "horse sales (his code for sales of *Their Trade Is Treachery*) have slumped and need stimulation. He (CP) would therefore be grateful for any information."

In yet another letter he writes to ask Wright 30 detailed questions: "Let me have any comments soonest because even if they are too late for the paperback of my book, they will be helpful in the publicity to boost sales through radio, TV appearances and press articles. "There's nothing like news stories for stimulating sales," he wrote. This was accompanied by advice to Wright not to collaborate with others. Wright

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should not cooperate with Nigel West, another writer of secret service tales. Pincher was fairly rude about West, whose "action has dirtied the nest for everybody" incidentally, reading *A Web Of Deception*, one would have little idea of the importance of West's book, *A Matter Of Trust*, in Wright's case in Sydney. One gets the impression that the Spycatcher case was about little else than Pincher's *Their Trade Is Treachery*.

A Web Of Deception would be a more interesting book if it had dealt with the other evidence rather than being a self-wise catalogue of self-congratulation by Wright. He would be advised to have nothing whatever to do with Penrose and Freeman of

the Sunday Times who were dismissed as "arch-hermits." Pincher also cautioned Wright about working with Granada, the producers of the World In Action programme in which Wright featured. "I do not wish to be unkind to Granada, but would you or your widow have the resources to sue them if their management reneged on such an agreement?"

Today Pincher weighs into the credibility of Wright. It seems he viewed things rather differently in 1981. Wright's letters were "much appreciated and it is always a red letter day when one of your missives arrives." In another letter he says "please write soonest, I greatly look forward to your letters." In *A Web Of Deception*, Pincher tells us that these letters, which apparently he had destroyed, were merely to ask Wright many questions which had come to mind after I had left him. The answers were needed in my spirited campaign to rebut the official rubbishing of *Their Trade Is Treachery*, in the interests of foreign rights and television sales and my reputation for accuracy."

Pincher's memory is clearly at fault here. In the 70 letters there is a concerted pumping of Wright for detailed information which goes far beyond that. Indeed in one of his letters, Wright complains that Pincher will have to cut down on his questions if he (Wright) is ever going to be able to draft the book that Pincher and Wright were then contemplating on the Atlantic Connection.

What then of Pincher's central proposition about the Arbitrator, the anonymous man that, he says, acted as intermediary between himself and the Government to see if *Their Trade Is Treachery* could be published? Why does that emerge now? Pincher seemed available enough to the media at the time of the Sydney trial, and one wonders why he did not share this information with the Government at the time so that it did not proceed, as he now argues, on the basis of incorrect evidence.

One can only speculate why the information was not produced then and why it emerges at a time when Spycatcher is published in the headlines. The thing that I find puzzling about the story is why, if the Arbitrator was likely to seek a view from

the intelligence services, it should have been a surprise to Pincher with his enormous knowledge of intelligence matters that the book would have been referred to M15. The Arbitrator needed "high level professional assurance." Pincher tells us, "from a friend with authority and whom he could trust completely that the book would not be damaging either to the interests of the nation or to the Government." Not surprisingly,



Peter Wright

therefore, The Arbitrator showed the book to the then head of M16. In 1981 Pincher wrote to Wright: "CP does not know how 5 got the book in advance but there is no doubt that they did. It could have been from the Mail or from the printers."

Pincher, who did not attend any part of the trial in Sydney, misses the real point about Sir Robert Armstrong's evidence, for which he expresses surprisingly vehement support. What Pincher fails to appreciate is that none of the questions asked him of Armstrong about *Their Trade Is Treachery* or *A Matter Of Trust* came to him as any sort of surprise. The issues had been raised months before the trial in interrogatories to which Armstrong had, on advice, given answers about which the judge was most sceptical.

Pincher seems to put this down to the pressures on Armstrong's time. No doubt, the publication of Pincher's book in 1981 was not a matter with which to trouble the Cabinet Secretary. But things were very different by 1986 when the Cabinet Secretary was going out to Australia to give evidence. At that stage, with his well-known attention to detail, Armstrong would have wanted to be fully briefed. He does have important duties in the intelligence

world and has regular contact with leading officials in M15 and M16.

Would not Sir Robert have ascertained the true position by the time of the trial, and if not, who kept the vital information away from him that, as Pincher tells us in his book, M15 and M16 were aware of what Pincher was going to write in *Their Trade Is Treachery*, not in February 1981 as Armstrong stated on oath, but in December 1980. Nevertheless, when Armstrong was asked in Sydney: "did anyone else in the service of the Government to your knowledge know in late 1980 that Pincher was writing this book about Hollis?" he replied "Not to my knowledge. How did he come not to know?"

Nor do we obtain from Pincher any enlightenment on the British Government's case for not taking action against *Their Trade Is Treachery*. Armstrong's evidence was that he was advised that there was no legal basis for taking action against Pincher's book. That was clearly nonsense. The other reason given that there had to be a covering up of how the Government had come by Pincher's manuscript - was likewise unsustainable. As the Government's action against Nigel West over *A Matter Of Trust* showed, it is not necessary to disclose where a manuscript came from if action is to be taken.

Equally, Pincher does not cast additional light on the Government's contention that there was, in the time available, difficulty in finding out who Pincher's source in the security service had been. He says Sir Dick White's reaction on reading *Their Trade Is Treachery* that the source "had to be Peter Wright."

It remains a puzzle why Pincher's book was allowed through by the Government. He pours scorn on arguments addressed by Malcolm Turnbull to the Australian Court but he has no convincing theory to put in their place.

Although Pincher denigrates what Wright says about his dealings with Lord Rothschild, he misses the opportunity in his description of the assistance rendered by Lord Rothschild in the payment of 50 per cent of the net proceeds of *Their Trade Is Treachery* to Wright through

a Netherlands Antilles company, and in his account of Lord Rothschild asking Wright to chronicle Rothschild's dealings with Wright, to explain to him why Rothschild was ever involved in this fashion, either with Wright or Pincher.

Pincher tells us in *A Web Of Deception*, as is undoubtedly the case, that Lord Rothschild asked a colleague at Rothschild's bank to make the arrangement (for payment in Australia) and then had no further connection with it. Yet this was not what Pincher was telling Wright at the time - "our mutual friend has just confirmed the deposit for the mares [code for the book money] is on its way to you..." "I have talked with our intermediary [Rothschild] and he will see what he can do about your Swiss venture but rather regards himself as having completed his contribution." "The K's you request immediately available."

The question must arise whether it is better to be his friend or enemy

Held up only on the advice of our mutual friend. Will expedite... "The failure is due to the mechanics at our mutual friend's end - am doing all I can to expedite. Will see him..." "Re the next tranche, arrangements depend on our mutual friend. I will consult him again..." "I had a session with our horse-coop [code for Rothschild] who says he cannot safely change the arrangement in the foreseeable future."

These letters are interesting when read alongside Pincher's statement in the book: "I had no hand whatever in the payment" of Wright's money.

The impression one gets from Pincher's letters is of a reluctant informant and of his desire to stir the pot in the hope of making even more money from his books.

As regards the Sydney trial itself, there are no striking insights by Chapman Pincher.

He suffers from not having attended the trial, and his account appears to be a mish-mash of press cuttings, bolstered by some offensive remarks about all the Australians participating in the case, except, curiously, Michael Codd, who he calls "such a prestigious figure." Had he been in Court he would have used another phrase. He appears to have been under the impression that Michael Codd must have been a man of the stature of Sir Robert Armstrong. In fact had he been at the trial Mr Pincher would have found that Codd was a much more junior and considerably less experienced civil servant than Sir Robert.

Mr Pincher seeks to entertain us by attacking Mr Justice Powell when he refers to vespers as a "jowler" (sic) and as "Perc." Pincher criticises Powell for certain findings on the evidence, preferring it seems his own theories which unfortunately he did not deign to share with those of us who attended the trial for five weeks or with the judge who spent some 12 weeks preparing his judgment.

Pincher seems to find it extraordinary that Mr Justice Powell should conclude from a letter dated January 27, 1983, that Pincher's reference to his "having lunch with Sir Arthur Franks recently" meant that he had seen him in December or January, whereas Pincher appears to have been under the impression that the meeting took place in September 1982. "Recently," in those circumstances, seems an odd word to use, particularly when he was writing to Peter Wright so regularly. Pincher appears to overlook the fact that Mr Justice Powell can only decide the case on the evidence actually put before him.

This book tells us more about Pincher than Wright. Pincher may have gained himself some friends in the Government and intelligence service with his attacks on Wright. But before they get too excited, they might be interested to know what he said to Wright about them in July 1982 - a view very much closer to Wright's beliefs, which Pincher now so strongly attacks.

"Mrs T only a month ago assured the House that the 'internal threat' had greatly diminished and that she was confident that there would be no more spies inside establishments. Whoever told her to say that must have been mad or worse."

For those who do talk to Pincher, the question must arise whether it is better to be his friend or enemy.

There are some interesting insights in the correspondence into Pincher's attitudes to leading figures in the intelligence and political world. The fact of Pincher's credentials to attack Wright, as he does in *A Web Of Deception*, and his rather singular view of his fellow men, it is difficult to improve on what he wrote about Harold Wilson in March 1980: "HW's health problem is real and organic - cancer of the bowel. Suspect he will not last long." (What about that famous reputation for accuracy? "Anything usable if he goes?" May be seeing Angleton soon. Meanwhile must soft pedal on HW and K [Kagan].")

On a personal level we know what Pincher had in mind when Lord Wilson's conduct was criticised. With the knowledge that the government has said it will arrest Wright if he returns to this country, Pincher can attack him with impunity. One can ask what the government thought it was doing in acquiescing in Pincher's book *Their Trade Is Treachery* if they really did want to muzzle Wright. The government's case against Wright is profoundly flawed, and the sooner they come clean the better. These letters written by Pincher which, as he makes clear in *A Web Of Deception*, he never expected to see the light of day, tell us more truth about his role on the Spycatcher affair than he chooses to do in the book.

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