

## The enemies within...

***The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents*** by Alex Butterworth, 482pp, Bodley Head, £25.00 (reviewed by Stuart Christie)

Appearing as it does just after the murderous activities of Israel's Mossad and the furore over allegations of the British secret services' complicity in torture, the publication of Alex Butterworth's compelling and insightful *The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* is well-timed. The backdrop describes the interwoven lives of some of the notable late

19th-century European revolutionaries radicalised by poverty, injustice, tsarist tyranny and the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune of 1871. These were men and women, hungry for justice, who believed, in William Morris's words, that "No man is good enough to be another man's master" and who shared a vision of the world as it might one day be, a cooperative commonwealth rid of exploitation, oppression and conflict.

The main story, however, is one of the penetration of these groups of all-too-human and often naive utopians by the sinister functionaries and acolytes of the secret state whose job it was to protect the status quo: the policemen and spymasters who lurked in the shadows seeding uncertainty and dissent, injecting discord, cultivating tensions and beguiling with deceits, illusions and provocations, demoralising, compromising and manipulating, sponsoring terrorism, and luring credulous and impressionable idealists into committing the most heinous of crimes they may never have otherwise conceived. All this was in the service of elites determined to retain their power and increase their advantage, irrespective, as the book shows, of the cost in human suffering.

Today, for me, *The World That Never Was* has particular resonance, involved as I have been recently in trying to identify some of the Franco regime's secret agents and confidantes who infiltrated the clandestine Spanish anarchist organisations in exile during the last years of the dictatorship. Butterworth's pacy and exciting book illustrates how little, if any, the practices and the character of the protagonists of this demi-monde have changed in the past century and a half: Colonel Wilhelm Stieber (1842-1882), secret counsellor to Bismarck's government, head of military intelligence for the North German Confederation, and adviser to the tsar's infamous 'Third Section'; Peter Rachkovsky (1881-1910), inheritor of Stieber's mantle as head of Russia's foreign Okhrana; Allan Pinkerton (1849-1880), Glaswegian Chartist turncoat, strike-breaker, anti-labour organiser and founder of the US Secret Service; and last, but far from least, Chief Inspector William Melville (1883-1917), later Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and, subsequently, head of the British Secret Service Bureau. The criminal intrigues and conspiracies of these men, presented so convincingly by Butterworth, were legion — including, notably, Rachkovsky's sponsorship of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and his role in establishing the fateful Franco-Russian alliance with its far-reaching and tragic consequences in the summer of 1914.

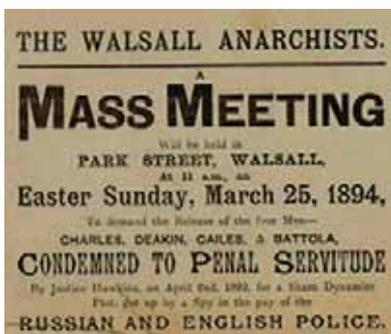
In today's 'war on terror', where the elites on each side believe, with no little justification, that those on the other are bent on global hegemony at any price, ruthlessness is de rigueur. However, in radical and revolutionary politics whose end is the destruction of domination itself the ruthlessness of power elites presents a particular perennial and, apparently, insoluble problem for the idealistic men and women involved. Their effectiveness and cohesion depend on trust and comradeship, qualities that don't fit easily into the harsh, paranoid and malevolent world of counter-intelligence. Anarchists and other active libertarian opponents of tyranny place absolute faith in individual conscience, allowing validity to every 'honestly held opinion', rejecting coercion, centralised power, and the



**Peter Rachkovsky**, head of the Russian Okhrana's foreign department



*It is Near, At the Door*, an edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* from 1917 by Serge Nilus



concept of the ‘greater good’; but the corollary of this, as Butterworth points out, is that the movement is left ‘defenceless, almost on principle, against malicious infiltration and co-option [by those seeking to use] political idealism as a cover for criminal intent’.

Butterworth describes how, in 1892, the spymaster William Melville exploited this naivety to engineer the so-called ‘Walsall Bomb plot’ to frame six anarchists, four of whom were convicted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The plot — one of many over Melville’s 30-year career in counter-intelligence — effected with the connivance of the Sûreté Nationale and Peter Rachkovsky of the Russian Okhrana, was part of a Europe-wide strategy of ‘false-flag’ terrorism to discredit anarchists and Russian dissidents in the eyes of the public of their host nations.



Sir William Melville, Chief Superintendent, Special Branch and, later, founder of the British Secret Service Bureau

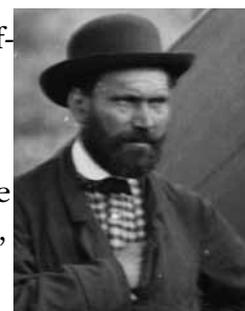
As Butterworth explains, Melville’s undercover operative in the Walsall case was Auguste Coulon, a half-French, half-Irish, deep-entry agent and spy, who was also closely involved with Henry Samuels, another of Melville and Rachkovsky’s creatures responsible for the 1894 Greenwich Park bomb explosion that provided the plot for Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*. David Nichol, the editor of *Commonweal*, the journal of the Socialist League, and one of the foremost defenders of the Walsall anarchists — who paid for his solidarity with 18 months’ hard labour — recorded the human cost of such tactics with great pathos: ‘Romance and novelty there are’, he wrote of the anarchists’ life, ‘though sometimes the delightful vision comes to an abrupt termination, changing suddenly, like a lovely face into an opium vision of something horrible and devilish. This was the fate of some friends of ours, who dreamed of regenerating the world, and found themselves, thanks to the machinations of a police spy, doomed to a long term of penal servitude.’ ‘The fate of others’, Butterworth notes, ‘was more abrupt’.



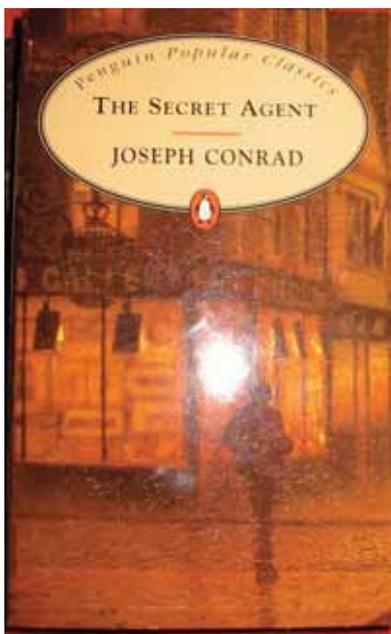
Accidental death of an anarchist: **Martial Bourdin**, Greenwich Park Observatory, Thursday, 15 February 1894



*The World That Never Was* is a compelling narrative history both of a generation of demonised and battered — but optimistic — revolutionaries involved in a Manichean struggle for progress and social justice, and of the political police forces ranged against them, serving the geopolitical and domestic political interests of tyrants, despots and privileged elites from St Petersburg to San Francisco. Protecting reputations isn’t limited to safeguarding that of the current head of MI5, Jonathan Evans, against accusations of complicity in torture; for years the Metropolitan Police Special Branch fought tenaciously to prevent access to their files for the 1890s, the period of Melville’s ascendancy. When he asked initially for them under a Freedom of Information application Butterworth was told the files had been lost, pulped in the war effort, or destroyed by a bomb. Then, in 2001, they mysteriously reappeared, having been used as the basis for a doctoral thesis by Dr Lindsey Clutterbuck, a serving Special Branch officer. Following a ruling in his favour by the Information Commissioner and a reprimand for the Metropolitan Police’s handling of the case, Butterworth finally received the 120-year-old Special Branch files — all names in it had been redacted. The censored material raises as many questions as it provides answers.



Allan Pinkerton, Glaswegian scab and founder of Lincoln’s Secret Service



Stuart Christie  
*The Guardian* 27 March, 2010

# On infiltration...

*\*This article was originally published in **El Libertario** #58, March-April 2010. Although originally based on the actual experiences of Venezuela's social struggles, it deals with situations and facts of interest to activists anywhere.*

For some time now the Venezuelan government has made systematic advances in the reorganization of the national police intelligence system, with the intention of discovering and neutralizing autonomous social movements that appear in the country. The Intelligence and Counterintelligence Law (temporarily suspended) and the new Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN in Spanish) are but two examples of this. In order to promote the necessary knowledge on this issue among activists, we give an informative recap of the different tactics used by the State to break up the antagonistic social fabric and criminalize its followers.

## **The State's intelligence tactics**

These tricks were developed and/or systematized by the COINTELPRO program of espionage, provocation and information the FBI used to destroy dissident political groups in the United States. They have been used by most of the world's States and Venezuela is no exception. Here are some examples:

**Surveillance:** Intelligence and security organizations use the existing technologies to conduct exhaustive surveillance of activists to prepare the corresponding judicial files. To that end they use the existing surveillance technologies. Photographing, filming, following in vehicles, reading email and correspondence are some of the many tactics used against social militants.

In general, mobiles/cell phones and frequently visited places are infiltrated by the police to eavesdrop in conversations and do what's called "information sharing" to combine different pieces of information. Let's not forget that in Venezuela CANTV (State enterprise that monopolizes telephone landlines) and most private communications enterprises lend themselves to such manipulation by the State.

**Infiltration:** The State usually places undercover agents in popular demonstrations or inside the assemblies with a dual intent: first, to take note of the persons gathered and the information discussed in the assemblies, second, to promote discord among the attendants in order to trivialize the issues. Not many people go to a gathering without previous interest in the conflict or knowledge of some of the people involved. Since the intelligence services normally use dumb or rookie police for this task, a simple conversation with them usually uncovers who is a plant and who isn't.

A usual trick is the use of **informers**. These are people close to the group who, for money, favors or the resolution of judicial problems give information about the group to the intelligence agencies. They are hard to detect and more than once activists have been falsely accused of being informants. This has been used successfully against armed groups particularly in the previous century. Because of this, action groups today tend to be smaller and based on extreme affinity and even family ties.

Another form of infiltration is people who attend a reunion or assembly for the first time and push for extreme or violent acts regardless of the issue being discussed. They stand out because of their subversive rants and their proposals for crazy ideas or plans rarely in tune with reality.

**Rumors:** The use of informers and infiltrators contributes to the spread of rumors that tend to divide a social front or collective. These baseless rumors seek to discredit the organization and its activists.

**False communiqués:** Intelligence organizations usually write misleading stuff to create confusion among activists and their kindred organizations. The idea is to find a contradiction within the group that will cause its implosion. For example, in Chile the District Attorney created a group named Frente Anarquista Revolucionario (FAR) [Revolutionary Anarchist Front] that in a provocative fashion claimed responsibility for false actions and stirred polemics with the informal Chilean groups in order to destroy them.

**Media disinformation:** Certain media work in tight cooperation with intelligence organizations. In general they try to create a preconceived opinion about demonstrators and activists, accusing them of sabotage, of being “enemy agents”, “out of control”, or “maladjusted”. An example is the Venezuelan TV program “La Hojilla” whose anchor –a well known and decorated police informant- plays prosecutor, judge and executioner of dissidents against the current government. The media also serves to broadcast wrong information about groups and initiatives or to publish manipulated information about some activist, attempting to discredit his/her commitment with whatever causes he or she upholds.

For this reason the use of **counter information** is a fundamental tool. In Venezuela – a country where the majority of the radio-electronic media is in the hands of the current government- the use of blogs, Myspace, Twitter or other communication networks is a necessary tool today and will become even more so in the future.

**Harassment:** In many countries, intelligence organisms use pressure such as telling the boss an employee is a “radical” or inserting information among his/her acquaintances to make him/her feel uncomfortable or persecuted in their trusted milieu. Accusations such as “homosexual”, “rapist”, “drug addict” are common. Another form of harassment is when the State determines the identity of an activist and decides to arrest or interrogate him/her under any pretext. In many cases the arrest is used to “plant” drugs or other things considered illegal (Molotov cocktails, explosives etc). The goal is to make them quit their activism.

**Sabotage:** Police organizations (or people connected to them) do sabotage against the meeting places of activists as well as theft of materials. They try to sow fear and discouragement among the sympathizers.

**Paramilitary:** Intelligence organisms form paramilitary organizations which they equip with weapons and train them to perform the “dirty work” that is not convenient to do under “constitutional legality”. In Venezuela this is formed by the evil “combat corps” or the diverse “popular collectives” that police the poor neighborhoods.

**Lethal force:** When somebody in a social movement achieves notoriety and other means of control or cooptation by the institutional powers fail, they resort to assassinate the dissident either by thugs (masquerading as common criminals) or in supposed confrontations that are usually uncovered if there is an objective investigation.

### **Some measures to avoid infiltration**

- 1) Turn off your cell phone before a gathering: It has been proven that cell phones can transmit information even when they are off. Put them in a place removed from the discussion area or put them in the refrigerator [TN: better yet, remove the battery]. Black Berrys use GPS (Ground Position System) that gives the exact location where you are. Cell phones are used for data sharing and to establish a dissident’s social network.
- 2) Before entering the gathering location, try to walk around and reconnoiter the outside area and try to identify suspicious activity that could imply undercover police, usually recognizable by their physique, their way of talking or because they look out of place. Rarely will they look you in the eye and they many times stumble with their explanations.
- 3) When doing mass email use blind carbon copy (bcc) for the addresses, in case your email falls in the wrong hands you will not expose other people.
- 4) Send your communications from a cyber café or similar service to prevent the intelligence organizations from obtaining your IP (your computer ID code)
- 5) Affinity and mutual trust among activists in any campaign are the best antidotes against infiltration and repression. Better a few but secure than many and insecure.
- 6) Do not contribute to the prevailing disinformation, don’t gossip or circulate ill-intentioned information.
- 7) Be alert – without becoming paranoid- of infiltrators and provocateurs.
- 8) If you feel you’re under surveillance let your comrades know about it.
- 9) Never talk to the police. The National Constitution guarantees your right to remain silent. Don’t collaborate with them. Unlike in the United States, in Venezuela collaboration with the district attorney doesn’t exonerate you and only symbolically diminishes your sentence.

### \_How to secure your computer\_

Today computers are the place where activists keep most of their writings and communiqués. In most raids the first things the security forces confiscate are the computers so we recommend the following:

- 1) Download and update firewalls such as AVG ([www.grisoft.com](http://www.grisoft.com)) or ZoneAlarm ([www.zonealarm.com](http://www.zonealarm.com)) which are free to download and work with Windows.
- 2) Install a spyware detector such as Ad-ware in your computer. They can be downloaded free at [www.lavasoft.de](http://www.lavasoft.de)
- 3) Deleting documents from your computer doesn't mean they're no longer in the hard drive. There is a program called Clean Disk that totally erases them, download it here [www.clean-disk-security.softonic.com](http://www.clean-disk-security.softonic.com)
- 4) Encrypt all your sensitive documents. There's a program called PGP ([www.pgp.com](http://www.pgp.com)) that has been successfully used by activists in many countries.
- 5) Regularly change your email password, it is recommended to use a 16 digit code containing letters and numbers. A short password is easy to detect. Don't use birth dates, or the names of family members or pets.
- 6) There is a free internet provider, Riseup ([www.riseup.net](http://www.riseup.net)) that gives free and secure email addresses to activists.

### Avoid paranoia\_

Some activists become paranoid, which completely immobilizes them, abandoning the struggle and becoming passive members of society. Therefore it is important to think about what was said above so we can act with prior knowledge and diminish risks and weaknesses. We must be conscious of the fact that any struggle for the collective is the potential target of police surveillance and that is part of the social dynamics. The armed organizations of control and repression have been created to counter any type of dissidence therefore by being activists we become their target; however, we have better values than they do: our convictions we uphold for a positive social change. Don't let fatigue and fear stop you!

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[Translation: **Luis Prat**]