

British Refuse Probe in Case Of Fugitive Spy

LONDON, April 2—Britain's political establishment has closed ranks to block any inquiry into the affairs of Kenneth Littlejohn, the fugitive bank robber recruited by military intelligence to fight the illegal Irish Republican Army.

Prime Minister Harold Wilson has formally rejected proposals for an independent investigation into the matter. Answering a written question in Parliament, Wilson said: "No credence can be attached to what Littlejohn has said about the details of his relations with the British intelligence and security services, and nothing he has said would justify making this matter the subject of further review or independent inquiry."

Littlejohn escaped from Mountjoy Prison in Dublin last month, where he was serving 20 years for robbing a Dublin bank of \$160,000. In two sensational interviews with a weekly and with the British Broadcasting Co., Littlejohn said he staged this and other crimes with the approval of British military intelligence to discredit the IRA and prod the Irish Republic into tougher legislation against terrorists.

Littlejohn also said his spymasters ordered him to "disintegrate" Sean MacStiofain, a key IRA leader, and told Littlejohn to shoot if necessary at British soldiers if they interfered with his escapades.

When Wilson was an opposition leader last summer, he urged fellow Laborites in Parliament to press Edward Heath's Tory government for an inquiry into the link between Littlejohn and intelligence. In response to a Labor member's question, the Defense Ministry acknowledged that its chief, Lord Carrington, had authorized one of his top subordinates to interview Littlejohn and to collect information from him.

Now that Wilson is in power,



HAROLD WILSON
... different viewpoint

his view has changed. Knowledgeable sources here say Wilson and other Laborites have decided to bury the Littlejohn affair.

A key figure in the decision is said to be Lord George Wigg, security adviser in the previous Wilson administration of the 1960s.

In public, Wigg has been denying Littlejohn's statements and, like Wilson, insisting that the bank robber is unworthy of belief.

Some who have been following the affair have noted, however, that Wigg may have gone at this task too enthusiastically. He has charged that Littlejohn, 32, was involved in still another bank robbery at Smethwick in Britain, for which he was never prosecuted.

Since Littlejohn was fleeing from a warrant for the Smethwick caper when he came to London to work for military intelligence in 1971, Wigg's statement seems to be a clue that his spymasters promised Littlejohn immunity for this affair.

Despite its embarrassment, the intelligence community here has found some profit in Littlejohn's revelations. For

one thing, they have ended the spy career of Pamela Countess of Onslow. An enthusiastic amateur, she was part of a network in the active intelligence or agent provocateur branch of military intelligence and recruited Littlejohn and his brother for the Defense Ministry.

As a result of all the publicity, her operation has been "wrapped up, folded up and blocked off," according to knowledgeable sources with a professional contempt for amateur spymasters.

One seemingly unexplained question is why Wilson should be eager to drape a mantle of silence over an affair that has largely embarrassed the previous Conservative administration. Those privy to the decision say that the prime minister figures he would receive no political credit for airing a spy scandal. Most Britons do not like dirty linen aired, particularly in security matters.

Professional intelligence

men hope that Littlejohn, now on the run, will not be caught and that this will end the affair. They do expect, however, that the glib, charming underworld figure will speak out again, for money. British tabloid newspapers write large checks for revelations of the Littlejohn variety, and he is likely to exploit this. If the government's present plan holds, however, further stories will be greeted with cold, official silence.

The episode illustrates the difficulty of penetrating official secrecy here. Some foreign observers think that the parliamentary routine of questioning ministers prevents cover ups, but the system does not really work that way. Question time simply provides members with a chance to score glancing political points and rarely compels the production of damaging information.

If Wilson gets another question about Littlejohn, he can fob it off by referring to the answer he has already given. There is no equivalent here to the congressional committee, uncontrolled by cabinet members, pounding away at a stonewalling government.

The press, moreover, is inhibited by a whole series of legal devices—the prohibition against revealing official secrets, stringent rules of contempt and a harsh libel law.

The BBC had tentatively

planned another program on Littlejohn for tonight, but it was cancelled. The noncommercial broadcasting system here is reluctant to push its own disclosures too far, and the failure of leading papers to follow its lead has discouraged another try.

The case, however, leaves some hard questions unanswered:

- How could responsible officials like Carrington encourage an underworld figure to serve as agent on the explosive Irish scene?

- Have agents of British intelligence committed some of the outrages in Ulster and Ireland attributed to terrorists of the IRA and its Protestant equivalents?

Was the Dublin bomb that provoked the Irish legislature to pass tough, anti-IRA legislation 16 months ago the handiwork of British military intelligence?