

David Wise

Three times, it can be revealed, Tolkachev was turned away by the CIA, which feared he might be a plant. Finally, the agency decided to take a chance and began accepting material from the Soviet defense researcher. For almost a decade, Tolkachev proved to be the CIA's most valuable asset inside the Soviet Union, his existence a closely guarded secret. Because of the agency's initial suspicion, it had come close to losing his rich haul of Soviet secrets. Tolkachev was finally caught, betrayed, almost certainly, by Edward Lee Howard.¹⁰

In the end, it all came back to betrayal. The need for trust, the reality of betrayal, transcend the dilemma faced by the CIA and the mole hunters of the 1960s. They are at the core of every human relationship.

On one level, James Angleton's obsessive quest for the mole was a search for the evil within. The parallel to the human condition is obvious. In a sense, Angleton and his band of mole hunters were exorcists. Ultimately, they had about as much success as others who have attempted to ply that difficult trade.

John Denley Walker, who saw it all from the inside but managed to keep a sense of balance, summed up: "The mole hunt," he said, "probably did more to protect the Soviet agent, if there was one, than to unmask him. While everyone was being investigated and accused, the real mole was sitting back laughing."

¹⁰On June 14, 1985, Tolkachev was arrested in Moscow during a meeting with his CIA case officer, Paul M. Stombaugh, Jr., who was expelled for espionage. On October 22, 1986, TASS, the Soviet news agency, announced that Tolkachev had been tried, convicted, and executed. When I interviewed Edward Lee Howard in Budapest in June 1987, he admitted that Tolkachev "could very well have been one of the assets I would have handled." Asked if he had betrayed Tolkachev, Howard said: "I don't believe I did that." David Wise, *The Spy Who Got Away* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 261-62.