

most successful of the Cambridge recruits, it would have identified Blunt and Cairncross as the Fourth and Fifth Men far more rapidly than it did.

The failure to complete the identification of the Five increased fears that there were other undetected Soviet moles in high places who, like the Five, had been recruited at, or soon after leaving, university. In 1967 the Service's newly founded University Research Group (URG) was given the mammoth task of tracking down all students at British universities who had been Communists or Communist sympathizers during the quarter-century from 1929 to 1954 and identifying their current employment. Hitherto the systematic study of Communists in British universities had been largely confined to Oxbridge. Had it been less sensitively carried out, the URG's work might well have appeared as a McCarthyite witch-hunt of dedicated civil servants who were being persecuted simply because of their left-wing sympathies as university students. Remarkably, the URG attracted virtually no complaints or publicity. Most of those who were approached cooperated with the inquiry. Though the inquiry was well conducted, however, it achieved little of importance apart from adding to the Service's contextual knowledge of past Communist and Comintern activities in British universities. Five years of investigations identified not a single additional Soviet spy.⁹²

Not until 1974 was Blunt at last identified, initially tentatively, as the Fourth Man.⁹³ Even then, however, the hunt for the Fifth Man still did not appear in sight of success. One of the few, rather slim, remaining hopes after the Service recovered its interest in VENONA during the 1960s⁹⁴ was that a new Soviet decrypt might provide the solution. On 22 June 1977 the DG, Sir Michael Hanley, was asked by the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, if he knew the identity of the Fifth Man. Hanley's response was somewhat defeatist:

I replied that I did not, though there were many theories. The only independent source on which I could rely was VENONA. There was still a chance that we should get enough VENONA messages from the London [residency] of the KGB in 1945 to enable us to discover more about the Ring of Five. NSA were doing a great deal of work on this and I had already emphasised to our American friends the importance, at least from our point of view, of bringing this to a successful conclusion.⁹⁵

The identity of the Fifth Man was eventually to be established, not through a belated VENONA breakthrough, but as a result of intelligence from Oleg Gordievsky, an SIS agent in the KGB recruited late in 1974. From September 1975 SIS passed all intelligence received from Gordievsky