





STORY BY EAMONN O'NEILL
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THE *Esquire* INVESTIGATION

IN HIS PARIS EXILE, MI5
WHISTLEBLOWER DAVID
SHAYLER SAYS HIS EVERY
MOVE IS WATCHED.
ESQUIRE TRACKED HIM
DOWN TO FIND OUT IF THE
SPY WHO COULDN'T KEEP A
SECRET IS A PUBLIC HERO
OR A GREEDY TRAITOR

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Carlos the Jackal calls him "David the Englishman". The terrorist once infamous as "The World's Most Wanted Man", is captive inside the forbidding Prison de la Santé in Paris. But that hasn't stopped him plotting, and the arrival of inmate 269151F filled his mind with schemes. He shouted hopefully through his iron bars every time the prisoner walked from his cell to the exercise yard.

"David, David... Tell me about Libya. Tell me about the plot to kill Gaddafi."

The Jackal's voice echoed around the yard as former MI5 agent David Shayler loitered in the shadows. "Who's that?" Shayler asked other prisoners in fluent French. It was Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, alias "Carlos the Jackal", in solitary isolation for life following the brutal murder of two French policemen. The terrorist's disembodied voice unnerved the British inmate. "For God's sake tell him I'm not here," he said, shaking his head.

To the other prisoners, Shayler wasn't David the Englishman. They called him "Mr Gazza": Shayler is a Middlesbrough fanatic; he had a team shirt in his cell. On one of the few occasions when he'd cried, it wasn't because the pressure had got to him, that The Jackal's daily taunts had become too much to bear. It was when he'd heard his team's terrace anthem, "We Shall Overcome", on French TV. It made him think about standing beside his brothers and father watching Boro play in last year's Coca-Cola Cup Final.

David Shayler's journey to his cramped cell began on the night of 1 August 1998. He walked out of his Parisian Left Bank hotel, and strolled around the corner to a bar to watch satellite TV coverage of Boro playing a pre-season friendly. When he returned, dripping wet from the heavy rain, he was greeted at reception by five French undercover police officers. They spoke to him in French, and he replied in French.

"Are you Mr David Shayler?" "Yes." "You must accompany us..." "Am I under arrest?" "That's not important."

It was an odd reply. He was neither read his rights nor informed where the men were from. Shayler asked for ID. Cards were produced. They looked fake, he thought — "like something you'd buy from a dodgy magazine" — and began to suspect he was being hijacked by terrorists. He was, after all, a rogue ex-MI5 officer with valuable knowledge, and Paris has always been an international crossroads in the world of espionage.

In rising panic he asked to see his girlfriend, Annie Machon, another fugitive ex-MI5 agent, who was in their room upstairs. They refused. He was handcuffed. Three agents led him to an unmarked car, while two stayed behind to search for his passport. He was driven at speed to a police depot in the bowels of the Palais de Justice, near Notre Dame. Forms were filled. Fingerprints were taken. Shayler was given cigarettes and coffee. It was then, as he began to take stock, that something suddenly dawned on him. "I'd been in that place before, in that very room," he told me. "On business, representing my old employers: the British government and MI5."

The first time I saw David Shayler was in a crowded Parisian courtroom last October. He was led into a glass security box to stand before Mme Ponroy, president of a three-judge jury. She was to hear arguments for and against Shayler's extradition to the UK, applied for by the British government.

Shayler, then 32, stood in the dock looking curiously young and stooped. A big man, he seemed to be trying to make himself smaller, more humble. He isn't as large as photographs suggest: podgy, not mountainous. His hands are fine but dimpled around the knuckles.

Shayler listened intently to the statements and, when prompted, answered in both French and English. His voice was soft, and the court strained to hear him. He wore a white shirt and a navy-blue suit he hadn't

SHAYLER'S GIRLFRIEND IS JUMPY. I SEE TWO MEN CHECK WATCHES AND SIGNAL TO EACH OTHER

worn since his MI5 days. His girlfriend told me her offer of a tie had been rejected. His guards said he might hang himself with it.

Shayler's French lawyers argued that as his actions had been political, he shouldn't be extradited. The prosecutor representing the British case stated that, on the contrary, Shayler's actions had been criminal. He also said that soon such hearings wouldn't even be required, since Europe's frontiers were opening up.

In his defence, Shayler claimed his motivation was to expose an operation which used taxpayers' money to kill innocent civilians. He said he'd already handed back sensitive documents, and offered to return the £20,000 *The Mail on Sunday* paid for his stories.

It was a low-key performance, very different from how he'd sounded just a few days before his arrest. Calling me from France – I'd made contact with him through a third party – Shayler had sounded bullish, even though he was speaking on a mobile phone, moving between secret locations, and there were clicks on the line which we both suspected were signs that the call was being monitored. He was relaxed and had a congenial, self-deprecating sense of humour.

Now he looked scared out of his wits. As he was led away he seemed set to burst into tears.

The evening following the hearing

I meet Annie Machon in a Paris hotel. She is attractive, pale and has blonde hair. Her demeanour is that of an off-duty police-woman; part of her, I feel, misses MI5 – or "Five", as she calls it. I'd met her the week before in London; she'd seemed jumpy. In the foyer mirror, I'd seen two men checking their watches and signalling to each other.

"Are you under surveillance?" I'd asked. "I expect so. But if I was, we wouldn't know – they're supposed to be too good."

In Paris, she's still nervous and smokes constantly. The empty hotel café is in a narrow side street; a single car could block it off in an instant. Machon talks about joining MI5 (she'd applied to the Foreign Office, which wrote back hinting clumsily about "another position she might be more interested in"); meeting David there ("at lunch – he was reading the paper and stuffing his face as usual"); how they'd both become disillusioned by the mismanagement of the place; how she'd initially tried to talk him out of going public ("I was scared"); and how nerve-racking it was

THE DAVID SHAYLER FILE

WHAT HE SAID, WHERE HE HID, AND HOW THEY TRIED TO GET HIM BACK

- 24 August 1997: *The Mail on Sunday* publishes a front-page story. In it Shayler alleges:
 - Former Trade and Industry Minister Peter Mandelson had his phone tapped by MI5 for three years in the Seventies.
 - MI5 held files on Home Secretary Jack Straw – the minister to whom MI5's Director General is directly accountable.
 - Former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, legal director of pressure group the National Council for Civil Liberties from 1978-82, had been under MI5 investigation.
 - Miners' leader Arthur Scargill was (predictably) under MI5 surveillance via secret agents. His file ran to "a massive 40 volumes".
 - MI5 had targeted *Guardian* journalist Victoria Brittain in the misguided belief that she was laundering money for the Libyans. Shayler estimated the investigation cost taxpayers £750,000.

- John Lennon's donations to the left-wing Workers Revolutionary Party had merited him an MI5 file: the dossier contained the handwritten lyrics to his hit song "Working Class Hero". Other celebrities allegedly targeted included jazzman Ronnie Scott, rock groups UB40, Crass and The Sex Pistols, and *Sun* columnist Garry Bushell, whose file was laughably based on "both alleged far-left and far-right activities".
- Shayler was instructed to "carry out operations against harmless individuals who posed no threat to national security".
- 26 August: Shayler, on the run with girlfriend Annie Machon, also an ex-MI5 agent, appears on *Newsnight* alleging MI5 had a file on former PM Edward Heath. Tony Blair's government places a gagging order on *The Mail on Sunday* preventing it printing any other Shayler-related stories.

- 29 August: Shayler and Machon's flat is meticulously searched by Special Branch officers over the next 72 hours. Boxes of personal material are removed.
- 31 August: *The Mail on Sunday* front-page shouts "GAGGED!" The paper claims it was prevented from reporting new Shayler revelations.
- 20 September: Machon returns to the UK and is arrested. After six hours' questioning, no charges are brought. She later returns to a secret location in rural France to join Shayler in exile.
- Early June 1998: Shayler surfaces again, claiming questions need to be answered regarding MI5's handling of the IRA's attack on Bishopsgate in April 1993.
- June/July: Frustrated at the lack of progress in negotiations with UK legal representatives, Shayler threatens to publish new revelations on the Internet.
- July: Shayler claims that MI6

- financed a £100,000 rogue operation to assassinate Colonel Gaddafi in February 1996. He claims a bomb was placed under a car in Gaddafi's motorcade, but missed the vehicle in which he was travelling; several civilians were killed. Pressure grows to publish this story in the UK. The BBC's *Panorama* subsequently broadcasts Shayler's allegations.
- 31 July: Shayler is spotted in Paris meeting renegade MI6 man Richard Tomlinson, also on the run.
- 1 August: Shayler is arrested in Paris and imprisoned without bail. The UK applies for extradition.
- 5 August: The Gaddafi story is published in *The New York Times*, and later reported in the UK.
- 21 October: Shayler appears before a French court.
- 18 November: Extradition request rejected by French court. Shayler freed. He remains in France for fear of arrest should he return to Britain.

fleeing the country ("we were just waiting for a knock on the door").

Shayler and Machon's escape from the UK was immaculately staged: two agents using their inside knowledge to outwit the authorities they once worked for. Machon explained that in the week preceding their departure in August 1997 "money [from *The Mail on Sunday*] was paid into an account in instalments of under £10,000" (sums more than this apparently trigger suspicions of money laundering). They didn't use their home phone, or the same public phone. They crossed London in a series of short trips in black cabs. "I read about it in *Le Carré*."

As per standard MI5 practice, Shayler had prepared a cover story. He told his bosses that meetings with journalists concerned a fictional thriller—which he had in reality started. But he was still worried. MI5 asked to see the book. A disk containing sample chapters went missing in the post. And the pair had been questioned by Special Branch as they entered Guernsey, Machon's former home.

THEY CROSSED LONDON IN A SERIES OF SHORT CAB TRIPS. 'I READ IT IN LE CARRE'

Why had Shayler blown the whistle? Talk of mismanagement sounded rather lame. "David initially focused on the bad management because he was trying not to talk about anything operational—it was less damaging. But they link closely... It's a blame culture, which can lead to problems which can have a knock-on effect and lead to loss of life... That happened regularly."

So why did Shayler sell his secrets to *The Mail on Sunday*? Though he might have been paid more by Libya or Russia, critics said the newspaper money implicated him. Far from being a conscience-driven whistleblower, it made him a traitor, plain and simple. "What were we supposed to do?" says Machon. "Stay in the flat and face arrest, or live off thin air abroad? We had to have some expenses... We haven't gained from this. I'd say we've lost."

So what was in it for him? "He's quite naive. And idealistic. He knew he was taking a risk, but I don't think he thought through the consequences." I'm taken aback by her honesty. "So you wouldn't have done it?" I ask. "No.



I-SPY Clockwise from above left, David Shayler aged 9; on the run in Paris days before his arrest last August; with his brothers last November celebrating his release from prison after a French court threw out a UK request for extradition; meeting *Esquire* with girlfriend Annie Machon, also an ex-MI5 agent



I was scared and I think I was right to be scared, because look what's happened. But David is a driven man. When he thinks something needs to be done, he'll go ahead and do it."

"What were you paid at MI5?"

I'm sitting in the foyer of my Paris hotel talking to David Shayler. I've spent the past three days in his company. He was released from Le Santé prison 10 days earlier when the French court dismissed the UK request for extradition.

"To start with..." and he tells me his starting salary. By answering this simple question, David Shayler has broken the Official Secrets Act. If *Esquire* were to repeat his reply in print, the magazine would also be breaking the law.

He looks tired, hungover maybe: his eyes are bloodshot and his hands shake slightly. Both Shayler and Machon are dressed from head to toe in black. They look sinister and dramatic, and I can't work out whether this is intentional. It's a grave-cold day and

Shayler is freezing; his overcoat is in a box in England somewhere. Both seem nervous. When, moments later, just within earshot, we witness an undercover policeman showing ID and asking questions at my hotel reception, all three of us are put on edge.

The image in my mind is of the lager-lout press photo of Shayler leaving prison—mouth open, eyes half-closed, hair messy—that ran on several British front pages the day after his release. I suggest that wearing a Middlesbrough shirt under his suit didn't exactly make him look serious or credible.

"Yeah," he says. "But I was just so elated, and that kind of elation is like being drunk... It's my roots."

He shrugs; Machon smiles nervously. He is straightforward and open; she is much more reserved. Shayler tells me his emotions were on a roller coaster after he left prison; he felt vulnerable and afraid.

I ask about his upbringing. He talks warmly about Teesside, where he lived as a toddler, and about growing up down south in

Beaconsfield. He says he loves to read, his favourite authors being Martin Amis, Hunter S Thompson and PJ O'Rourke. He tried to become a "guitar hero" at 16: "It took six months to learn to tune the bloody thing."

Some articles have portrayed Shayler at this age as a rebellious halfwit, an outspoken loudmouth destined to cause trouble. *The Daily Telegraph*, for example, quoted a teacher describing him as "a rebel who liked to sail close to the wind". The paper commented: "He excelled at drama, adapting alarmingly well in school plays to his fantasy role."

That same teacher later wrote to Shayler's mother to clarify *The Telegraph's* selective reporting: "David was a lively, intelligent and extrovert pupil – in many ways a normal sixth former," he wrote. "I specifically emphasised to the reporter that I did not want to convey the impression that David was a fantasist."

The two sides of his nature – the bookish "David the Englishman" and the opinionated "Mr Gazza" – have combined to create a strong if conflicting impression. Few seem to forget Shayler. His teacher also remarked to Shayler's mother that her son was, in a

positive sense, "independent-minded and a boy who vigorously challenged ideas".

Shayler certainly used these qualities at Dundee University, where he studied English, to become the college's newspaper editor. Again, his personality left its mark. I dug out Shayler's clippings from the university's archives. His coverage of problems with student accommodation, lazy lecturers and arrests at a student disco won him a *Glasgow Herald* Student Press Award in 1989. Significantly, he also printed a lengthy extract from Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* at a time when it was a risky thing to do.

He also reported on abusive initiation ceremonies carried out on students joining the university's medical society. I learnt that it was another student, not Shayler, who passed on these revelations to *The Sun*, which ran the story in full. I was told that at least two student journalists, including Shayler, each unexpectedly received cheques for an alleged sum of £2,000 for the tip-off.

This episode echoes *The Mail on Sunday* revelations; he wanted to be seen seizing the moral high ground, yet he was receiving

money in the process. The difference, of course, is the context of the two incidents: one involves a hard-up student receiving a cheque out of the blue for a story he's already featured in his paper; the other involves a career man who makes a premeditated deal prior to going public with his allegations.

Both, however, have a common thread. The earlier incident may have sown the seeds of his public-interest defence, and of using the media – rather than leaking the story via an MP, as another security services whistleblower, Clive Ponting, did – as a means of revelation and remuneration.

On graduation, Shayler was recruited by *The Sunday Times* as a trainee journalist; something he still regards as "one of my greatest achievements". It was certainly a potentially career-making break; over 400 students had applied for four positions. He lasted just six months. He claims the course was badly organised; journalists I've spoken to say he wasn't up to the mark. The truth is probably somewhere in between.

His next move was an audacious failure. He tried to mimic Richard Branson by



launching a student newspaper in Scotland, using a bank loan and some of his father's money. The publication, *The Paper*, never saw its fourth issue; all the finance was lost. After he'd returned to his parents' home, Shayler took a clerical job his father had helped him obtain and managed to pay off all his debts, which amounted to a few thousand pounds.

"I always felt he was quite a sensitive child and quite arty," says David's mother Anne Shayler. David Shayler's parents live in a detached home on a small, respectable estate in Beaconsfield. They are a hard-working, decent couple: his father, Ron, is a retired mechanical engineer; Anne works at a local nursery school. Photographs of David and his two younger brothers, Jeremy and Philip, are scattered around their neat living-room.

"Apart from the odd bust-up that you're going to have with any teenage kid, David was no trouble at all," says Anne. Ron told me that David had said

something about "spilling the beans", and had told his son to think long and hard before "fighting the establishment". When the article was published, Shayler's parents were angry and bewildered.

"I never thought any son of mine would be in prison. It's really the hardest thing to cope with," says Anne Shayler, breaking down. "Hell hath no fury like the establishment thwarted. I feel as though they're trying to do a character assassination on him."

Are they proud or ashamed of what their son has done? "I'm proud of him," says his father directly. "I'm not ashamed of him," adds Anne, nodding.

Before I leave, Ron Shayler shows me David's old bedroom. On bookshelves lining a wall, I spot a well-thumbed collection of Shakespeare, some Kurt Vonnegut and a book on Dylan Thomas. The last title that

catches my eye is a yellowed paperback about the Modernist literary movement on the Left Bank. Its title is *Paris is Yesterday*.

In 1990, Shayler's mother noticed a job advert in *The Guardian*, asking if the reader was "Waiting for Godot". It was designed to appeal to someone like David Shayler: educated, offbeat and motivated, and was in fact placed by MI5 through a London-based recruitment agency. After receiving his application, MI5 contacted Shayler at home on a Sunday night. When he picked up the phone, a voice at the other end simply asked: "Do you know anything about *Waiting for Godot*?" Thereafter, all contact between Shayler and his potential employer was conducted by phone; no written correspondence ever took place.

"I went to a recruitment consultancy

LEN DEIGHTON'S HARRY PALMER NOVELS FEATURE DISLOCATED CHARACTERS LIKE DAVID SHAYLER

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up in [London's] Soho Square; they did psychometric tests and a short interview," says Shayler. "That evening, they phoned and said, 'The people are interested in talking to you.' I asked what the job was. They told me that it was in the Ministry of Defence, but a secret job. You think [to yourself] it can't be intelligence – what would intelligence want with someone like me?"

For the second interview, Shayler was directed to an unmarked building on Tottenham Court Road. The interview room had no posters or decorations – just a desk and two chairs. "The interviewer was a 'retread'," says Shayler. "He'd retired from the service but worked as a freelance on things like recruitment." The officer was patrician, with swept-back silver hair. He wore a pinstriped suit.

Shayler was asked about his childhood and questioned on his beliefs. He was probed about his views regarding a recent SAS ambush in which six IRA terrorists had been killed. And he was asked why he had printed extracts from *Spycatcher* as a student editor. He answered truthfully. His interviewer told him he could not continue with the employment process unless Shayler signed the Official Secrets Act. Which he did.

More interviews in a building near Trafalgar Square followed. He met other potential recruits. They were interviewed by a senior member of MI5, a civil servant and a psychologist. Role-playing scenarios and more management exercises followed.

A standard vetting procedure also took place. "A guy came to my house and talked for two hours about my entire life. He asked things like, 'Are you a homosexual?'" He was asked if he'd ever had links, or known anyone who'd had links, with the Communist Party, or with such countries as Libya, Iran and Cuba. He was also asked to nominate four people for the agency to talk to. Even his neighbours in Beaconsfield were approached.

After one more interview, David Shayler was told he had a job. He started work at the end of 1991 in the vetting division. If MI5 had any significant doubts about Shayler, it is unlikely it would have given him such an important role.

A few months later he was moved sideways into the counter-subversion area of MI5. With the 1992 election looming, the department had plenty of work. It should have been a more stimulating environment for Shayler; he says it was not. Coming across files that revealed MI5 had reports on such unlikely suspects as a boy who'd written to the Communist Party as part of a school project, and a disgruntled wife who'd

SPY VERSUS SPY

THE DOUBLE AGENTS WHO WENT INTO THE COLD AND THE WHISTLEBLOWERS WHO COULDN'T STAND THE HEAT



◀KIM PHILBY

Cold War double agent once described as "a schizophrenic with a supreme talent for deception". His subterfuge led to the deaths of scores of British agents. Defected to Moscow but longed for England, or rather its cricket and coarse-cut marmalade.



◀GUY BURGESS

Second in the infamous Cambridge spy ring. Recruited by the KGB in the Thirties, he worked for the BBC and served with MI5. Defected to Soviet Union in 1951.

CATHY MASSITER

Former MI5 officer who revealed that her employees had files on union leaders and CND activists.

DONALD MACLEAN ▶

Influenced by Communism at Cambridge, Maclean joined the Diplomatic Service, serving in Paris and Washington. After a nervous breakdown in 1950 he became head of the Foreign Office's American Department. Fled with Burgess to Moscow.



GEORGE BLAKE ▶

MI6 man jailed for 42 years – one year for the death of each man he betrayed. Escaped from Wormwood Scrubs in 1967 and has lived in Moscow ever since.

RICHARD TOMLINSON

Tried to sell his story in Australia after being sacked by MI6. Fled to Geneva.



▲JOHN CAIRNCROSS

So-called Fifth Man in the Burgess/Maclean spy ring, who handed the KGB names of prominent MI6 agents and the West's atomic bomb secrets. "This material formed the point of departure for organising the work on atomic energy in our country," boasted the Soviets.



STEPHEN HAYDEN

Naval intelligence officer jailed after selling *The Sun* a secret document outlining Saddam Hussein's plan to flood Britain with the deadly virus, anthrax. He subsequently suffered serious psychiatric problems, spending part of his £10,000 fee on a parrot and a water bed.

◀ANTHONY BLUNT

Respected art historian and curator of the Queen's pictures whose covert activities included recruiting Communist sympathisers and assisting defectors Burgess and Maclean. Stripped of his knighthood in 1979 after being exposed by Andrew Boyle's *The Climate of Treason*.

GEOFFREY PRIME

Treacherous former GCHQ employee who was caught selling "sensitive material" to the Russians in the early Eighties.

MICHAEL BETTANEY

MI5 misfit, jailed in 1985 after attempting to spy for the Soviets. Had earlier been arrested for evading a train fare.

PETER WRIGHT ▶

Despite Thatcher's efforts to gag it, his *Spycatcher* was the literary sensation of 1987. Turning the pages of a copy (invariably smuggled from Australia) revealed that MI5 had "bugged and burgled" its way across London. Allegedly penned after a dispute about his pension. DAN SYNGE



written to MI5 claiming her ex-husband was a communist, doubts began to enter

his mind about the value of his role in MI5 and the agency in general.

Colleagues, he claims, also felt their work was merely "a bloody paper exercise". Shayler moved to departments dealing with such matters as the threat from Irish terrorism and Libyan affairs; all disillusioned him further.

By this time, Shayler was living with Annie Machon in a flat in Pimlico. She identified with his reservations, but says he never at this time hinted that he might go public. At weekends Shayler went north to Teesside to watch Boro play. As his frustration with his professional life grew, so did his devotion to his team. It was his way of letting off steam and, among colleagues who he says were more interested in rugby or cricket, a way of underlining that he was something of an outsider.

He decided to leave MI5 after learning about the investigation of a *Guardian* journalist who had alleged links with Libya, the alleged MI6-financed operation to blow up Gaddafi, and the red tape in the investigation of a rumoured Libyan plot. "These things happened in a short space of time," says Shayler. "I just thought, I don't want to be part of it any more." He claims he told his managers about his grievances and even tried to contact MI5's deputy director general – to no avail. He had just turned 30 and was, he says, taking stock of his life and career.

He denies that his motivation for going public was that he had been passed over for promotion. "I had a performance-related bonus from my last year's work," he says. "If I'd stayed I'd probably have been promoted."

After six years with MI5, he quit and joined a Surrey-based management consultancy. Over the next six months he also made regular contact with *The Mail on Sunday*. It was at that point that, as American spy experts say, he entered the wilderness of mirrors.

There is no getting away from the fact that David Shayler contradicts himself. He claims he was glad to leave MI5. He likes to leave you with the impression that, as a man whose soul is in the north-east of England, he never fitted in at Whitehall. But then he complains bitterly about MI5 not helping him prepare for life after the agency. "The Army has contacts in the City, in industry – they find every other officer who leaves, a job," he says. "But MI5 doesn't give a damn about its staff."

While I don't believe Shayler blew the whistle on MI5 because he wasn't climbing the career ladder fast enough, there's no doubt that career dissatisfaction played a part. Had MI5 pulled strings to get him a new job, he might have kept his mouth shut.

He was certainly motivated by a sense of

public duty. "I regard myself very much along the whistleblower/civil-libertarian lines," he says. "The purpose was to change things that I saw as too Draconian."

In the process he also broke the Official Secrets Act. No question about that. Over a two-week period, he carefully chose and photocopied 62 highly sensitive Top Secret documents which he then smuggled out of his office. Shayler says the documents were "only summaries of intelligence"; he was careful not to copy specific reports or those containing lists of agents.

Yet these same documents hindered his negotiations with the British government last year. He had requested that *The Mail on Sunday* return the photocopied documents to the authorities, and they complied. But their contents – which Shayler's lawyer, John Wadham, director of civil rights group Liberty, described to me as "fairly serious" – alarmed the British authorities enough to cause them to take a very hard line.

A press officer for MI5 detailed the British Government's position on the case. "We're disappointed the French did not extradite him," she said. "There have been reports that his disclosures were not damaging to national security. That's not the case. The information disclosed to journalists by Mr Shayler included highly classified intelligence material which, if compromised, would seriously damage national security. Most of the material was not publicised, but the small portion which was, included material which caused real damage. Individual lives were put at risk."

I asked if MI5 were concerned about the implications of David Shayler being at liberty in France. "The prosecution file remains open," said a spokeswoman. "He's liable for arrest if he returns to the UK."

His actions were those of either a moral crusader fuelled by righteous indignation, or a reckless opportunist driven by greed and narcissism. I think it was more of the former and much less of the latter. I found David Shayler to be someone with sound scruples. In that regard he is brave for acting on his fears and doubts and ultimately for doing what he did. However, I don't believe he really thought through the full personal and public implications of his actions or how they might appear to others. In that sense there is something naive about the man.

Sitting opposite me in Paris, as he nervously stirs his coffee, David Shayler looks momentarily lost. He seems remarkably yet predictably ordinary. When you look at him you see the real face of the modern security services. David Shayler is no James Bond. He embodies flaws we all have: contradictions, vanity, ambition and conflicting values. I could see why he was recruited and why he did fairly well within MI5. He's spy material all right. Anyone who's ever read

one of Len Deighton's Harry Palmer novels will recognise a dislocated character like David Shayler. He's very bright and, for the most part, I found him reliable and loyal.

But what is his next move? Legal sources indicated to me that there remains a chance that the French justice ministry could contest the validity of the Paris appeals court not to extradite him back to Britain: if they were successful he would be extradited. If Shayler leaves France, he could be arrested, imprisoned and his extradition sought all over again. If he returns to the UK – voluntarily or otherwise – he'll probably plead not guilty to charges. He will run a defence of "necessity": he broke the law to stop another law being broken. In Britain, as a whistleblower, he'd no legal options open to him. Shayler's lawyer, John Wadham, argues that "whistleblowing is the first and last resort – for those in the security services there are no other systems".

If he goes to trial, Shayler will most likely be the first to fight the 1989 Official Secrets Act, which – unlike the 1911 version Clive Ponting was tried under in the early Eighties – does not allow a "disclosure in the public interest" defence. It was for that reason that some then Opposition MPs – including Tony Blair and Jack Straw – voted against the bill.

This is, however, unlikely to happen. It would give further publicity to Shayler and his secrets. A better policy may be for the Government to quietly cut an immunity deal.

Shayler tells me he wants to go home; he misses his family and his team. His novel is now almost finished. It's titled *The Organisation* and deals with "people's paranoia that there's a real shadowy intelligence organisation at large". I ask if he has any more secrets to reveal. "Not at the moment, [but] you can never say never," he replies.

There's a final twist in the tale. After I've switched off my tape, Shayler claims he was approached the day before by a man he thought was a journalist but who was in fact an intelligence agent for a Middle Eastern country (I was asked by Shayler not to disclose which one). The man was carrying a gun. The agent said he had been authorised to tell Shayler to name his price in return for details of MI5's knowledge of his country's activities.

Shayler thought it might have been an MI6 set-up to test him. I wonder whether Shayler has fabricated the story in the hope I'll report it, so alerting MI5 that the international espionage community regards him as a valuable asset. "How did you respond?" I ask. "I said no, of course – I'm not a bloody traitor!" says Shayler. "Anyway, I haven't said anything to anyone [else]. I thought I'd better tell you in case anything odd happens to me."

As I watch Shayler and Machon melt into the anonymous noise and bustle of the night, a thought occurs to me: Shayler is not really in Paris at all – he's in purgatory. The City of Lights has become his City of Shadows. 