

# FEATURES AND NEWS FROM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

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43 TREGUNTER ROAD, KENSINGTON, LONDON SW10 9LG

Telephones: (Ansafone) 01-373 9410 Telex: 21879 att. TRUTHINFO Cables: TRUTHINFO LONDON SW10

SPECIAL ARTICLE No 1055/7 (FCI/JJ) WESTERN RESEARCH ON SOVBLOC INFILTRATION AT CROSSROADS

ALLEGED END OF IRD - A NEW ERA OR JUST CAPITULATION ?

By Josef JOSTEN, Editor FCI (formerly <sup>of</sup>SHAEP/PW)

(London/FCI) - If Oscars were awarded for press irresponsibility, at least two British so-called "quality" papers would be among the candidates for the way they presented the public with eight-month-old news. This dealt with the scaling down of operations of a branch of a senior Government Department, which, under the wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, had for three decades stood up to the Soviet ideological onslaught on the West, as befits a serious information research body in this field. (Whether the articles form an infringement of the Official Secrets Act, is yet another matter.)

LET US PUT IT THIS WAY: Whether fighting for expansion or against extinction, or just for the chance of holding their own, newspapers maintain their circulation and promotion departments, and these, of necessity, produce appropriate propaganda material. And because such a process provides bread and butter for those who serve the press, the subject is tabu. On the other hand, when their country wishes to protect its own way of life against an onslaught of lies, subversion and obvious physical penetration by alien elements, "propaganda" becomes a dirty word. Thus, the very same newspapers employ mischievous pen-pushers in one case\* and a platoon (six to be exact)\*\* of investigators in the other, to produce a funeral oration which has already provoked cries of delight in the enemy camp.

The public is told and is expected to believe that successive Governments of their own country, constituted by both parties as they alternate in power, have wasted tax money and otherwise gained public cash by the million for a full thirty years, for the purpose of planting propaganda through furtive IRD action, using aggressive cold-war stance, slanting news and "adding spin"; using old-fashioned methods and spite, until "their star began to wane". The other paper thought that the IRD cause embarrassment to Ministers, "was out of date", and that "secret vote money was generously distributed until it produced a threat to detente, obviously hated by the revilers of the Foreign Office operations.

THE INFORMATION RESEARCH DEPARTMENT (IRD) - was, in fact, the brainchild of a Socialist then-junior Minister, Christopher Mayhew, who served under Ernest Bevin, frequently described as Britain's great, and sometimes greatest, Foreign Secretary. It actually came into being in January 1948. Then, a courier from Prague brought to London a message from another Foreign Secretary, Jan Masaryk, which said in part: "It's going to be a hard year, but we do not despair, we have faith and we need you all to reinforce our endeavours... We can shape our own future if we get together. - Please... Truth shall prevail if we give it a fair chance." This was certainly neither ministerial nor diplomatic standard language employed in exchanges between two countries, but then the time was not normal time. Within a month Czechoslovakia was taken over by a revolutionary Communist gang directed on the spot by a Soviet emissary, Deputy-Foreign Minister Valerian Alexandrovich Zorin. Within ten days, the very same Czechoslovak Foreign Minister was mysteriously dead.

So the newly-created British Foreign Office Department had to get to grips with a developing threat which no one could say where or when could be brought to a halt. Now, thirty years later, when we know to our discomfort that the threat has by no means diminished (also, among other things, due to the 1968 invasion and subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact forces), but has in fact become global to such an extent, that because of the existing warlike situation in certain countries of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, it assumes the character of a World War III, fought on half-a-dozen as yet separate fronts.

IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, as a former member of the IRD put it, "it is a matter of considerable concern that the destruction of the FO's IRD has produced such a slanted reaction in some of the press", while the rest, irresponsibly, keeps silent.

Only those who worked in or with that Department really know that the mainfeed of information to be researched came from a variety of SOVBLOC sources, especially the Soviet and satellite government-controlled press and other mass media, from articles by Ministers and Party hacks, which made all the necessary points and which the IRD /MORE

brought to the notice of Western press, politicians and diplomats, i.e., the opinion makers, with absolute accuracy and full objectivity.

Surely, when Marshal Grechko, supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact forces, wrote in the Polish Trybuna Ludu, that the fire-power of those countries' armies had increased threefold, with the aid, naturally, of new Soviet equipment, the statement was a good indicator of the Bloc's "peaceful" intentions. When Mr. Brezhnev, then still only Secretary of the Soviet CP, hinted in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on the possibility of a situation arising where the Communists would have to consider whether a pre-emptive strike might be necessary, such "disclosures", as they appeared for the obvious benefit of the English-speaking world in publications disseminated from Prague among Western Communist Parties, one had to take some notice of the workings of the mind of the Soviet leader. By now he is also bearing the Presidential mantle. Or should reports of a SOVBLOC conference on detente organised in Hungary, where spokesmen of some fifty Communist Parties were reassured that the present period of so-called detente was the best suited for making great progress towards ensuring a world-wide victory for the Soviet Revolution, be relegated to a locked drawer in the FO? If it were not for the IRD, many of us could also have forgotten that almost exactly a decade ago, a conference of 81 CPs in Moscow produced a resolution which reassured the comrades that "detente was the only period when capitalism could be defeated without a war" - in other words, that we may eventually lose our freedom sleeping peacefully in bed, rather than in armed conflict on a battlefield.

TO COMPARE THE IRD WITH THE CIA is not only ludicrous and impertinent, but mightily inaccurate. CIA is quite officially an intelligence, that is espionage, organisation, though perhaps it uses slightly different methods than the KGB, STB or AVO. On the other hand, IRD, in the words of someone who was associated with its work, existed solely for the purpose of stemming the unending flood of lies and propaganda emanating from the Communist countries. Its material was welcomed and valued by those who were on the receiving end - and these were by no means only the journalists and the opinion-makers. Was it not natural that a branch of the FO used its safe internal channels to pass the results of its research to its diplomatic spokesmen abroad, and that the most important results and finds were imparted to Britain's trusted friends in the hope of their utilisation for the benefit of the remaining free world?

Even the so-called "Think Tank", which has for its objective research into the working and commenting on the impact of British Government Departments, however scathing it may be about the value of information work in general, has conceded that IRD "had a role in creating helpful political attitudes in the more influential Third World countries", while the IRD itself knew full well how effective its own efforts were too. One could only add that they were all the more effective precisely because the output was not the result of a "crusading spirit", which was actively discouraged, but because it was dispassionate and founded on cold, hard facts provided from Communist sources. It is rather sad, therefore, to have witnessed the first curtailment of such desirable output during the time the Rt. Hon. George-Brown, M.P., had his rather brief tenure at the FO.

COMMUNIST FRONT: It has now been said that, for instance, the list of Communist Front organisations and their members (whether Party workers or Trade Unionists) have from time to time upset the leadership of the Labour Party. Yet it is public knowledge that it was the Labour Party which proscribed a dozen organisations which profited from outside support and received directives from outside the country. It was the Labour Party's left wing which came to the fore with its extreme views when membership of subversive political organisations was no longer a disqualifying factor in considering candidates for high offices and functions in the Party. In fact, IRD activities enjoyed the approval of all the successive governments, Conservative or Labour, as long as the Socialists had not swung too far to the left.

Looking at charges that the IRD Staff and their methods were "old fashioned", one finds, on the contrary, that right up to the moment of the ill-advised closure or curtailment of the Department, they fully responded to the present trend of events in world politics and diplomacy, and certainly, as was in line with its brief, IRD more often than not responded to rather than warned against enemy action. Naturally, the IRD could not have accepted the slogans of co-existence and detente at their face value just because these were proclaimed by the spokesmen of the Soviet regime, as in the case of a number of Western writers and political fellow-travellers.

THE IMPLICATION BY THE PRESS that the discretion with which IRD managed its affairs was somehow shameful, borders on the ridiculous. How could it have operated if everybody had known about it? The Department simply acted as an ever-vigilant watchdog, and there is now nothing comparable in volume of research capability and in output of its results to fulfil that role which is, unfortunately, so necessary /MORE

especially to-day. Detente is still practised only by the free world but not all by the Communist bloc which regards our attitude as a sign of weakness and treats it with the contempt it deserves. The Soviet position will best be understood if we quote the Party's official journal, Pravda:

"Peaceful co-existence does not spell an end to the struggle between the two world social systems. The struggle will continue between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between world socialism and imperialism, up to the complete and final victory of Communism on a world scale."

That the closure of IRD should have been kept quiet from May 1977 until the end of January 1978, is surely strange. That it was presented to the public by certain organs of the press with a pen dipped into the ink of malice and wrapped into what the Germans aptly call "Schadenfreude" (that is delight at someone else's discomfiture) is not only shortsighted but suicidal. It is certainly a further step on the path to Communism's final victory. In this context the IRD's demise coincides with the anniversary of the 1948 Communist coup in Prague, the 1968 invasion (not to forget the 60th anniversary of Czechoslovakia's liberation and 40th anniversary of her betrayal at Munich). One has also to think of the misguided utterance by Sir Harold Wilson during his stay in Slovakia that "the events of 1968 are best forgotten". If so, then only to the complete disregard of the public opinion here, of our common interests with the suffering people of that country. It was another former Prime Minister of Britain, Lord Home, who, after studying photographic and other documentary evidence of the very same events, said: "If this is what the Soviets did to their allies, what would they do to us?"

RADIO MOSCOW HAS ALREADY REACTED with malicious glee to the untimely closure of the IRD, and the Kremlin is obviously enjoying something else too: The closure effected in secrecy was apparently a virtuous move by the present regime, but it was a sin when secrecy was maintained by such a vulnerable Government Department, which performed a very important and indeed necessary function in the unhappy conditions in which the post-war world still find itself. And so there just remains a faint hope that "closure" is perhaps neither the right nor the final word to use in this affair.

J. Josten

- \*) The Guardian - 27.1.1978: "David Leigh recounts the 30-year history of the Foreign Office's covert propaganda operation" - "DEATH OF THE DEPARTMENT THAT NEVER WAS".
- \*\*\*) The Observer - 29.1.1978: "HOW THE F.O. WAGED SECRET PROPAGANDA WAR IN BRITAIN" Richard Fletcher, George Block and Phil Kelly. Additional research by Paul Lashmar, Tony Smart and Richard Oliver. - .....BUT IN CONTRAST: HEADLINE from The Observer - 22.1.1978: "Russian build-up shocks the West" by Colin Legum. - The Observer - 29.1.1978 (leader page): "Russia's Crime in the Horn", by Colin Legum (on a conflict involving six kinds of nationalism which the Soviet intervention is aggravating).

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