

How the FO waged secret propaganda war in Britain

by RICHARD FLETCHER, George Brock and Phil Kelly

A SECRET Foreign Office department set up after World War Two to distribute anti-Communist propaganda abroad also covertly planted material in Britain.

Over a period of 30 years material and money from the Information Research Department (IRD) went into books published under highly respectable imprints. Some of them are still available in public, school and university libraries. Anti-Stalinist material was also infiltrated into trade union literature.

After 30 years, the IRD finally became an embarrassment to Ministers, who feared its approach to propaganda was out of date and a threat to détente relations. Its activities were first curtailed by the late Anthony Crosland, and last May it was closed down by his successor as Foreign Secretary, Dr David Owen.

Documents in the hands of *The Observer* reveal that within a year of its foundation in 1948 the department

was paying a hidden subsidy to an anti-Communist magazine, *Freedom First*, which was circulated to trade unionists.

It was negotiated secretly between the editor and Mr Christopher Mayhew, then a Foreign Office junior minister and the man who created IRD.

The department used a small publishing company, Ampersand Ltd, which published IRD-inspired material for 20 years and bought thousands of books for distribution by IRD.

A director of Ampersand since 1953, Mr Stephen Watts, confirmed to us that IRD paid his firm's costs, including office fees, and always understood that the money was from the secret vote, the Parliamentary allocation of money for the intelligence services.

The IRD began life in January 1948 after the Attlee Cabinet approved a plan put up by Mr Mayhew for a vigorous information offensive against the Iron

number of the English language edition would be practicable and extremely helpful.

Mr Mayhew, his officials and his confidants at Labour Party headquarters were well aware of the risks they were running.

Mr Mayhew, now a member of the Liberal Party, said last week that IRD dealt in 'true facts' and commented: 'It's difficult to make out that there's anything sinister about this. We were ahead of our time in fighting Stalinism. In the post-war years there were many illusions about Stalinism, not least inside the Labour Party. We were certainly taking great political risks, and quite right too.'

In May 1948, Mr Mayhew told Bevin that he had made arrangements with Herbert Tracey (an official in the Labour Party's international section) for the dissemination in the Labour movement at home of anti-Communist propaganda.

Mr Tracey ran an anti-

Communist committee called 'Freedom First'. Mr Mayhew noted a month later that the committee's material should be supplied by IRD on a 'strictly confidential basis'.

The note went on: 'Mr Tracey would work out a financial estimate on the basis of 5,000 copies covering three or four languages. We would then see what we could do in the way of a hidden subsidy—e.g. by purchase of copies for use and distribution by our information officers.'

An idea of IRD's information-collecting methods, as opposed to dissemination, can be gathered from a note from Mr Mayhew to one of his officials in January 1949. It proposed to attack Communists by carefully selected material energetically reproduced and distributed—rather than 'black' propaganda of lies and fiction.

Mr Mayhew recommends using the Press monitoring section at the Moscow Embassy to gather suitable material.

In addition to sponsoring anti-Communist books, IRD also distributed British newspaper articles to developing countries. Newspapers in those countries were carrying material supplied by Russian and Chinese news agencies because it was all they could afford.

So IRD, wishing to counter that influence, made arrangements with some British news organisations (including, in 1968, *The Observer* Foreign News Service), which gave IRD writers, it was a condition that the articles of charge, to the media of selected countries.

In the case of *The Observer* Foreign News Service, which syndicates articles by *Observer* writers, it was a condition that the articles could not be altered.

The arrangement between IRD and Ampersand for subsidising and publishing anti-Communist books began in the 1950s.

Mr Stephen Watts, the head of Ampersand, said last week that he would discuss possible

book titles with the heads of IRD. Those books would be commissioned, and edited by Mr Watts, who would arrange for sales of copies to IRD for distribution overseas.

That discreet arrangement was merged with conventional current affairs publishing. Mr Watts, as a freelance publisher's editor, created and edited a series of more than 100 volumes called *Background Books*, which was published by two small firms between 1950 and 1960, when Bodley Head took over.

IRD paid for the books in two ways: by buying up to several hundred copies of a title they wanted and by meeting production costs for titles published by Ampersand and under their own imprint.

Ampersand also acted as purchasing agent for IRD, buying Bodley Head books and other publishers' books through Bodley Head's credit facilities.

Ampersand's accounts for the years 1967-76 list total payments to Bodley Head of

£55,991, but Bodley Head were not able to confirm this.

They also show 'reimbursement' of publishing expenses and overheads over the same period of £89,570. Mr Watts said that this had been paid by IRD.

The accounts were audited each year and a copy of them was sent to the Foreign Office, which then paid reimbursements to Ampersand.

Mr Max Reinhardt, managing director of Bodley Head, said: 'Ours was an orthodox publishing arrangement with Stephen Watts. I naturally had no idea of Ampersand's connection with IRD or the Foreign Office.'

Mr Watts told us that the arrangement between IRD and Ampersand had been suggested by the late Mr Leslie Sheridan, a wartime intelligence man. He was deputy head of IRD in 1961 and the founder of Ampersand.

Although the British public didn't know about IRD's



Christopher Mayhew: He set up department.

activities, ironically the Russians were handed details of what was happening on a plate.

When Mr Mayhew was assembling his staff a colleague approached him and recommended a young diplomat as a 'man deeply versed in communism'. That man was Guy Burgess, one of Britain's most famous post-war defectors, who was on the staff of IRD for several months until sacked by Mr Mayhew for being 'dirty, drunk and idle.'

Additional research by Paul Lashmar, Tony Smart and Richard Oliver.

Owen plans ban on mercenaries

by a Staff Reporter

THE GOVERNMENT is considering laws to ban mercenary recruitment, the Foreign Secretary, Dr David Owen, said yesterday.

In a speech in Manchester, he said mercenaries gravely damaged Britain's standing in Africa. This condemnation of mercenary recruitment followed a statement at the Foreign Office news briefing on Friday when the Press was told that links persisted between British mercenary recruiters and the Angolan FNLA.

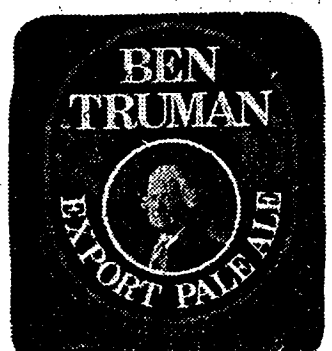
The statement contained a warning from the Foreign Office that the Government could 'in no way be responsible for the fate of anyone foolish enough to become involved.'

There is growing speculation that the surprisingly sudden Foreign Office stand has more to do with attempts to begin formal relations between Britain and Angola than any hard evidence that would-be British mercenaries are ready to fight for the FNLA.

Moreover, the Foreign Office denied yesterday that the statement and speech had anything to do with the arrival in Luanda last week of British diplomat Mr John Flynn.

Mr Flynn is in Angola not only to establish relations between the two countries but also to ensure that the seven British mercenaries serving 30 years in Luanda are being well treated. Relatives have not heard from them for a year.

A denial that FNLA recruitment of any sort is taking place in London was made by the FNLA's European representative, Mr Samuel Abregada. Mr Abregada had talks in London last week with the Shadow Foreign Secretary,



Mr John Davies, and Conservative MP, Mr Julian Amery.

Mr Amery said no mention was made of mercenaries at the meeting. He added: 'It could be that the Foreign Office has been told in Angola of President Neto's anxiety about recruitment. I must admit that statement at the briefing on Friday was bizarre.'

Mr Abregada accused the Foreign Office of acting on 'assumption' and not on fact. He had not been in London to recruit, he said, but to tell anyone who would listen that two Nigerian battalions were now fighting for the present Angolan regime.

However, while in London, Mr Abregada did meet the head of recruitment, Mr John Banks, who organised the Angolan mercenary force two years ago. Mr Banks, who now carries FNLA credentials, claims the only recruitment taking place in London at the moment is for the Middle East.

The FNLA has quite sufficient troops. I met Mr Abregada to organise a trip to Angola for a TV crew and while he was here I acted as his bodyguard. The Government realised we had contact and put two and two together, he said.

Dr Owen's comment yesterday that the Government was now considering taking legislative action to ban mercenary recruitment comes more than a year after the Diplock Commission report recommending some kind of restriction.

'Fraud' charges rock world of the spirits

by ROBIN LUSTIG

ANGRY accusations of unethical practices and downright fraud have surfaced among Britain's spiritualists as a result of an unprecedented tribunal hearing in Bristol last week.

The charges were levelled at the 20,000-strong Spiritualists' National Union and probably the country's best-known clairvoyant. They are the most dramatic indication so far of the troubled times through which spiritualists in this country are passing.

Mr Higginson, a 58-year-old shopkeeper from Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, is widely respected as a medium but has now been accused, by a fellow medium, of being a fraud.

But the sombre proceedings, during which evidence was given on oath, at the Grosvenor Road Spiritualist Church last Monday were not concerned only with Mr Higginson's qualifications as a medium. Indirectly, they were also a challenge to his eight-year dominance of the SNU.

Spiritualists tend to keep their internal disputes to themselves; they view non-believers as predominantly unsympathetic to their cause and try not to air their differences in public. But the Bristol tribunal has revealed bitter disagreements among spiritualists over how their movement should be run.

Mr Higginson's accuser,



Mr Gordon Higginson, president of the Spiritualists' National Union, as he was shown on the front page of last week's 'Psychic News'. The paper says the picture was taken on infrared film in 1975 and shows ectoplasm emerging from Higginson's solar plexus while his hands were held.

Mrs Phyllis Simpson, said last week: 'Unwittingly, I seem to have put a match to a bonfire.'

Spiritualists are a Christian sect who believe not only that there is an after-life but that it is possible to communicate between the two worlds.

Though many believe they sometimes receive messages from people who have died, only about 200 practising mediums are recognised as genuine by leading spiritualist organisations.

The allegations against Mr Higginson stem from a clairvoyance session he gave at the Grosvenor Road Spiritualist Church on St Valentine's Day, 1976.

'Memorised from lists'

Mrs Simpson, the church secretary, says the names and addresses of people in the congregation which Mr Higginson claimed to have divined by supernatural gifts, had in fact been memorised from lists kept on the church premises. Mrs Simpson, 41, who has been a medium for the past 15 years, told the tribunal through her solicitor: 'Every single name and address is to be found in the records here. That is far more than coincidence.'

She has also alleged that Mr Higginson gave the names exactly as they appeared in the church's records; full Christian names if they were listed, initials if they were not.

He denied looking at any of the records and accused Mrs Simpson of 'hounding me and my family, knowing this tribunal would take place, yet making libellous statements.'

If Mr Higginson is found guilty of the charges, he is expected to resign his office, although he could still continue to practise as a medium if he wished.

The charges are not the first to be made against him. Last July, the *Sunday People* published details of allegations made because of his claims to be able to 'materialise' the spirits of dead people.

According to Mr Tom Johanson, general secretary of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and a friend of Mr Higginson's for the past 20 years: 'Gordon is a physical medium who has an abundance of ectoplasm in his body. Spirit forms drape themselves in this ectoplasm and you get a sort of mould.'

'If I find a medium who is faking, I jump on him. I'd jump on Higginson too if I thought he were a fake.'

The world of spiritualism in Britain is divided into those who respect Gordon Higginson for his psychic

Row over jailed patient

by a Staff Reporter

AN Iranian drug addict who arrived in England before Christmas for mental treatment was kept in Pentonville Prison until last week, Dr Joshua Briener, a leading psychiatrist, alleged yesterday.

He has written to Mr Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, complaining that although the 31-year-old Iranian had £1,400 with him to pay for the treatment, he was put into the hospital wing of the prison.

Dr Briener, who is founder of the International Association of Social Psychiatry and chairman of the British Association of Social Psychiatry, said that the addict arrived with a letter from a specialist referring him to Dr Briener.

An immigration officer rang the doctor at his London home to confirm that he was willing to treat the man.

'I said I would give them a personal undertaking that I would look after him until his treatment was complete, and would ensure he did not stay in England a moment longer than he ought,' said Dr Briener yesterday.

'But the next I heard was that he had been put in prison. I have been unable to discover why. He had enough money on him to live on and was no danger to anybody.'

Dr Briener contacted Mr Arthur Latham, Labour MP for Paddington, who pressed the Home Office for his release. He was freed last Monday after spending a month in prison.

'While he was inside I was allowed only 20-minute visits. A doctor who has a patient to see is normally allowed much longer,' said Dr Briener.

A Home Office spokesman said yesterday: 'The Iranian was refused entry on medical grounds. Following representations on his behalf, it was decided to give him limited leave to enter for one month.'

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