

John B. Black

**Organising
the Propaganda Instrument:
the British Experience**



**MARTINUS NIJHOFF
THE HAGUE**

specifically to "overseas" or "home" subjects are referred to the Controller directly concerned.

To attempt a detailed examination of the many services provided for the overseas departments by the COI is beyond the scope of this study.³ Some illustration of the nature of these services and the way in which they are controlled and utilized by the departments can be seen from briefly looking at three divisions: the Overseas Press and Radio Division, the Reference Division, and the Films and Television Division.

The **London Press Service** provided by the Overseas Press and Radio Division of COI is a direct successor to the pre-World War II "British Official Wireless" and the wartime Ministry of Information press service. It is operated at the request of the overseas departments for the Information Officers at posts abroad and serves to supply them with background information, feature articles and commentaries which provide information for the members of the British Missions as well as a source of material for use in dealings with the local press. It also provides overseas posts with a "Verbatim Service" of the texts of ministerial statements and/or extracts from these statements. In addition, a number of regional editions sent to various parts of the world in regular daily radio-teletype transmissions are supplemented by airmail services of feature articles, radio script features, and a large volume of industrial and commercial information.

Although the **London Press Service** is not actually "vetted" by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before transmission (there simply is not time to clear it all each day) it is certainly subject to its control. COI has a number of specialist liaison officers ("correspondents") who cover the diplomatic scene, economic affairs, Parliamentary affairs, and other areas to obtain material for the service as well as providing regular liaison with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A daily meeting is held with the Information Services Section of the Guidance and Information Policy Department which serves to establish the lines to be followed in the various transmissions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office however, certainly has the right to clear material being used in the **London Press Service** since it is vested with the ultimate responsibility for that material. Overseas, the Information Officers on the spot can use their own discretion regarding the use that is to be made in their area of the material supplied in this form. Decisions on

³ For a study of the **history**, structure and services of the COI see Clark, *op. cit.*

the service to be provided, what regions should be added or dropped, what types of materials should be included or emphasized, and related questions must be made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (with the Department of Trade and Industry keeping a watchful eye on the handling of industrial, commercial, and export matters). The COI provides the "expert advisers" but in the last analysis they do what the departments want.⁴

The ultimate responsibility of the Foreign and Common Office for the material produced for it can also be seen in the context of the work of the Reference Division and the Films and Television Division. The former attempts to provide U.K. Information Officers abroad with a comprehensive service of reference material on international and Commonwealth affairs, as well as events and policies within the U.K. This is provided through published material as well as an "enquiry service" for posts abroad. The posts abroad can query the Reference Division directly and attempts will be made to provide the material required. Answers can be sent back directly as well, with a copy of the exchange to the department concerned.

Material produced by the Reference Service is generally for use by information posts in both foreign and Commonwealth countries. The object is to explain and document Her Majesty's Government's policy, as well as giving an indication of any "significant" opposition to this policy at home or abroad. Since the material is intended for "reference use" in reading rooms and distribution to more "sophisticated" audiences, it tends for the most part to be more "factual" than that produced by other divisions. Nonetheless, its intent is clearly to present effectively British policy in a positive if not purely favourable light.⁵

While the material must be "factual" according to COI, it obviously must also be acceptable to the sponsoring department. All material produced must be cleared with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or with any home department concerned (if a domestic subject is involved) thus ensuring that it is in fact acceptable to the departments. Normally this clearance takes place through the Information Department of the department of state involved, with that Information De-

⁴ *The Central Office of Information, op. cit.*, pp. 60-63.

⁵ In her testimony to a Parliamentary Committee, a former Head of COI's Reference Division, Miss B. J. Fell, said, "Our material is wholly factual and we would treat a subject from the point of view of fact only. If the Department wanted a document which went into argument of a persuasive kind, they would almost certainly turn to Publications Division." *The Central Office of Information, op. cit.*, p. 135.