RORY CORMAC

FAKERS

A TOP-SECRET TALE OF PHANTOMS AND FORGERIES
ON THE DISINFORMATION FRONT LINE

Praise for *Fakers*

‘An intriguing and utterly gripping portrait of Britain’s secret Cold War operations, where mavericks and misfits turned typewriters into weapons and shaped global politics from the shadows. It’s Cormac’s finest work yet—a masterclass in carving a riveting narrative from darkness itself.’

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Phil Tinline, author of *Ghosts of Iron Mountain*

‘With *Fakers*, Cormac delivers a gem of intelligence history—right at the intersection of deeply researched and relentlessly entertaining. The pluck, creativity, and persistence of the men and women working in the UK’s underappreciated Information Research Department jump off the pages, leaving readers with plenty of “you’ll never believe *this*actually happened” stories to pass on. Truly a joy to read.’

Dr. David Priess, former CIA officer and author of *The President’s Book of Secrets*

‘*Fakers* is a great story, unearthing the intriguing hidden tale of how British political warfare continued into the Cold War era. Rory Cormac’s excellent research draws on many formerly classified files to reveal the complex characters who ran British disinformation campaigns around the world. While the members of the IRD may have struggled to understand and

influence the new world they worked in after the war, this book illuminates the bigger question of how Britain too was struggling to find its new role.'

Terry Stiastny, author of *Believable Lies*

'Magnificent. A rip-roaring history of Britain's once top-secret covert propaganda department is finally brought to light. Using declassified files, Rory Cormac delves into the world of deception, skilfully retrieving the voices of the brilliant misfits who weaponised their typewriters to influence and undermine Cold War targets. *Fakers* is masterly and matchless.'

Claire Hubbard-Hall, author of *Her Secret Service*

'Fascinating, evocative, timely and often laugh-out-loud. A thoroughly researched, entertaining and brilliantly enlightening read.'

Danny Wallace, author of *Somebody Told Me*

'*Fakers* provides a fascinatingly fresh take on the propaganda battles of the Cold War, whilst adding new dimensions to our understanding of fake news and its history – highly recommended.'

James Crossland, author of *Rogue Agent*

'You've heard of the Cold War Space Race and the Arms Race, now welcome to the Lies Race. Rory Cormac takes you into the top-secret depths of the vast deception operations between the British and the Soviets. A world where Monty Python meets Le Carré, with a revelation on every page that will transform how you see our history.'

Peter Pomerantsev, author of *How to Win an Information War*

'A fun and fascinating dive into the deep history of propaganda and fakery – including its absurdities – which has shaped our world today.'

Gordon Corera, author of *The Spy in the Archive*, co-host of *The Rest is Classified*, and former BBC Security Correspondent

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In memory of
Seán Cormac
1953–2025
Always fiercely proud

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Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been an absolute blast. In some ways, it has been easy: the files are so remarkable that they speak for themselves. In other ways, it has been particularly difficult: synthesizing so much source material in a manner which does justice to the remarkable characters, plots, and intrigue is an unusual challenge for historians used to fighting over fragments. Propaganda operations are inherently deceptive and, complicating matters further, the British intervened in local politics everywhere from Kenya to Indonesia, Egypt to Rhodesia; black propaganda covered everything from student politics to trade unions. If this was difficult for the propagandists to keep track of, spare a thought for the historian.

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October 2025 addendum. I am checking these copyedits and proofs from my father, Seán Cormac's, bedside. He will not see this book in print. It is dedicated to his memory.

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Prologue: Down the Rabbit Hole

It appeared a perfectly ordinary scene. With Christmas approaching and the trees of Hampstead losing their last leaves, a figure entered the local post office to send a batch of New Year greetings cards to Nigeria. The clerk would barely have looked up.

Weeks later, in early 1968, British diplomats in Lagos opened the package with surprise. The card was anything but ordinary; what lay inside was no greeting. Sandwiched between an angry black skull and crossbones on the left and an ornate red hammer and sickle on the right was an ominous message:

‘Arms For All Opportunities’
The USSR Arms Bazaar
sends you
New Year Greetings
And the Seasons’s Best Wishes
For War, Violence, Death & Destruction

The stark absurdity of the message made even seasoned diplomats double take. Their first thought was that this bizarre card must have been the handiwork of the British Foreign Office’s own top-secret fakes and forgeries department. They wrote back, begrudgingly impressed. ‘If so, you will be amused to see from the enclosed cutting from the *Nigerian Tribune* that it was taken by the leader writer to be a propaganda item by the Russians, attempting to capitalise on their willingness to supply weapons to the Federal Government. It seems incredible, but I suppose our particular brand of humour is not understood here.’[1]

Distribution was not limited to Lagos. Other copies of the mysterious card had reached Accra in Ghana, where local staff thought it ‘pretty poisonous’.[2] Could it have been authored by a shadowy nationalist movement known as the Loyal African Brothers who had form in exposing

Soviet encroachment into sub-Saharan Africa? Perhaps they were drawing attention to trigger-happy Soviet arms sales. Unbeknownst to most, the Brothers were an entirely fictitious creation of Britain's fakes and forgeries department—though this time, they were blameless.

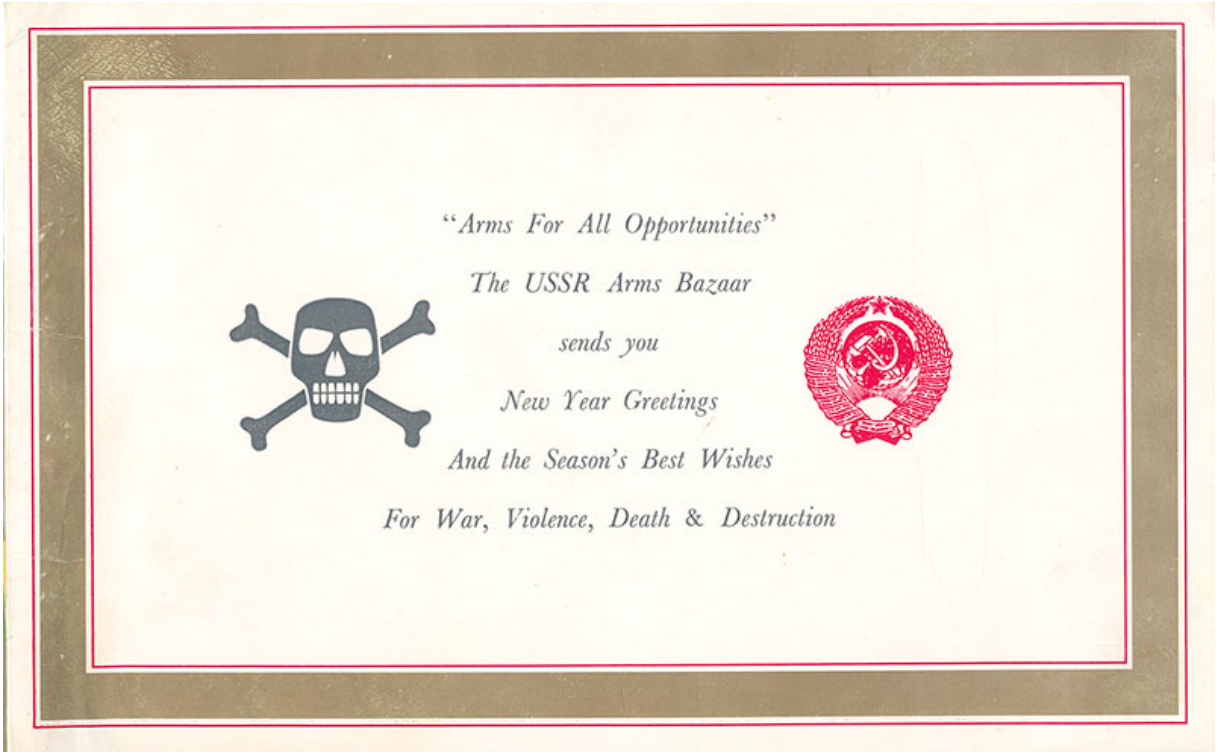

Figure 1. 'Arms for All Opportunities', bogus greetings card, attached to Gowlland to Biggin, 26/1/68, FCO168/3359, The National Archives, UK.

The cards continued to appear. More copies, expensively printed, had also been sent from Vienna to British embassies in Warsaw and Belgrade, leaving the ambassadors similarly perplexed.[3] If 'the card is by any chance "one of ours", I would much prefer not to receive such things in the future', Duncan Wilson complained from Belgrade.[4] More arrived in Ankara, Rome, and Paris. Worryingly, one reached the British ambassador to Athens at his private address.[5]

Inside, the card boasted of Soviet arms having killed more than one million people since 1960: 'this amounts to about 70000 roubles per killed person which is far cheaper than all our competitors!!! HAPPY NEW YEAR'[6] Clearly, someone was trying to discredit the Soviets. But who?

Back in Whitehall, Britain's secret team of fakers and forgers were as puzzled as anyone. They did not recognize it at all; it was not one of theirs. Besides, why would they post from Hampstead?

'Any suggestions?' asked their boss. 'CIA?'[7]

Hans Welser, the enigmatic special operations adviser to the Foreign Office, shook his head. It could not be the Americans; apparently, they had received it too. Same card. Same message. He paused, eyes narrowing. Could it be far-right Russian émigrés?[8] The West Germans had received one too. Either way, Britain's expert in forgeries was professionally unimpressed: 'a rather silly and expensive exercise'.[9]

'This ludicrous operation was not our work or the work of the CIA', one colleague sniffed. 'We do not know who was responsible for it.'[10] Ultimately, the card's authors would remain a mystery with the authors still at large; it was just the latest skirmish in a relentless global battle with many mysterious elements and hidden actors: the Cold War's disinformation front line.

This is the true story of a small group of mavericks and misfits, of odd-balls, irregulars, and pioneers within what was called the Information Research Department. British diplomats of the early postwar years still possessed, fairly or not, a certain reputation: reserved and refined, graduating from the same elite schools and universities. But this is the story of Britain's undiplomatic service: the voluble, hard-drinking, journalists; the trailblazing women, scruffy graduates and glamorous society types alike; and the licentious literary sorts operating from the diplomats' annex —in the most sensitive part of the Foreign Office's secret department. With an almost religious zeal, this peculiar cast, part Alice in Wonderland, part P. G. Wodehouse, created what the regulars came to see as a piratical empire, a fiefdom in equal measures frustrating, infuriating, and bemusing. But, working closely with the spies south of the river in MI6, the team navigated a world of deception to provide a secret service where typewriters became agents and foreign journalists became assets to be covertly cultivated.

Espionage history currently falls into several overfamiliar categories. Much of it focuses on the great and the good, with presidents and prime ministers appearing on alternate pages. Many accounts focus on a single officer or agent who is presented rather improbably as 'the spy who saved

the world'. Not a few are bureaucracy-heavy regimental histories of the secret world. *Fakers* goes far beyond the usual suspects to embrace a new approach which celebrates the social texture of hidden lives, highlighting the role of those often overlooked in previous histories of intelligence, such as women and refugee writers.[11] The secrecy of the IRD allowed many staff to be taken on who would never have otherwise been allowed to enter the regular Foreign Office, and extraordinary declassified files finally allow their story to be told from the bottom up, and even, as far as possible, in their own words.

This book primarily draws on around 8,000 IRD files—which their creators never thought would see the light of day. Perhaps Britain's most politically controversial secret service, the Information Research Department was created in 1948 to counter communism using unattributable propaganda and energetically continued these pursuits for three decades. Its work covered a range of sensitive activities, including off-the-record briefings for trusted contacts, confidentially writing material for journalists, and secretly sponsoring the publication of books. With unprecedented access to the characters, their plots, and their ploys, this book focuses on the most sensitive part of this secret activity: what its creators called black productions, or fakes, forgeries, and phantom groups to everyone else.

The UK conducted a remarkable programme of fakes and forgeries: at least 400 separate operations between the late 1950s and early 1970s, as well as countless articles placed in covertly controlled press agencies. Those involved have long denied using such methods. Tommy Tucker, long-time head of the IRD's Editorial Section, recalled after the department shut down that it 'has been accused of all sorts of sinister methods, of waging black propaganda, of misleading people and so on, all of which—and I can speak of this as an insider—are false'.[12] Similarly, Christopher Mayhew, an architect of the department, accused critics of failing to provide evidence of a single lie or fabrication.[13] Hugh Mooney, a journalist-turned-propagandist working in Northern Ireland, insisted under oath that black operations stayed firmly in their scabbards.[14] Perhaps taking their lead from such testimonies and early batches of bland declassifications, historians have played down accounts of black propaganda as sensationalist.

The real story is rather different and now can be told for the first time.

Fakers makes three arguments. First, from outwardly grand yet crumbling premises physically separated from the main Foreign Office building by Horse Guards Parade, the small team ran what was in effect a global intelligence laundromat. Why were the British services diligently doing their washing? In short, to allow even the most sensitive intelligence to be used for propaganda. Whenever British governments wanted to expose malicious or subversive behaviour by adversaries they faced two perennial problems.

The target audiences, often in places until recently ruled by the imperial UK, were inevitably suspicious of anything coming out of the British foreign secretary's mouth. Nationalist leaders such as President Nasser of Egypt were adept at accusing the British of lying or hypocrisy. A more credible messenger—and one less open to criticism or libel—was needed.

More importantly, the evidence underpinning an exposé might well have come from a secret source: a spy in the enemy camp or a bug on a telephone line. Going public risked blowing it. Whilst use of open sources was always far preferable, when necessary, and with permission from MI6 and GCHQ, the laundromat washed secret intelligence through fake groups and forgeries so that it could have public impact. Whenever it generated coverage in the worldwide press, the team then laundered it further, quoting the article to harness credibility, create an open source, and generate yet more coverage.

Sefton Delmer, who, nicknamed Seldom Defter,[15] headed black propaganda in the Second World War, later recalled, 'our politics are a stunt. We pretend we have an active following to whom we send news and instruction. The purpose of this is to provide ourselves with a platform from which to put over our stuff.'[16] The same principle applied long into the Cold War, where these phantom groups, such as the Loyal African Brothers, also created a sense of grassroots support for a particular idea.

Indeed, the wartime legacy is immediately apparent. Historians tend to examine either the wartime Political Warfare Executive or the peacetime Information Research Department in isolation, neglecting connections between the two. In reality, and although Delmer returned to journalism, there was much continuity in personnel: veterans became so-called black writers on the Cold War team, others ended up running it until finally retiring almost *en masse* in the early 1970s. Meanwhile, the IRD formed the

shadow organization for political warfare throughout its existence, and the huge, bearded shadow of Delmer loomed large over its work.

Continuity in ideas followed continuity in personnel. Using fake groups as a stunt to create the illusion of an active following is merely one example. Attacking corruption and exposing hypocrisy rather than promoting high-minded ideals was another. Propagandists stayed true to Delmer's idea of appealing to the self-interest and passions of particular targets, what he called their inner *Schweinhund,* rather than appealing to ideology.[17] At the same time, Delmer helped create the legend of the 'good German' soldier, patriotic but opposed to the Nazi leadership, in order to make audiences receptive to the line that they were being misled by their leaders.[18]

By the 1960s, propagandists adopted what they called a 'more in sorrow than anger line', when targeting adversaries from Indonesia to Ghana. They depicted soldiers as patriotic and brave but manipulated by malevolent leaders; nationalists, even those particularly antipathetic to the British, were generally portrayed as deceived and exploited by Moscow or Beijing. Even when the team did deploy a direct and angry attack, they did so on the grounds of criminality rather than with an appeal to lofty ideals.

Although the Cold War was a worldwide battle of ideas—of ideology, governance, culture, even global order—and this made propaganda vital, black propaganda specifically did not engage on the lofty high ground. In exposing hypocrisy and corruption, it often hoped to jolt audiences into thinking for themselves. To achieve this, an audacious forgery sometimes deliberately verged on the ridiculous. The aim, though, was not necessarily for readers to assume authenticity, but to separate them from the other side's propaganda—to make them question the charade without having to listen to lectures about democracy. Black propaganda cast doubt on the accuracy of assertions made by adversaries, whilst also encouraging scepticism of the adversary's very conception of political reality.[19] All of this had echoes of the Second World War—although the goal was, of course, fundamentally different: disruption through exposure as part of a wider effort to maintain British global influence and interests in the face of decline, rather than subverting enemy morale and undermining willingness to fight in what was already total war.[20]

Indeed, the Cold War also brought about stark change. When addressing new recruits, Leslie Glass, a rotund and breezy wartime propagandist who had since risen to oversee all information work in the Foreign Office, recalled Sefton Delmer's golden rule. 'Propaganda must be written and/or delivered by nationals of the country addressed, and if possible written from scratch not translated from English original. The propagandist must have real "empathy" for his target audience.' After all, Glass pointed out, Delmer himself 'was born and educated in Germany and completely bilingual. It is essential to speak to foreign countries and troops in their own idiom. One slight mistake can make a leaflet ridiculous.'[21]

Although wartime operatives were not above making blinkered assumptions and employing crude stereotypes,[22] such expertise was more possible during all-out war with the Germans than in the global Cold War. Émigré writers, mostly from Austria and Hungary, played a key role countering the Communists, but their campaign tried to move seamlessly from the intricacies of local politics in Tanzania to student movements in Indonesia. The small team inevitably lacked sufficient knowledge of the personalities, hopes, fears, and frustrations of the print cultures and the media ecosystems. It was impossible to perfect every idiom at this scale; the risk of ridiculousness was high.

This was a global programme, hitting targets from Latin America to Southeast Asia, and firmly locating the propaganda Cold War in the Global South. Ambition, bordering on arrogance, was high, with the scope and scale driven partly by legacies of the Second World War; partly by an increasing desire, almost desperate at times, to justify their own existence in the face of cuts; and partly reflecting the overstretch, again desperate at times, of those trying to manage dwindling empire with equally dwindling resources.

If the book's first argument is that a black propaganda campaign existed on a global scale far larger than historians realize, its second argument is that the British team was one among many in a worldwide game of competitive interference. The Cold War was a global affair, intertwined with decolonization and taking place far beyond London, Washington, and Moscow;[23] accordingly the range of propaganda players, from superpowers to developing states to rebel factions, was more diverse than is currently understood.[24] Far from fiendishly manipulating targets, British efforts

navigated, were buffeted by, and often drowned in waves of rumours and intrigue emanating from all sides, including those within the target states themselves.

The British programme paled when compared to the sheer volume of Russian propaganda, bolstered by forgery factories in places like East Germany and Czechoslovakia.[25] The Information Research Department was playing catchup. Likewise, the CIA's booming capabilities, in which black propaganda complemented a flood of unattributable news stories, dwarfed IRD activity.[26] This certainly had its advantages, not least when the UK knew the Americans would shoulder the blame for various forgeries.

Meanwhile, states such as Ghana, Egypt, and Indonesia were not merely recipients of UK operations, neither were they a passive battleground between the Cold War superpowers; they launched operations of their own. When the UK targeted Kenya in the second half of the 1960s, the Kenyans were just as—if not more—worried about interference by neighbouring Somalia. The UK was not a puppeteer but merely one actor amongst many within shifting alliances, including local propagandists seeking to disrupt each other as well as to undermine external interferers.

Propaganda directed from Whitehall, or from Washington and Moscow for that matter, must therefore be understood within the context of local actors driving and reacting to developments on the ground. Successful propaganda depended on harnessing ongoing events and exploiting existing schisms; it did not create resistance or divisions from scratch. It is therefore vital not to overplay the impact of the hidden hand. This book accordingly adopts an international multi-archival approach, from American oral histories and Kenyan newspapers to Chinese foreign ministry records and Soviet intelligence reports. It does so first to place UK operations in the broader context of superpower activity; second, to understand the role of other players—such as intelligence agencies in sub-Saharan Africa—currently overlooked, transforming our understanding about who does propaganda and how it works; and third to expose other sides' reactions to British propaganda.

Propaganda was a constant interplay between external influencers and those within the target states. British lines were therefore instantly subject to multiple competing narratives developed by audiences scattered within and across governments. They soon took on a life of their own, distorting as

well as reflecting competing versions of reality. The fundamental lack of control created a series of timeless core dilemmas for the propagandist.

When should propagandists intervene with a fake or forgery, something which was always risky, and when should they sit back, do nothing, and let events take their course?

When would a smear campaign backfire? For some targets, there really was no such thing as bad publicity.

How was it possible to generate helpful confusion without ending up confusing your own side? It could be difficult to keep up with what was real or fake and what was or was not British handiwork. As the artfully macabre New Year Card of 1968 demonstrated, it was easy to lose control in the world of smoke and mirrors which the propagandists had helped create.

How could propagandists manage a successful channel without that channel becoming so successfully prolific that it drew sufficient suspicions to spell its own downfall? Restraint was key.

And when would material be convincing enough to be believable by target audiences whilst not being too convincing that it ended up spreading the other side's propaganda? As one internal review of the IRD warned, 'if the product is too like the real thing it loses its purpose; but if it diverges too much from the real thing its true purpose is revealed'. It was a tricky balance, and this was the fate that befell *Flamingo* magazine, covertly created by the British, in the early 1960s. It 'seems to me', the reviewer complained, 'to be so much like what it pretends to be—a popular illustrated magazine with Negro sex appeal—that it lacks any anti-Communist purpose'. *Flamingo* was wound up afterwards.[27]

The reverse dilemma came to the fore when defending against disinformation. It may be a cliché that lies travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes, but it was a very real issue when determining how to expose an attack. The team soon learnt that publicly denouncing a lie gave airtime to that very lie. Similarly, much Soviet disinformation sought not necessarily to persuade a reader of something but more subversively to undermine trust in all media sources, in democratic authority, and even in truth itself. It sought to induce paralysing cynicism. Those on the lookout for it had to be alert to the very real threat, whilst not seeing it everywhere. The latter, as one senior diplomat warned colleagues,

risked doing the disinformers' job for them and built up the Soviets into some sort of masterful puppeteering behemoth, always one step ahead.

It was even difficult to spot the disinformation and untruths in the first place. What was the difference, officials reflected in quieter moments, between disinformation and unsavoury ideas? When did a half-truth, or spin, become disinformation to be countered by the tools of secret statecraft? When did a useful idiot spouting drivel become an agent of foreign disinformation?

Many of these dilemmas, turning on big themes of authenticity, truth, and reality, still resonate. Those grappling with Russian and Chinese activity today, whether in Whitehall or Washington, might be surprised to learn that British diplomats used the same language of countering disinformation as early as the mid-1960s.

The book's third argument is that success is more multifaceted and subjective than many assume. Measuring the impact of fakes, like all forms of propaganda, proved perpetually difficult—a difficulty which ultimately proved part of the Information Research Department's downfall in a cash-light and metric-heavy world.

Propagandists and their paymasters alike acknowledged the challenge of proving value for money. The impact of wartime activity has remained contested ever since, occasionally spilling out into public spats between those involved about what they did or did not achieve.[28] Sefton Delmer, aware of the moral ambiguity of his work, even wondered in his own memoirs whether he was a 'baddy baddy' rather than a 'goody goody'.[29] Another wartime operative, one who would go on to play a key role in Cold War black propaganda, reflected in the late 1940s how 'there are in any case few ways of measuring its effects, which are cumulative'.[30]

Thirty years later, shortly before the IRD was closed for good, an inspector memorably grappled with the same question.

> Information work is very expensive in manpower and is practically impossible to evaluate in cost effectiveness. It is not feasible to follow individual items to try and assess their impact which will vary from country to country and recipient to recipient. Occasionally you can spot a piece which rang a bell, but otherwise it is like fertiliser. You cannot really tell how much it has affected a particular crop as opposed, say, to the weather. But like fertiliser you have to put it on.[31]

Those creating the fakes and forgeries objected to having to produce evidence to appease the managerial bean-counters, especially as economic pressure mounted. The bosses wanted numbers, but even an increase in the tempo of operations did not necessarily mean an increase in impact: the number of fake stories launched and the number of articles they generated was an entirely different indicator from the actual impact of those articles. Still, the fertilizer idea created licence for some creative grading to navigate bureaucratic absurdities. Propaganda was so much more than a direct transmission between the broadcaster and the recipient; success came in many forms, far outstripping whether the propagandist had actually managed to convince a particular target audience of something. It might have involved tying down the adversary in a lengthy and paranoia-inducing leak investigation; it might have sent a message of resolve to a particular audience; it might have just made life that bit more difficult for the target. Perhaps counterintuitively, exposure of a forgery did not necessarily mean that the forgery had failed: public denials would draw attention to both the allegation and the actual policy being critiqued.

To an extent, success was in the eye of the beholder: it was constructed and contested by all involved, and sometimes these narratives outweighed the supposedly more objective accounts of whether the operation had met its stated goals. British officials in the 1960s worried that Russian disinformation became successful simply by virtue of Whitehall narrating it as successful. It was all difficult to prove though. And the managers demanded mono-dimensional metrics.

This created what might be called the fertilizer paradox: keen to justify their expense and effort, those involved would claim credit for something that might well have happened anyway. They had nudged history along. At the same time, they could avoid blame for morally problematic consequences of their propaganda, say encouraging brutal anti-Communist crackdowns, by claiming that such things were happening anyway. In some ways, the subjective nature and unprovable impact could have been a win-win—but it would never be enough. Pathos hung in the air, as propagandists grappled with underappreciation and a wider fear of futility, disillusionment, even purposelessness.

One thing on which everybody did agree, whether sceptical or supportive, was that black propaganda was no magic bullet. It is a challenge to tell the story of such activity—or any secret operations—without

imparting a sense of strategic importance that it does not deserve. As Leslie Glass lectured new recruits in the early 1970s,

> it is somehow thought that in situations which are militarily unsuccessful a rabbit can be pulled out of a hat by secret propaganda operations. It was the same psychology based on the World War II mythology of resistance movements and partisans that led the USA into thinking they could find a cheap secret way of throwing out Castro and led to the Bay of Pigs.

This was entirely wrong, he insisted. Propaganda 'is a support weapon at best. But it is an effective support weapon only *in the hands of experts*. Wrongly used it may backfire. And never rely on it to pull a rabbit out of the hat in the event of a military and/or political failure.'[32]

Clement Attlee's Labour government created the Information Research Department in 1948 as part of a fightback against a highly coordinated worldwide Communist propaganda offensive. As the department quickly expanded in budget and personnel, so too did its remit. By the middle of the 1950s, its scope had widened to include countering hostile propaganda from all sources. What was once limited to Western Europe now took on a global scale, particularly in the post-imperial world. Propagandists targeted nationalist leaders who were hostile to British interests, most notably Egypt's President Nasser before, during, and after the 1956 Suez crisis. Many in Whitehall believed that extra effort was needed to prevent the Communists from filling the vacuum created by the retreat from empire.[33]

But not all of them. Plenty of people even inside the IRD did not like working there, feeling it was too negative, too, in the words of one former officer on its Africa Desk, '"anti" something'. They 'preferred to do something more positive'.[34] The artistes and Cold Warriors of the black section, by contrast, were more than happy to meld their imaginative enthusiasm for propaganda and print into something altogether more devious. The result was a bathetic paradox of the absurd, sometimes comically so, colliding with the darker side of human nature—and all against a high-stakes geopolitical backdrop.

To allow a behind-the-scenes account of how multi-layered propaganda operations unfolded, and how a curious cast navigated the dilemmas, deception, and intrigue on a global scale, this book deliberately covers a narrow timeframe. Our journey down the rabbit hole, where not everything was as it seems, begins in 1960 when the Soviets began forging British government documents and, as the Cold War collided with decolonization,

spreading them across sub-Saharan Africa amidst fierce competition for influence in the rapidly growing post-imperial world. British expenditure on propaganda was on the verge of exploding. Back in 1950, the Information Research Department had cost around £50,000 annually. By 1960, it had risen to £400,000, before more than doubling to a huge £1 million in 1965.[35] The Department was entering its glory years, employing 217 people, up from around 125 in 1952—an almost 75 per cent increase in manpower. Twenty-three of them worked specifically on black propaganda.[36]

Would this select group respond to Soviet disinformation with forgeries of their own? Would they try to pull a rabbit out of the hat? Would it become a theatre of the absurd in which the dramatic increase in personnel and costs backfired? In the bleak bureaucratic landscape of British intelligence, would grand ideals clash with petty reality?

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PART I

Forgery Wars

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1

The Secret Annexe

The chatter started as a murmur, quiet and scattered, but soon grew into an excitable buzz among leftist leaders in Accra. It was the early summer of 1960 and the bustling streets of Ghana's capital, noisy with the hum and whir of new building projects and imbued with a sense of optimism and vibrancy post-independence, were a far cry from the dark alleys of Berlin and Vienna usually associated with Cold War intrigue. But the stakes were no less high.

The top-secret document passed hand to hand, its pages creased with urgency, its contents whispered in hurried tones on the fringes of trade union meetings; the trade unionists could not believe their luck. Finally, they had stone-cold proof of what they had known all along. The United Kingdom, until three years earlier the colonial ruler of their country for almost a hundred years, had launched a dirty tricks campaign to stymie the emergence of independent trade unions and keep local labour movements firmly under the oppressive thumb of British and American imperialists.

They were outraged. They were vindicated. And their excitement was audible. Word soon reached MI5's ears on the ground that locals had got hold of a British document, presumably via Russians: it had an air of legitimacy; the font looked official; it was marked *SECRET*. Titled 'Annexe to Cabinet Paper on Policy in Africa', it exposed imperial designs on Africa, portrayed local trade unionists as dupes of British intelligence, and highlighted rifts in the much-vaunted Anglo-American special relationship.

British intelligence grew more nervous as MI5 watched the revelations spread from Accra, on the west coast of Africa, to the northern shores of Tunisia and Libya. Worse still, a Tripoli-based newspaper, *Al Libi*, soon published extracts and the scandal seeped into the wider public

consciousness. Containment was no longer possible; the revelations had entered mainstream circulation across Africa.

MI5 assumed it was a forgery—albeit a clever one—but could not be sure. They naturally suspected the Soviet hand.[1] British intelligence was well aware of a recent spate of forgeries, seemingly orchestrated by the Kremlin, but this was a new departure. Forgeries had targeted the US, which occupied a special place in Russian thinking, rather than Britain. The rapid rise of American power in places like sub-Saharan Africa had shunted the British out of the firing line. This was both a relief and, peculiarly, a rather sad statement on post-imperial decline. Perhaps the UK was now a target. British intelligence quickly needed answers: was it really a forgery, or a damaging leak? Who was behind it? Who had seen it? And, most importantly, should diplomats publicly denounce it and risk drawing more attention? Or might Britain's spies do something more discreet and devious to silence the rumours?

Some 3,000 miles away in Whitehall, the one-time imperial capital now struggling to adapt to the dislocation of decolonization, Britain's covert cold warriors held an emergency meeting to determine if the Soviets had in fact dragged the UK into the burgeoning forgery wars.

It seemed likely, given the Kremlin's policy of so-called peaceful coexistence with the West, which played out as subterranean competition. As the Soviets sought to match the vast reach and status of the US, they projected their influence, wrapped in revolutionary rhetoric, into the Third World; and so the Cold War collided with decolonization in what was becoming a battle for status as much as post-imperial influence.[2] Indicative of this, Soviet intelligence had just opened an Africa division headed by a relatively young and energetic officer determined to make his mark.[3, 4] Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, had intensified the Kremlin's own disinformation activity, notably exhorting sister intelligence services behind the Iron Curtain, from East Germany to Romania, to step up lies, fakes, and forgeries designed to blame the US and other enemies for Soviet assassinations and kidnappings.[5] He hoped this would kill two birds with one stone.

Their knowledge of Soviet disinformation strategy may have been sketchy, but British diplomats assumed this 'secret annexe' was a forgery.

Still, they asked the Foreign Office's specialist propaganda team to investigate further. In their minds, the stakes were high: the document undermined the fragile British position, damaged delicate relations with new post-imperial leaders, and ultimately endangered the postwar Commonwealth project. Given the likely Soviet hand, they also feared it was an ominous sign of things to come.

Could it be a genuine leak? After all, the British did oppose the development of an independent trade union which could fall under Communist control. The document was right about that. They quietly admitted—although could never say it publicly—that the 'statement of British policy contained in the forgery was, in many ways, near the truth'.[6]

If it was a fake, Leslie Sheridan, a dynamic force in the Information Research Department since its inception over a decade earlier, warned against denouncing it as a forgery: 'there was always the risk that when a denial was issued it inevitably gave further publicity to the forged document'.[7]

Sheridan was just the man to be delving into this murky sphere. He was a journalist by training, having been night editor at the *Daily Mirror* before the Second World War. He had then become a senior propagandist for the Special Operations Executive, notoriously charged with setting Europe ablaze, during wartime. Remembered by one colleague as a sinister-looking man fond of odd recruitment procedures conducted over clubland lunches,[8] Sheridan was a formidable operator—although his judgement was not infallible, he once recruited one Kim Philby as a propaganda instructor.[9]

He had specialized in operations outside of Western Europe, recommending the various subversive rumours, whispering campaigns, and black propaganda to be spread. Perhaps most importantly, though, Sheridan manipulated the world's press—audaciously infiltrating unsuspecting newsrooms across the globe. Starting in the Balkans, Sherry, as he was known to friends, had successfully built a worldwide network of foreign correspondents. By 1941, it spanned practically every neutral capital city on the planet. Alongside his second wife, Adelaide Maturin, who also worked at SOE and was the behind-the-scenes brains of the operation, Sheridan founded at least three news agencies covertly controlled by the British: Britanova Ltd, Arab News Agency, and Globe News Agency. Their importance was simple and obvious. As once senior colleague later

explained: ‘A news agency man will get hold of the facts from a source he regards as reliable and will put it into the plumbing of the news machines, and it will be all over the world in no time flat.’[10]

Enthusiastic, dynamic, and constantly dreaming up new plots and ploys, Sheridan was one of the Information Research Department’s first hires. He had headed its new editorial section, the most action-orientated and sensitive part of what was then a small outfit, which involved discreetly distributing the British line around the world. He used boozy lunches to convince friendly journalists to act as quiet conduits for his material, and worked closely with Maturin, now in MI6 but still running covertly controlled news agencies, as another outlet. They formed a formidable husband-and-wife team.[11]

In 1956, then Editorial Adviser to IRD, Sheridan had played an instrumental role in covert propaganda during the Suez debacle, managing relations with the press and working on leaflets and tape recordings.[12] One former boss described him as being always keen to ‘go back to the era of dirty tricks’. Another contemporary saw him less flatteringly as a ‘sad bag of debris’.[13]

Now, at the start of a new decade, Sheridan found himself on the other side, wondering how to defend against a forgery.

Sheridan and his fellow cold warriors, including officers from MI6 and MI5 equally well-versed in secret statecraft, agreed this was indeed a forgery. Probably. Their initial hunch was that the World Federation of Trade Unions, a Soviet front organization, was the likely culprit rather than the KGB directly. Perhaps it had come from Prague. Perhaps it was an English Communist living there. It was too early to tell, leaving Sheridan reduced to speculation and gossip.[14]

Sheridan then faced the classic disinformation dilemma: to expose and discredit the apparent forgery but risk drawing attention to it, or to do nothing and hope it goes away. The dilemma became more urgent a week later when MI5 reported that it had now reached Kenya. Something had to be done. But what? And how? Even for an old hand like Sheridan, this was new territory.

Fighting his natural inclination to wade into some fiendish plot or another, he decided to do neither. The compromise was to tell the president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, discreetly, that it was a fake. Nkrumah, he

reckoned, must have seen it already and so would need reassurance that the British were not moving against him. Sheridan was not naïve; he knew this brought its own challenges. After all, why would Kwame Nkrumah believe the British? He had led Ghana to independence from the British in 1957, he was an ardent nationalist, increasingly intolerant of dissent, and he was surrounded by a KGB-trained intelligence service.[15] He was already suspicious of MI6 and CIA machinations. There was no way he would take some local British bureaucrat's word for it.

The problem was that Sheridan did not know who *was* behind it and, even if he did, would not have been able to reveal to Nkrumah *how* he knew without blowing MI5 secrets. Sheridan's team instructed local diplomats to be cautious: to tell Nkrumah it was a forgery and play up differences between the document and actual British policy. It was not much, but it was the best they could do in the circumstances, especially given that he knew, on first glance, that it was not all that far removed from reality.[16]

The revelations felt true, felt familiar, and so readers did not question them but passed along the lie as if it were a gift. They continued to spread, growing louder, echoing, across the continent, with MI5 soon warning the revelations had reached as far east as Addis Ababa in the horn of Africa. Inside the Foreign Office, Sheridan assembled a team to stop the spread. Always cautious, especially where Cold War intrigue was concerned, colonial officials warned against telling any other African leaders: 'Nothing should be done', they fretted, 'to inflate the significance of this document which has not, from all accounts, made much of an impact as yet.'[17]

But the risk of widespread publicity grew by the day. One diplomat warned that 'the poison may well sink in' amongst readers, so it made sense to issue a disclaimer now. A press release would have the added benefit, he naïvely hoped, of deterring against future forgeries. On the other hand, the forgery was so well done that 'the average African may well believe that all, or at least part of it, does represent HMG's thoughts'. Worse still, nobody wanted the press or African governments making detailed inquiries into the real British policy, given its embarrassing similarities with the forgery.[18]

It went all the way up to the most senior diplomat in the Foreign Office, Frederick Hoyer Millar. A tough character unafraid to shy away from covert competition and subterranean machinations, Hoyer Millar settled it with the classic mandarin response of stumbling through and hoping for the best: 'do

nothing until publicity was inevitable'.[19] He knew it was a gamble though. If publicity picked up, then the Foreign Office would have been left flatfooted on the defensive.

And so, the diplomats came up with a back-up plan, presumably against their colonial counterparts' preferences: 'the possibility of some inspired, unofficial commentaries to lay responsibility at the door of the Russians who have in the past been responsible for a number of forgeries of official documents, mainly American'. There was just one catch. MI6 had no evidence that it actually was the Russians.[20]

Deniably blaming Russia would prove tricky and, with the British position in Africa on the line, the stakes were high. But Leslie Sheridan knew just the man for the job.

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2

Anatomy of a Forgery

Enter Johann (Hans) Leopold Welser. In his mid-forties and on the verge of receiving an OBE for services to British propaganda, Welser was the UK's go-to expert on fakes and forgeries. He was a most unlikely diplomat.

Born in wartime Vienna on New Year's Eve, 1916, Hans Welser's early years were sculpted by a world torn apart. Like Sheridan, he was a journalist by training and, after leaving school, worked the circuits of Vienna and Geneva before fleeing his homeland after Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938. Welser was staunchly anti-Nazi and claimed his bold pro-democracy journalism had put a target on his back. He arrived in the UK, via brief stints as a journalist in Geneva and Finland, a year later in August 1939 at the age of just 22. With a presence that did not immediately command attention, he was slight, average height, of fresh complexion, with grey eyes and fair hair.[1]

Bilingual and well-travelled, Welser was no stranger to Britain. He had been there before on both business and pleasure, for, whilst travelling as a journalist, he had met and proposed to his English fiancée, Caroline Margaret (known as Margaret) Theobold, ostensibly a dress designer but from a wealthy family. He quickly married her in a small Catholic church in Kensington in late September 1939, less than two months after arriving as a refugee. The rushed timing was hardly coincidental; he had only been given leave to remain in the UK for two months and, now married, could stay indefinitely. Young Welser had arrived penniless and his apparent willingness to live off Maragret's substantial means raised eyebrows amongst her family. One aunt implied he would bleed the 'sweet, gentle' Margaret dry and even told the Home Office to sign him up for military

service. He was, after all, a supposed ‘friendly alien’. Margaret, by contrast, was besotted by her charming new husband.[2]

Welser would not be dependent on his wife for long. An ebullient and indefatigable young man, keen to make a life for himself in London, he quickly found a job in journalism for a small service called United Correspondents. He wrote propaganda radio scripts and newspaper material primarily to be used by the Joint Broadcasting Committee, a body set up by MI6 shortly before the war to organize the transmission of propaganda into enemy countries, and later, under the Ministry of Information, expanding to neutral countries as well.[3] Welser instantly began integrating himself into his new surroundings. Friends remarked upon how quickly he assumed British mannerisms and opinions, even trying—unsuccessfully—to tone down his Germanic accent.

The war soon caught up with him, interrupting his exciting new life. Like many other anti-Nazi refugees, Welser was initially exempt from internment but, as the risk of German invasion increased, he found himself stuck in an internment camp by late June 1940. The Battle of Britain began just weeks later. It was a change of policy which caught him, Churchill wanting to ‘collar the lot’,[4] but pointed comments about him living off of his wife and other allegations that he had lied to passport control two years earlier did Welser no favours. He ended up in a pleasant enough camp outside Liverpool, which consisted of newly built council houses surrounded by a high fence.

Welser was not the sort to avoid notice for long. Ever the opportunist, he had a talent not just for surviving but for exploiting situations and now cannily turned an ongoing investigation into pro-Nazi sympathies inside the camp to his advantage.

The catalyst was an old colleague, one Paul Frischauer: a successful Austrian novelist, fellow journalist, and staunch anti-Nazi writer who had emigrated to England in 1934. From his new home, he worked with MI6 on various activities to get propaganda into the Reich by underhand means, including an anti-Nazi newspaper and by helping to set up both United Correspondents and the Joint Broadcasting Committee.

Welser and Frischauer had first crossed paths in May 1938, before Welser had formally settled in London. They had talked, no doubt, about propaganda. About opportunities. Frischauer had made himself useful to

MI6 by cultivating a network of Austrian journalists who would quietly receive British material—perhaps one was Welser. By the time Welser arrived in the UK in earnest, he had found his way into Frischauer's United Correspondents outfit. This was his way in, his ticket into Britain's wartime propaganda.[5]

Frischauer was now assisting MI5 with their inquiries but, for all his anti-Nazi credentials, was proving a liability. He had committed the cardinal sins of making false accusations about supposed Nazis in internment camps and recklessly boasting about his work for British intelligence. These were just the latest black marks, as suspicion of him grew. Rumours circulated that his Hungarian wife had been a spy, whilst MI5 wearily alluded to some sort of 'scandal' involving the pair of them—and the Soviet spy Guy Burgess, a close friend of the couple—at the outbreak of the war. His hush-hush propaganda units were falling foul of sordid turf wars growing inside Britain's propaganda bureaucracy; he had been briefly interned, and felt humiliated, but was quickly released at the request of the Foreign Office—against the wishes of the security authorities who deemed him unreliable, unstable, and entirely unsuitable for delicate work.[6]

When Frischauer claimed to have given Welser notes on pro-Nazi groups inside his camp, the authorities came knocking. Welser, unflappable, denied ever receiving any such material, but as an ardent anti-Nazi himself and keen to make a good impression on his new hosts, he voluntarily provided MI5 with a list from memory.[7]

It was not enough to shake MI5's doubts. Welser's association with Frischauer had stained him. Even before internment, Welser was listed as an 'MI5 suspect' almost immediately after beginning work for United Correspondents, with a police report noting connections to one Paul Frischauer.[8]

Now languishing behind barbed wire in a camp, the scrutiny increased further. One informant described Welser as 'unreliable and of doubtful origin', accusing him of boasting about his 'ability to convey information' overseas. Whispers circulated about this mysterious man who had no money, had somehow travelled abroad to Switzerland and Finland, and had managed to marry a wealthy English woman.

Yet Welser, ever the survivor, turned charm into currency. After less than three months of internment, he found himself in the picturesque seaside village of Ilfracombe, north Devon. Alongside other refugees, he was conscripted into the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps to do light engineering work on the home front.[9]

Welser felt his considerable skills were wasted digging holes and erecting shelters. Nearly three years later, in June 1943, he was discharged with 'excellent character' on medical grounds—chronic sinusitis—and reinvented himself once again, this time working as a monitor for the BBC, keeping watch on European broadcasts from Caversham Park on the outskirts of Reading.[10]

Welser's journey was a far cry from that of his old colleague and countryman. Paul Frischauer was hurriedly packed off to Brazil and ditched as a secret British asset; he rather hysterically threatened legal action when the British government liquidated United Correspondents shortly afterwards in a deliberate attempt to freeze him out. He railed against betrayal but faded into obscurity.[11] Welser, meanwhile, had slipped away. He had found his way into the secret state, used Frischauer to his advantage, and emerged intact. If only just.

Around this time, Welser met Leslie Sheridan and his life changed forever. Sheridan, as head of MI6's press propaganda section, was more than happy to let the unreliable Frischauer waste away in Brazil,[12] but he viewed Welser in an altogether different light. He and Adelaide Maturin quickly recruited Welser back into the secret world. Sefton Delmer himself, the *éminence grise* of wartime propaganda, then poached him to come and work for the top-secret Political Warfare Executive 'as a matter of urgency'.[13] By spring 1944, Welser was living in a beautiful eighteenth-century manor house in Bedfordshire and working on black propaganda targeting Germany and Austria. His boss thought him 'absolutely reliable and loyal'.[14] It was quite the turnaround.

Welser ended the war at Bush House in London, working for Delmer on propaganda in the British zones of Germany and Austria. In spring 1946, he transferred to the Control Office for Germany and Austria where he continued targeting his occupied homeland.[15] He cryptically labelled his work as being of 'a journalistic nature'.[16] Friends now described him as

having ‘adjusted himself to British ways and customs remarkably well’. He was keen to assimilate, holding ‘typically British’ opinions, and his manners were becoming increasingly British.[17] In many ways, he was desperate to fit in. Punctilious, impeccably dressed, and fastidiously tidy, Welser became a British citizen the following September, settling into family life in Surrey with his wife and two young daughters. Margaret had bought the house outright, in cash; Hans had just £44 to his name.[18] The family became good friends with Sheridan and Maturin. His latest boss thought he had ‘the abilities to make him a useful citizen’.[19]

Welser had certainly been useful to Britain in the years since. By 1949 he was on the Austrian press desk of the Foreign Office’s German Information Department under Christopher Warner. A senior diplomat, Warner also oversaw the nascent Information Research Department and clearly saw something in Welser. Making the most of the opportunity, by 1952 Welser had swiftly worked his way up the Information Research Department ladder to become head of its special editorial unit, the highly secret covert operations section. His team worked on what they euphemistically called ‘angled political material for special recipients’.[20] He had been particularly active during the Suez crisis in 1956 when the UK, France, and Israel infamously colluded to invade Egypt under false pretences after Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal; one forged pamphlet falsely attributed to the Egyptian government suggested that Nasser intended to take over Middle Eastern oil. The British sent a copy to oil companies.[21] Welser’s unit then leapt on the ill-fated Hungarian uprising shortly afterwards when Soviet forces brutally crushed an attempted revolution. Here, they forged booklets in Arabic to expose and discredit Communist brutality for a Middle Eastern audience.[22] Traditional, Catholic, and conservative, Welser hated Communists as much as he had hated Nazis. He loved his job—and took a no-nonsense approach to the secret world.

It was no surprise, therefore, that Welser led the charge to counter what appeared to be a Soviet forgery now discrediting British policy in Africa. Working closely with his new boss, decorated war hero turned swashbuckling head of the IRD Donald Hopson, Welser prepared an anonymous briefing that planted the document firmly within a recent spate of Soviet forgeries which had sought to weaken Western unity; readers, he believed, should know that the devious Soviets had forged some thirty-two

letters in the last couple of years alone.[23] One particularly outrageous example, which Welser and Hopson tied back to Nikita Khrushchev personally, was supposedly written by a senior US military official disclosing that most American pilots were ‘psychoneurotics’ and ‘alcoholics’. Welser lacked evidence that Russia was behind the new anti-British forgery, but by putting it in broader context hoped to point the finger squarely at the Kremlin. Hopson despatched it to posts around the world—to be used only if absolutely necessary.[24]

Welser could offer little more than innuendo without knowing the provenance of the forgery. He needed accurate intelligence, and so MI6 began some discreet detective work. If Kwame Nkrumah and other nationalist leaders did not accept that it was a fake, then he feared it could do devastating damage to the UK’s standing at a delicate moment in the decolonization process as various powers competed for influence in the post-imperial space.

The forgery’s cover letter, sent by the United Africa Association, provided a lead. The Association claimed to ‘have come into possession’ of a most secret document ‘by good fortune’. ‘We shuddered’, it warned ominously, ‘to think of what they have in store for Africa.’[25]

Nobody in MI5 or MI6 had heard of the mysterious United Africa Association. Headed notepaper listed offices in no fewer than eight African capital cities—but suspiciously did not supply addresses. Neither did MI5 nor MI6 know anything about the names of the chairman and general secretary printed on the cover letter. British intelligence confidently concluded that the association was ‘almost certainly fictitious’.[26]

The document certainly matched the emerging Soviet *modus operandi* for forgeries. Use of security classification so as to attract attention. Tick. Use of official letterhead. Tick. Surfaced as a copy, rather than an original, with the key document slightly out of focus so as to complicate forensic analysis. Accompanying cover letter by an angry friend or a non-existent group. Tick. Tick. Tick.[27]

Confusing matters, the Americans believed that the Chinese Communists were running what the ambassador called a ‘propaganda factory’ out of Ghana.[28] China was also seeking to make economic and political inroads into post-imperial Africa, so was it perhaps them rather than the Soviets?

Spelling mistakes were another giveaway. Less obviously, specialists in the arcane intricacies of British bureaucracy spotted some formatting errors which would have gone quite unnoticed to the vast majority of readers. They pedantically and pompously pointed out how no British typist would have failed to number their paragraphs. No British typist would have adopted the continental style of using a mere single space after each full stop. The British unfailingly used two or three. The dates were also improbable—and bizarrely flattering—in so far as the document was supposedly written in just five working days.[29] It would have been more like five working months. It was definitely a fake, they proudly concluded, setting down their spectacles and turning off their reading lights.

Welser furrowed his brow, unsatisfied. He knew the experts' evidence was far too esoteric to cut through the noise. How would full stops and spaces convince any reader who wanted the revelations to be true? He was right: a Moscow-based newspaper eagerly—too eagerly perhaps—argued that spelling mistakes proved nothing.[30]

The all-important question, then, remained who had made the fake. Things now got technical as document detectives forensically analysed the typeface. This may have been a far cry from the fast cars and shootouts of the theatre of James Bond, but it was full of intrigue, mystery, and skill. MI6's forgery hunters sat, hunched over the paper, painstakingly peering through microscopes under a bright light. It was a classic Cold War interrogation, but of paper rather than spies.

Analysis revealed that it did not come from Africa; it might have been French or Italian, but 'there are also very similar Russian typefaces'.[31] Confusingly, the typeface used in the cover letter was perhaps West German or even British. The paper was Italian, as was the envelope. The forgery itself was a photocopy making it almost impossible to identify the typewriter; but the paper was German.[32] The CIA chipped in, tracing the typewriter back to Erfurt, a town in East Germany. Even French intelligence got involved, blaming a Soviet front organization, the World Federation of Trade Unions—just as Sheridan had suspected. The CIA wondered whether India may have had a hand in hoping to disrupt perceived British neo-imperialism; or maybe it was a rogue Briton with inside knowledge of trade unions.[33] Hopson had little to go on. It was an international mystery; the perpetrators were highly professional.

One further clue pointed to the Russian hand. The forgery included an unusual phrase: ‘verbally insist on’. This was a direct literal translation of a Russian phrase which would have been better rendered in English as ‘pretend to believe in’.[34] Intriguing, but hardly case closed.

It felt like a race against time. As MI6’s forensic analysts came up against a brick wall in their hunt for provenance, the forgery continued to spread. Sheridan had to despatch one diplomat to have a discreet—if awkward—word with the president of Guinea who had been parroting its line.[35] Another IRD official, Hugh Carless, worried that the affair had ‘done considerable damage to our interest in territories such as Ghana and East Africa’.[36]

Days turned into weeks, and Hopson became impatient. Demanding answers, he instructed Welser to prod MI5 and MI6. ‘Our friends are pursuing this’,[37] Welser responded. Even the cabinet secretary himself, the most senior civil servant in the land, got involved, suggesting that there should be a leak investigation in case the forgery was loosely based on a genuine document that someone had snuck out of Whitehall.[38] The IRD had already been betrayed by the Soviet spy Guy Burgess, who had briefly worked for the department before defecting a few years earlier; was another traitor in their midst?

Out of the blue, a new lead arrived in the form of a rumour from Egypt. Sheridan heard that it was not the Russians after all, but an obscure leftist-nationalist group of exiles known as the Cameroons Office, based in Cairo. He tracked down the source, Mursi Saadeddin, secretary of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization, also based in Cairo and a body increasingly regarded as an international Communist front.[39] Mursi stuck to his story: the obscure Cameroons Office in Cairo had produced it and had asked his organization to print and circulate it. Mursi had refused, or so he said, and so the Cameroonians had scruffily copied it themselves and circulated it by hand to all the Africans on the council of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization with the aim of exposing and discrediting British activity. The local embassy believed the story—apart from Mursi’s self-vindicating account of his own role in it.[40]

Sheridan and Welser were unconvinced. Why would Cameroonian exiles be behind it? They spoke French and targeted French colonialism rather than the British. Besides, the forgery was far too sophisticated, and MI6

forensic analysis had loosely pointed to the Russians.[41] The Soviets did have a senior KGB officer based in Cairo in close contact with African liberation movements, although by his own admission Soviet intelligence was ‘behind the times’ when it came to Africa.[42]

Events soon threatened to overtake Welser and Sheridan. Across the border in Libya, a local governor was trying to shut down the very same newspaper which had earlier published extracts from the forgery. He had long held a grudge against its owner—a man, incidentally, who had connections with the Russian embassy—and had wanted to close the newspaper for some time, largely on the charge of its being too critical of the Libyan government. Now, having been discreetly briefed by the British, the forgery story offered the perfect pretext to bolster his case.

Plans to refer to the forgery in an upcoming court case horrified Hopson, who remained desperate to limit coverage and control the narrative. He instructed the embassy in Tripoli to restrain the governor and ensure that British security did not become intertwined with, and exploited by, local personality politics. The forgery simply had to be kept out of the court case. After all, they still did not know who was behind it and, more seriously, ‘it might, in the cut and thrust of a court, be difficult to produce proof that the document publicised by *Al Libi* was a forgery’. Worse still, it might give rise to ‘the legend that the British and Americans had forced the authorities to suspend *Al Libi* because it had printed excerpts from a document damaging to their interests’. This was not the case, but local audiences would lap up the conspiracy.[43]

Hopson’s last-ditch intervention seemed to have worked, but he could not stem the spread of this story for ever. He also managed to ensure that Labour members of parliament did not raise it in the House of Commons when news of the forgery reached the UK the following September.[44] However, his hand was finally forced at a meeting of the International Labour Organization in Nigeria in December.

Forgeries do not sit still and, by this time, it had mutated into a pamphlet with a foreword written by Gogo Chu Nzeribe, the Nigerian leader of an extreme-left splinter trade union and a long time anti-colonial campaigner. MI5 was watching closely, and one of its intelligence officers warned Welser that Nzeribe intended to circulate it amongst the delegates. The intelligence was accurate: Nzeribe stuffed a copy into the pigeonhole of

every single one of them—except for the UK delegation.[45] He framed it as a great conspiracy against the entire continent: a ‘new and deadly danger over Africa’.[46]

Hopson now leapt into action, briefing any journalist who would listen to emphasize the British line. Going further, he and Welser then sought to inspire articles in the local press stating that the whole thing was a forgery emanating from Communist countries—although in truth they could not say which—with the sole purpose of making mischief and bringing the Cold War to Africa.[47] It worked. Nigerian newspapers condemned the circulation of the document.[48] Tom Mboya, a Kenyan politician with links to the US, spoke out against a ‘dirty game’.[49]

Watching from London, Sheridan finally relaxed. He knew the story had to break eventually, and smiled that ‘it could not have broken in a better way’.[50] Welser agreed with his friend. An unlikely spymaster, he had an impressive intelligence network of his own, consisting of sources in press agencies covertly controlled by the IRD, including those run by Sheridan’s wife, Adelaide Maturin. The trio breathed a sigh of relief. When he received word that a French edition was coming out, Welser merely shrugged. It was best not to overreact.[51] His instincts were right: it gained little traction.

Hopson was less laid back and sought retribution. Could Nigeria bring criminal charges against Nzeribe? he asked Sheridan hopefully. Or could any of the people criticized in the forged document take civil action against him?[52] Sheridan bristled, preferring a more intricate scheme. He was likely relieved to be told that criminal charges were out of the question. There was no way the UK, a former colonial power, could intervene in internal Nigerian legal issues. As for civil action, it would have been too difficult to prove malicious intent.

‘A pity’, Hopson sighed.[53]

There may have been a more intricate scheme afoot. Plans were under way to strike back by using forged notepaper of the fictitious United Africa Association. The perpetrators would certainly have been surprised, and put on the back foot, had the fake group they created suddenly sprung to life with a new message.[54] Either way, the saga was not over yet.

Demonstrating the unrelenting nature of Cold War information operations, the Communist press now whirred into action and began to

cover the story, still hoping to discredit the British in the region and pave the way for Communist influence. In December, a Czechoslovak newspaper publicized the 'secret document which has fallen into the hands of an African trade union organisation'.[55] Days later an East German news agency got on board, providing quotes for further coverage in Morocco.[56] In January 1961, the Soviet trade union newspaper devoted an entire page to what it described as 'a secret British document on Britain and United States policy in Africa'. Tass, the official Soviet news agency, then followed suit:[57] 'The imperialist conspiracy against the freedom of Africa is an indisputable fact.'[58]

In February, *Pravda*, the Russian state newspaper, quoted extensively from the forged document and claimed it was authentic. Again, Tass echoed the comments: 'The imperialists hope, with the aid of trade union leaders who co-operate with Right Wing socialists, to be able to preserve their control over the main sections of the economy of the African States now emerging.'[59] To Welser and Sheridan, it felt orchestrated. They were correct, as one Soviet official involved later explained: disinformation 'placed successfully in the press abroad is usually picked up and printed in the Soviet press, so as to misinform the Soviet reader as well, and is broadcast by Soviet radio to practically all countries of the world'.[60]

With the affair now public, the British government went through the theatre of complaining to the Soviets for quoting from an obvious forgery.[61] Each time it popped up in a new country, from Lebanon to Aden, Hopson and Welser implemented their well-rehearsed routine to stem local coverage by discreetly briefing local authorities and manipulating the press.[62] Welser was relieved, and pleasantly surprised, by the lack of coverage.

He was gaining an impressive reputation for dealing with fakes and forgeries. And he was not short of self-confidence, having recently offered the CIA to take the lead on matters of black propaganda.[63] When the Americans were targeted with another fake—this time stirring racial tension in spring 1961—they came knocking on Hans Welser's door.

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3

Drawing a Bow

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the Soviets dramatically ramped up their disinformation efforts. In 1959, unbeknownst to either Welser or Sheridan, who lacked an inside source, the KGB had established its own dedicated unit, Department D, helmed by Ivan Agayants—a legendary pioneer of fakes and forgeries, as enigmatic as he was ruthless. An Armenian polyglot fluent in English, French, and Persian, he had cut his teeth in Tehran and Paris before ascending to lead the KGB's Western European Department. He was a man of contradictions: impeccably tailored, softly spoken, and carrying the air of a Tolstoyan nobleman, yet he was cold, calculating, and a great deceiver.

His rise was no accident. Agayants excelled in the dark arts of forgery, orchestrating an array of counterfeit works designed to fracture alliances and tarnish reputations. Among his triumphs were a series of bogus memoirs and an entirely imaginary stream of correspondence between Stalin and Tito.[1] And he was good. So good that his team's work duped even the most distinguished of scholars, such as the historian E. H. Carr who, in 1955, had penned a foreword to *Notes for a Journal*, fraudulently attributed to the former Foreign Commissar, Maxim Litvinov.[2]

Although initially slightly erratic and under-resourced, the Soviet effort soon grew in speed and skill. The US Senate, increasingly alarmed, held a hearing on Soviet bloc forgeries in 1961 at which the assistant director of the CIA, Richard Helms, warned that 'the Russians have a long tradition in the art of forgery', which the KGB was now turning against American targets.[3]

On 23 March 1961, Welser received a message from Washington: the CIA wanted help finding the originators of yet another forged pamphlet. This one linked the Ku Klux Klan with the US government and claimed that Washington was about to send the Klan to Congo, no doubt bent on some racist rampage. Describing a heinous mixture of real and fictitious atrocities, the pamphlet combined graphic photographs of lynchings with one of a black child whose arms had been gnawed by rats. It aimed to discredit and undermine the US in the eyes of black Africans as part of a battle of ideas and influence in the global Cold War. The CIA also asked MI5 to monitor the reaction across Africa where the pamphlet was spreading fast.[4]

Welser was quickly on the case. The photographs were genuine but dated back to the 1920s rather than the 1950s as claimed. Captions were false. One photograph depicted Nazi atrocities rather than those of the KKK. MI6 technical analysis suggested German-made paper and envelopes, whilst, amazingly, handwriting analysis suggested a Russian who had spent a lot of time in Germany.[5] Welser recognized some of the pictures, vividly remembering what he called ‘the Ku Klux Klan horror pictures produced by the Nazis’.[6] What concerned him more, however, was intelligence from MI5 that, for the first time, the forgers were framing British firms and the British Council in Africa as the supposed senders of the material.[7] Intelligence analysts pointed to the same Nigerian, Nzeribe, the extreme leftist trade unionist who had spread earlier anti-British forgeries.[8] The Americans were grateful, although in truth learnt little that they did not already know.

Meanwhile, the KGB station in New York was churning out racist hate mail destined for African leaders at the United Nations, purportedly from American white supremacists. They used new typewriters and wore gloves to hide their real identity.[9]

On the back foot, Welser knew that the British had to adapt and respond. Officials well above his pay grade increasingly recognized that the Cold War had shifted southwards and, in the words of one senior diplomat, it ‘was vital to target people with neutralist tendencies rather than preach to the converted, as the IRD was perhaps guilty of doing’.[10] More covert work was necessary; and this had to target the Global South.

The IRD now upped its game. Those in charge talked of entering a new phase: its creation in 1948 until the death of Stalin in 1953 was only the beginning; 1953 until 1960 then became a period of consolidations and adaptation to a wider task, including targets beyond international Communism, such as Egypt and other nationalist states. A new stage—bigger, bolder, and more global—began in 1961. Welser's Special Editorial Unit, consisting of just nine people only five years earlier, swelled to over twenty after senior mandarins prioritized what they euphemistically termed 'the importance of novel and unconventional forms of counter subversive activity'. Rather uncharacteristically for Whitehall, 'No opportunities were to be lost whether for lack of money, manpower, or other resources.' This was nothing short, as Ralph Murray, a founding father of the IRD put it, of being 'the Great Leap Forward'.[11]

Across Europe, the KGB's disinformation unit increased to over a hundred officers. The Soviets believed that the UK—and the wider West—was openly working to hinder humanity's progress towards Communism by weakening the global socialist system. They pointed to Winston Churchill's famous speech in Fulton, Missouri, back in 1946, when the former Prime Minister had declared 'an iron curtain has descended' and proceeded to set the blueprint for what would become the Cold War. The Soviets claimed that the UK was using ideological subversion, disruption, propaganda, and other covert operations to achieve this dismantling of international socialism.[12]

And so, in January 1961, the KGB disinformation unit struck again. Maverick Labour MP Bob Edwards co-authored a pamphlet about Allen Dulles, the outgoing director of the CIA, with a British journalist called Kenneth Dunne. Edwards really was a British MP, albeit one who was also an enthusiastic agent of the KGB who had met both Stalin and Trotsky. Kenneth Dunne was not really a British journalist. In fact, he was not real at all. The other author was one Colonel Vassily Sitnikov, senior disinformation specialist in the KGB. Their booklet, essentially a character assassination of Dulles accusing him of having been sympathetic to Nazism during the war, was published in London, at a radical bookshop near King's Cross station.[13]

Shortly afterwards, the KGB duped the *Daily Express* with a forgery. Operation Thunder involved forging a US State Department memo

supposedly inducing Soviet citizens to commit treason and sent a copy to the newspaper. Sure enough, the *Daily Express* published it as a front-page story about the disappearance of two top-secret documents from the American embassy in London.[14] Welser did not seem to spot this one, but it would have been a bit embarrassing for the newspaper, given that its defence correspondent was none other than the legendary Chapman Pincher who specialized in intelligence scoops.

Later in the year, the Sunday newspapers reported a leaked letter by a British minister expressing racist neo-imperialist policy in Central Africa; the UK was supposedly plotting in favour of white settlers in Rhodesia. Welser, Sheridan, and Hopson were again caught on the back foot. MI5 had known nothing about it, and neither did the government until it was all over the *Observer* and *Sunday Times*.

The routine was becoming familiar. Could it have really been written by a British member of parliament? How did it compare with genuine British policy? What impact was it having on the ground in Africa? And, most importantly, who was behind it?

Some answers were easier than others. The letter was seemingly written on House of Commons notepaper and signed ‘Sandy’. The implication was obvious: it was supposed to have been written by the Commonwealth secretary, Duncan Sandys. Hopson and Sheridan soon uncovered evidence that the letter had been rudimentarily copied in Cairo before being circulated by African delegates in Belgrade attending a conference of non-aligned states. The United National Independence Party, a left-wing anti-colonial political party in the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia, what is now Zambia, seemed to be behind it, presumably aiming to discredit British rule and advance the cause of independence.[15]

Sheridan and Welser then faced the familiar disinformation dilemma: to expose or not to expose.[16] This time the stakes were higher, dragging in the highest levels of government. It was supposedly written by a cabinet minister, included damning evidence from the Prime Minister himself, and implicated Lord Salisbury, a hard-line imperialist, staunch defender of white domination in Southern Africa, and former secretary of state for Commonwealth relations. Just days after first reading about the forgery, Welser sent a copy up to the very top of government: Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.[17]

History repeated itself as MI5 warned the revelations were spreading fast; copies had now reached Uganda.[18] The next day, Welser took a short but anxious walk from his office hidden away in the attic of the rambling Carlton House Terrace. It was a strange set-up, with the department operating from non-adjoining buildings separated by a casino, and access between them limited to crawlspace in the roof from where propagandists could hear the thrills and spills from the gamblers below.

The creaking lift down, with a loose grille and buttons designating bedrooms rather than floors, was operated by staff loaned from the magnificent Petworth House by its aristocratic owner, John Wyndham, a well-connected and bibulous fixer for Harold Macmillan, with whom he had become close friends, having served as his private secretary on and off since the war.[19] Wyndham's wife, Pamela, had worked as a codebreaker at Bletchley during the war, living very close to Welser at Woburn Abbey. She was a remarkable woman: a charming socialite, an intrepid adventurer, and a fiercely bright intellect. At least one IRD man thought her 'renowned for her beauty'. Perhaps she, the chatelaine of Petworth, rather than her husband, provided any behind-the-scenes support.[20]

Either way, Welser descended, passed the doormen also on loan from Petworth, and made his way outside to Horse Guards Parade. Dressed in a tailored suit, a bowler hat, and carrying an umbrella, he looked every inch the English gentleman as he strutted, chest out, gravel crunching under his feet, across the parade ground. Two minutes later, he arrived at Admiralty House, the makeshift home of the Prime Minister while Downing Street, even more crumbling than Carlton House Terrace, underwent major refurbishment. As he sat down, in the—albeit temporary—heart of British power, Welser the refugee journalist, once interned but desperate to be British establishment, would be forgiven for thinking he had made it.

Despite his carefully cultivated displays of *savoir-faire*, Harold Macmillan was an unhappy spymaster and found the realm of intrigue too intricate for his tastes. He was a famously keen bibliophile but, by his own admission, his copies of Dickens and Thackery offered few clues to the mysteries of espionage, and he had a comparatively poor knowledge of detective fiction.[21] On this occasion though, he might have enjoyed improvising the role of detective given that he had personal insight into the

cast of characters. He was convinced the document was a forgery, albeit a clever one.

Rather than dwelling on misrepresentations of policy or stylistic errors, he offered personal alibis. Contrary to the forgery, Macmillan recounted how he had only been to Pratt's, the exclusive club near the Ritz, once in the last year and that was with his son. As for Lord Salisbury, the notion was laughable; the man never set foot in London's clubs at all.

He finished with a flourish: neither he nor Salisbury could possibly have conspired over cigars and brandy in the private rooms of clubland, as the forgery so luridly alleged. The story, he implied with a dismissive wave, belonged in the realm of cheap fiction.[22]

With Macmillan's personal backing, Welser set to work on the provenance.[23] Meanwhile, his colleagues in the regular Foreign Office debated how best to rebut the letter if necessary. They focused on points of policy—rather than stylistic curiosities—to offer a detailed and comprehensive, almost paragraph by paragraph, rebuttal.[24] It may have been thorough, but such a mundane appeal to facts and truth would lack the impact necessary to discredit the letter.[25] Facts are boring; people, Welser knew, would believe what they wanted to believe, clinging to lies that felt familiar, or else confirmed their beliefs.

Harold Macmillan's patience was wearing thin, and Welser, emboldened by the Prime Minister's support, prodded MI5 for answers with the authority of a man acting under orders from the top. He then took matters into his own hands, tapping into his secret network of journalist contacts and press agencies covertly controlled by Adelaide Maturin. He traced the forgery to its source: a printing house tucked near the banks of the Nile in the heart of Cairo. The same establishment, he discovered, served a range of nationalist groups. He even managed to hand MI5 a name: a Mr Kamalondo, a mysterious figure who seemed to pop up time and again.[26] It was all rather confusing though. As the local KGB *rezident* put it: 'Cairo is a big, murky pond … everyone's trying to fish here.'[27]

'We really must get to the bottom of this matter', Welser and Philip de Zulueta, Macmillan's private secretary, agreed, as newspapers in Ghana went into overdrive, publishing the letter in full.[28]

With the diplomats stumped and lawyers offering no solutions, Welser and Sheridan stepped into the void with a secret counterattack. The pair had already overseen a couple of British forgeries, including a booklet attacking Iran supposedly written by a Soviet front. Welser insisted it had been ‘instrumental’ in getting that particular front expelled from Austria back in 1956.[29] Front organizations—especially their communications systems and those based outside the Iron Curtain—were prime targets for such covert operations. A convincing forgery could exploit these vulnerabilities and even force fronts to move their headquarters inside the Soviet Union, thereby exposing Moscow’s protective hand.[30] He knew that forgeries, as a weapon of subversion, could expose facts which the Soviets wanted to conceal; used carefully, they could disrupt the enemy.[31]

Welser’s team laid out their golden rules for a successful forgery: be precise in target but flexible in objective; intelligence must be ‘100% correct and up-to-date’; paper and print must be replicas of the genuine article; posting must be done from likely places. British posts abroad were put under standing instruction to collect letterheads and signatures to be used for plausible forgeries—although they did not officially know why.[32] Forgeries had to be as convincing as possible and issued sparingly. It was vital not to overstock the market—a trap into which diplomats felt the Soviets too easily fell.[33] The forgeries themselves would then be made by MI6, working closely with Welser’s team.

And so, armed with contacts at home and abroad, and covert control of newspapers and press agencies around the world, Welser took the fight to the Communists. ‘We should not hesitate to draw a bow at a venture.’[34] The counterattack began.

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4

A New Front Line

First, they needed weapons. Welser's collection of gadgets and gizmos was not as dramatic as those of his colleagues in MI6 or the CIA, and the antithesis of those depicted in the James Bond novels that were flying off the shelves at the same time. No, Welser's weapons were typewriters. And he needed more.

Would it be the Olivetti in Arabic? Or the Royal with English keyboard and French accents? Or perhaps the Olympia with Spanish additions, manufactured overseas to bolster deniability? Some had been cleverly modified to include accents, umlauts, and reversed question marks. He had used Imperials in the past, but they were manufactured solely in the UK, making the security risk too great. Each machine was carefully desensitized after use to avoid it being traced back to Welser's team, with new typefaces added or individual keys modified to alter their specific characteristics. On one occasion, after treatment, an Arabic typewriter started spitting out small dots on some of the keys. These were 'dangerous distinguishing marks from a security point of view', fretted Jean Scott, Welser's keeper of the typewriters. It needed urgently retreating.[1] For one-time operations, they borrowed a machine from elsewhere in Whitehall, so that they were not left short when it was then out of action for about a month being desensitized.

Pica font? Or the slightly smaller Elite? Perhaps the continental Elite typestyle 8? And would it require a black ribbon, or perhaps black and red? The team carefully studied specimens collected from Communist and front organizations around the world to work out the best match for their forgeries. The Chinese Peoples' Committee for World Peace used a Remington Noiseless for letters and an Olivetti elite for envelopes; the International Institute for Peace used an Everest with Elite font. Some were

old and hard to track down, leaving poor Jean Scott begging and borrowing from MI6.[2] Like all forgers before them, from the great Shakespeare folio forgeries of the nineteenth century to those of the art world, manufacturing provenance was everything.

Here was the real world of intelligence: methodical, meticulous, matching paper and fonts. In a world of fakes and forgeries, typewriters became the intelligence agents. Unlike human spies, operations could be blown in two ways: by identifying the manufacturer and model of the machine or, better still, identifying the specific machine that wrote the documents. The former looked towards size of letters, the curvature of letters such as t and y, or the size of figures (such as the shapes of the ovals in 8). The latter involved signs of wear and tear, or even abuse. Perhaps one character made a stronger impression relative to others. Perhaps, like Scott's spitting dots, another character had a tell-tale defect. And then there was more detailed inspection involving chemical and microscopic analysis of paper and ink.[3] Welser knew all of this and, promising deniability, had to take it into account. At the height of the Cold War, stakes were high. Forgeries could be provocative; this was tricky, risky business.

Welser reeled off a long list of targets: the World Council of Peace; the International Union of Students; the World Federation of Democratic Youth; and plenty more besides. He knew that these apparently innocuous—even laudable-sounding—organizations had something in common. They all formed part of a global network of fronts secretly funded and coordinated by the Soviet Union. Despite their feigning neutrality and supposedly operating in pursuit of peace and democracy, to Welser, these organizations were tools of Soviet policy. He would raise an eyebrow when supposedly independent peace organizations protested the spread of nuclear weapons, whilst remaining mysteriously quiet about those tested by the Soviets.[4]

Ever since 1919, the Soviets had pursued a secret aim of influencing Western civil society and, by the early Cold War, they had effectively succeeded in supporting a range of these international mass organizations.[5] They were 'Potemkin villages' designed, according to one former Communist spy chief, to provide a 'deliciously indirect way of confounding the Kremlin's enemies'.[6] Now Welser wanted to expose the hidden Soviet hand behind the alphabet soup of peace, student, and trade union organizations—and, in the process, disrupt it. How, he wondered, could the

UK carefully launder secret material to expose hostile activity whilst ensuring credibility of the message and not blowing the sources?

The International Committee for the Investigation of Communist Front Organizations was a dry research institute. With eight offices supposedly in Vienna, Munich, Stockholm, Brussels, Rome, Paris, Cairo, and Dakar, it fired off bulletins to peace organizations, student groups, and the media worldwide. Its rigorous research exposed Soviet manipulation worldwide, discrediting a whole range of international groups as tools of Moscow. In reality, it never existed at all. It was all a ruse to launder secret intelligence and attack the Soviets publicly. The ‘Committee’ could say things MI6, and the UK government, never could.

Welser had invented the Committee back in 1959 to expose Soviet sponsorship of the World Youth Festival in Vienna.[7] These festivals purported to encourage free exchange of cultural and political views, yet in reality were discreetly supported by the Soviets.[8] Welser had earlier issued six bulletins in the name of a fictitious research institute between March and September that year. He clearly thought it had been successful because the following month, October 1959, the International Committee was born. It was a blunt approach though, assuming Soviet control and neglecting the fact that any such organizations, even when infiltrated and externally funded, still had their own internal divisions and agency.[9] Still, this was the Cold War, and Welser was determined to expose Soviet malevolence—and had found his own ‘deliciously indirect’ way to do so.

Its first target was the World Federation of Scientific Workers, the only Communist front to be both founded in and run from the UK. Under surveillance by MI5 since its inception, the group became a vehicle for the Soviets to deniably coopt the international scientific community as an acceptable voice to espouse its policies.[10] Welser’s bulletin design was not especially subtle; the front page listed the World Federation of Scientific Workers alongside all other front organizations in large block capitals organized by their host city: Vienna, Prague, East Berlin, Budapest, London, and Brussels.

The scientists were an easy, and in some ways an odd, target. By the end of the 1950s, this particular front had fizzled out. It had struggled to achieve much influence, especially after many Westerners had grown disillusioned

with Soviet-style Communism. MI5 had lost interest, whilst its lack of activity and internal divisions left MI6 confused about whether it was still operating at all.[11] Perhaps for this reason, it was actually the perfect low-stakes test case for Welser.

The team fired off another eight bulletins in 1960, each numbered consecutively, attacking the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the International Union of Students, the World Council of Peace, as well as various journalists' and lawyers' organizations. MI6 posted between 500 and 1,000 copies of each to peace organizations, student groups, universities, and the media worldwide. The method was the same each time: sanitize intelligence and launder it through a fake channel to expose and discredit these organizations as tools of Moscow. Welser hoped that these attacks would expose and disrupt front activity, cause confusion, and drive a wedge between the members. Three more followed in 1961, targeting youth and peace organizations.

TOP SECRET

Internationaler Ausschuss für die

UNTERSUCHUNG KOMMUNISTISCHER TARNORGANISATIONEN

International Committee for the

INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNIST FRONT ORGANISATIONS

VIENNA, MUNICH, STOCKHOLM, BRUSSELS, ROME, PARIS, CAIRO, DAKAR

VIENNA:
- INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PEACE
- WORLD PEACE COUNCIL
- INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RESISTANCE FIGHTERS
- INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF LIVING CONDITIONS AND HEALTH
- ESTATE
  - Reisebüro Josefstadt
  - Gazzetta
  - Metros

PRAGUE:
- WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS
- INTERNATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS
- INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION OF JOURNALISTS
- INTERNATIONAL RADIO AND TELEVISION ORGANISATION

EAST-BERLIN:
- WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

BUDAPEST:
- WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH

LONDON:
- WORLD FEDERATION OF SCIENTIFIC WORKERS

BRUSSELS:
- INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC LAWYERS

September 1963

BULLETIN No. 25

The International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ), one of the Russian international camouflage organisations, whose seat is at Prague 3, Opletalova 5 (Czechoslovakia), is now organising a "world meeting of journalists". This is to be held aboard a Russian ship in the Mediterranean from September 20 to October 3.

THE CHIEF ORGANISERS

The origins, political background, leading personalities, activities and financial secrets of the IOJ were revealed in detail in our BULLETIN No.8 in September 1960 when the IOJ was organising - against the will of the Austrian journalists - a similar Communist political manifestation in Baden, near Vienna, the capital of neutral Austria. The Indian delegates walked out of this meeting because they could not agree with the others, all of them Communists.

To cover up the fact that the Baden meeting was organised by the hopelessly compromised and exposed Communist IOJ, its leaders created a so-called "International Committee for the Cooperation of Journalists", with a Paris address (75,rue St. Lazare, Paris IXe), which then sent out the invitations, as if the IOJ had nothing to do with the meeting.

The same trick has now been repeated in connection with the Mediterranean cruise and the "world meeting of journalists", the only difference being that this time the ostensible seat of the so-called "International Committee for the Cooperation of Journalists" is given as Via del Bufalo, 126, Rome, Italy.

TOP SECRET

Figure 2. International Committee for the Investigation of Communist Front Organisations, 'Bulletin No.25', Sept. 1963, FO 1110/2344, The National Archives, UK.

All the while, Welser worked closely with his old friend Sherry. Sheridan was the senior partner, chairing what was known as the Sheridan Committee, to which Welser had to submit requests for various bulletins and, in Welser's words, 'other means of unattributable propaganda'. Sheridan was a keen ally, happily approving Welser's schemes.[12]

But Hans Welser wanted more: a multi-pronged approach, intricate, layered, and resilient, designed to corroborate and amplify the Committee, as well as to reach as wide an audience as possible. He therefore developed another channel through which to expose fronts: Dr László Taubinger, a Hungarian-born journalist run out of the British embassy in Welser's hometown, Vienna.

Taubinger had fled Budapest in the repressive wake of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and had found refuge in the Cold War crossroads of Vienna where he worked as a freelance correspondent for a number of Swiss newspapers, southwest German radio, and a handful of German and Scandinavian publications. His recruitment had allowed Welser, in his words, to 'launch very delicate stories under his own name with the British hand being completely concealed. What made Taubinger's work particularly valuable was that his stories invariably appeared first in Switzerland and thereby gained on respectability.'[13] Welser had always liked working through Switzerland; a neutral state in the centre of Europe, it was a peculiar propaganda battleground in an unseen war, a convenient hub for laundering information across the world used not only by Welser but also the Soviets—and especially the Chinese.[14]

The local information officer in Vienna—and Welser's go-between—was a music-loving diplomat called Perry Rhodes. In between swapping bottles of whisky for the chance to book opera tickets, his job was essentially to pass material gathered from Eastern Europe to trusted British, Austrian, and Swiss journalists. With so many people desperate for a scoop, he had no shortage of takers,[15] but László Taubinger, tall, upright, and perennially sporting a three-piece suit, soon stood out. Rhodes told Welser that Taubinger was 'only too keen to use any material on the subject of front organisations'. Welser was delighted. 'If there is any particular line you

would like to publicize', Rhodes continued, 'do not hesitate to let me know.'[16]

Taubinger 'seems indeed an energetic person, as we both knew', replied Welser excitedly. 'His efforts will no doubt be valuable in the future.'[17]

Welser wasted no time and quickly sent over a bunch of what he called 'titbits which have only just come in'. All were gleaned from secret intelligence gathered by MI6 and GCHQ, and designed to stir tensions inside front organizations. Welser was a professional antagonist. Tell Taubinger, he instructed, that 'there was some friction and mutual suspicion between Africans and the Arabs, mostly on racial grounds' at one recent international front meeting. Taubinger could do something with this—if 'handled with considerable care'. At another recent conference, he continued, almost gossiping, the Iraqis were upset at the poor quality of their accommodation, especially when Russian and Chinese delegates were staying in luxury hotels.[18] Welser used secret sources to uncover fissures, sanitized them, and made them public. It was classic practice, and mirrored Soviet activity which sought, in the words of one Communist practitioner, to provoke political conflict and discredit particular organizations, although Welser stopped short of other things done by his Soviet counterparts such as 'carrying out political and economic blackmail'.[19]

Nursing a visceral hatred of Communism, Taubinger was only too keen to help, but was also a little scatter-brained and neurotic. He forgot to update the British about every article he published based on Welser's titbits—and there were so many of them it was tricky to keep up. By spring 1960, he was publishing material in newspapers across Switzerland.[20] Welser thought Taubinger was 'certainly doing very well'; his whole team was 'extremely pleased' with the operation.[21] There was even talk of sending him to a front organization meeting in Casablanca as a supposedly independent journalist.[22]

Donald Hopson was so impressed, and keen to prove his department's worth, that he offered up the Taubinger channel to senior diplomats in the Foreign Office. Perhaps they would like to 'plant something else (not of an anti-Communist nature) by this channel'. The irrepressible Welser was also keen to sell his wares, but, as was so often the case, diplomats not used to secret statecraft always wanted more.

‘I suppose T[aubinger] has no access to the *Neue Zurcher Zeitung*?’, asked John Killick of the Western Department hopefully. ‘It is the only paper Adenauer ever reads himself and there might be useful possibilities here in the general political field.’[23]

Killick was busy working on contingency plans for an ongoing dispute over the future of Berlin. Influencing the West German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, without his realizing it would have been rather helpful. Welser assured Killick that the Vienna embassy had a contact within this newspaper to whom they had previously leaked stolen documents about Communist front organizations. ‘It should, therefore, be possible to try and put material into the NZZ if and when Mr Killick wishes.’[24] This might have been a promise difficult to keep, but Welser was determined to promote his skills at any opportunity.

Welser eagerly counted up the number of articles written by Taubinger: over seventy in summer 1960 alone.[25] He showed little interest in the impact they may have had—or even how to measure this—but happily reported back that his man was doing ‘splendidly’.[26] It was all ‘really impressive’, he waxed to Sheridan.[27] He was ‘only sorry that we have not been able to feed him as much as we would have liked’.[28]

Welser and Taubinger grew close, perhaps bonding over shared backgrounds as refugee journalists as well as a loathing of Communism. The friendship only went so deep though; after all, Welser was a professional who had charmed and cultivated Taubinger into a valuable asset. Occasionally, the mask slipped and Welser lost his temper, for example when a short illness prevented Taubinger from covering a particular front organization conference.[29] Welser composed himself and switched back on the charm.

After recovering, Taubinger asked Welser for ever more material on front organizations and soon received more titbits, gleaned from secret sources.[30] A row had broken out between Cuban, Chinese, and Western delegates; Eastern European countries had bussed African and Asian students to a youth conference because their home countries were unable to provide delegates; and the Soviets had passed off a Nigerian student under the Ghanian flag to give the impression of greater representation at an international youth conference, whilst Czechoslovak Communists

masqueraded in Asian national dress to pad out Asian representation.[31] The professional antagonists struck again; Taubinger lapped it up.

Taubinger was both an idealist and a man given to worry. Of naturally gloomy disposition, he worried about his health, his finances, and the six dependants he supported, each weighing on him heavily. Welser never paid him a penny. ‘I have never quite understood’, he wondered, how Taubinger made a living but ‘expect that what he needed was provided by some Hungarian Refugee organisation’. Then the time came when Taubinger began to worry over his work. He thought it was drying up, and spoke of finding something more lucrative. Welser panicked and offered a £300 retainer—before remembering he worked for the penny-pinching Foreign Office: ‘I need hardly add that I would not go to the top limit of this sum unless I have to.’[32]

Taubinger turned it down, telling Welser that he was acting in the interests of Hungary. ‘As his interests and ours coincided it was his duty to act as he did’. To accept money for it, even by way of expenses, would, in his view, not be right. A man no matter how troubled could still hold a principle, and Taubinger did not want to be in British pay.

‘Strange as it may seem,’ Welser mused, ‘I am inclined to believe this.’[33]

Audiences around the world lapped up the flood of bulletins issued by Welser’s phantom research institute. The Communists, too, took notice, complaining to the Austrian police about the mysterious Committee, much to Welser’s delight.[34] Eager readers also included other Western intelligence services keen to exploit the lack of visible British fingerprints on what was turning out to be an impressive propaganda operation.

Perry Rhodes, the information officer in Vienna, brought Welser the latest gossip. ‘A Professor von Mende who described himself as the Head of the Ost Institut in Cologne, recently visited Vienna and claimed to be responsible for your Bulletin.’ Von Mende had boasted over a lunch with Taubinger about his brilliant German sources in Egypt and other parts of Africa, a claim to power and knowledge more fiction than fact. And Taubinger, who perhaps should have known better, had believed him.

Welser digested it with a smile, leaned back and let the amusement wash over him.[35] This was the second time it had happened, he laughed, explaining that the Ost Institut ‘was an organisation run by the West German government with some sort of IRD functions!’[36]

Welser naturally made sure he took credit for his handiwork. He immediately told his boss—and his boss's boss—that 'it is, perhaps indicative of the standing of the Bulletin series that people are tempted to claim authorship'. It brought a tangible benefit too. Others claiming credit, Welser continued, 'is likely to maintain the security of the bulletins'. Still, it would be best if Professor von Mende kept quiet. There was a 'small risk', he sneered, 'that the bulletins may become known as an official though covert German propaganda operations which may lower its value in some quarters'.[37]

He turned to his old friend Sheridan for advice. What could they do about an allied intelligence service exploiting the ambiguity of plausible deniability? Not much, unfortunately. They certainly could not bring the West Germans into the secret by privately acknowledging authorship. Welser did not even want to tell von Mende about the role of information officers in spreading British material more generally.[38] After all, he lamented, the German's lies about authorship of the bulletin did 'not inspire too much confidence.'[39]

Welser and Sheridan decided to add an extra layer of confusion by issuing another wave of bulletins but this time under non-consecutive numbers. This, they hoped, would mislead hostile be both founded in and run from the existed than was actually the case. It could also confuse friendly intelligence services trying to take credit. Confuse to conceal, Welser smiled, confuse to conceal.

At the end of 1960, Welser spotted an opportunity—small but tantalizing—to both discredit and confuse.

The setting was innocuous enough: a run-of-the-mill agricultural trade union conference slated for the summer of 1961 in Bari, on Italy's Adriatic coast. Welser, ever the craftsman of disruption, fully intended to expose what he saw as the Kremlin's hidden hand guiding proceedings. The plan called for a forgery.

A pamphlet, innocuous at first glance, would be sent to trade unionists, journalists, and newspapers across the Mediterranean. It would appear authentic—built around an actual article penned by a senior official in the leftist World Federation of Trade Unions. But it came with a sting at the start.

‘As you will see’, Welser explained to his superiors, ‘the pamphlet is based on a genuine and unadulterated article’. He spelled it out slowly. ‘The propaganda message’, exposing the Russian hand and stoking tension within the movement, ‘is in the introduction. It should be quite effective, and the message will not be missed, I think, by most readers.’

MI6 forged a compliment slip for good measure. It would become a classic *modus operandi*: a genuine article reproduced as a separate pamphlet, together with a forged foreword.

Sheridan eagerly approved.[40]

In the spring of 1961, envelopes began to land in mailboxes from Algeria to Yugoslavia. Some carried the pamphlet in English and others in Arabic.[41] The Americans were quietly briefed—Welser taking an opportunity to furnish his own reputation as well as to ensure eyes on the ground to monitor reactions.[42]

Word reached him soon enough. A British embassy official in Tel Aviv, upon stumbling across a copy, assumed it was genuine. Welser was delighted. ‘Our Mediterranean pamphlet has got around’, he mused to colleagues, ‘and was apparently good enough to be taken at its face value.’[43]

Then came the fallout. The Yugoslav Confederation of Trade Unions launched an indignant attack on the pamphlet, prompting another smile from Welser. ‘It is interesting that the Yugoslavs did not apparently question the authenticity of the publication and are obviously considerably annoyed with the WFTU.’ He noted that the conference had been postponed indefinitely, wondering aloud to his friends in intelligence, ‘No-one can tell what, if anything, we may have had to do with the postponements of the Conference.’[44]

By August, Welser was claiming victory. ‘Apparent success’, he called it, though the phrase was measured, careful.[45] Hopson trumpeted what he called the ‘fairly successful and promising covert propaganda operation’ to senior figures in the Foreign Office. They moved quickly to exploit the momentum, ‘by planting in Switzerland, and possibly in India and SE Asia, a story, under a Vienna dateline’, exposing WFTU overtures to the Yugoslavs and ‘trying to aggravate the situation’.[46] Two days later an

article, probably via Taubinger, went out headlined ‘Moscow Woos Yugo Trade Unionists’.

Not everyone was impressed. Leslie Glass, soon to take charge of all information work in the Foreign Office, was lukewarm. ‘The Russians are flooding the market for confections’, he warned, ‘and I think we should be very chary of them for a bit—though this one seems to be penetrating silently’.[47]

Days later, Italian newspapers denounced the pamphlet as a fabrication, concocted to bring agricultural organizations into disrepute. Welser was thrilled. ‘There is still no news as to when the conference is to take place, if at all.’ He had planned to ‘make some mischief’—and it seemed to be working.[48] Another denunciation followed, this time quoting all of the allegations in full. Welser rubbed his hands with glee. It was ‘continuing to cause anxiety’ and ‘still there is no news or sign of the Bari conference!’

Still, shadows loomed. The WFTU threatened legal action against the perpetrator and there were whispers of potential Soviet retaliation. Welser worried about skeletons in his closet, an earlier WFTU pamphlet he and MI6 had forged, for instance, which Moscow might now expose with documentary evidence. He shook it off, the Russians would not do that: ‘one must feel confident’, he tried to reassure himself as much as anyone else, ‘that our secrecy is complete’.[49] As far as Welser was concerned, his forgery had scuppered a conference and sown confusion amongst the Soviets and their fronts. Combined with his fake Committee and the Taubinger channel, things were going well. It was hardly going to win the Cold War, but Welser’s fightback was disrupting and exposing Soviet tactics nicely.

His intrigue and double dealing took its toll however, and soon found its way closer to home.

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5
Loyalty and Betrayal

Hans and Margaret Welser had been married for almost two decades, had two daughters, and were now living in a beautiful, red-brick mansion block near South Kensington. The secret world was a small one and he was not the only shadowy character in the neighbourhood. Coincidentally, MI6 operated a safe house in the very same building, where intelligence officers debriefed the Soviet spy Oleg Penkovsky as he spilled valuable military secrets to his handlers.[1] Yards away, and at almost the very same time, another tense atmosphere with a different kind of interrogation was taking place in the Welsers' flat.

Hans and Margaret's marriage had gradually slipped into disarray. And they were not the only ones: their close friends Leslie Sheridan and Adelaide Maturin were facing similar strains. Like many in the shadowy world of intelligence, their lives wrapped around a work that left little time for personal relationships, worn thin under the weight of duty and secrets. Yet their problems were no mere accident of fate; the same thread wore through both couples' unravelling: Hans Welser, himself.

He and Maturin had come to work closely together, their professional lives entangled in the overlapping warren of wooden corridors that made up MI6 and the thinly partitioned bedroom offices that made up the blackest part of the IRD. They collaborated on fakes, influence, and deceit. From 54 Broadway, MI6's dingy headquarters just the other side of St James's Park from Welser, she continued to act, in effect, as the managing director of a series of news agencies secretly controlled by British intelligence, with a cool command and a smile that knew more than it ever spoke. Welser then used these agencies as covert conduits for his propaganda.[2] This was their

gift, infiltrating newsrooms and managing the words of others. They worked side by side, hand in glove. The glove perhaps fit too well.

Welser left Margaret to be with Maturin.

Sheridan, meanwhile, had drifted into Margaret's orbit quickly and unapologetically. There had always been an easy camaraderie among the four—a circle of shared memories steeped in the dark days of the war. Now, the couples had effectively swapped partners; the office gossip was that they had holidayed together—as they had done many times before—but this time they had returned each with another's spouse and Hans with a fresh bruise over an eye. Whatever the truth, whatever had happened that summer, whatever resentments had surfaced, Welser and Sherry would barely exchange words ever again, the emotional wreckage of lives consumed by the clandestine world.

Other rumours and whispers travelled through the thin partitions of Carlton House Terrace. Some suggested that Welser had only married Margaret, then just 22 years old and a virtual—but wealthy—stranger, as a matter of convenience, to secure residency in England. Perhaps Margaret's suspicious aunt had been right all those years before that his motives had lain beyond love; perhaps Welser was as inauthentic as his forgeries and it was too easy for a man like him, all clever lies, to wrap young Margaret in his world. Either way, she had loved him dearly and would have been horrified by the mutterings.

It was a turbulent time for the family, marked with tragedy and change. Their daughter Ann died in 1961, aged just 20; the family was tearing apart, and Welser and Margaret had to grieve in separate lives. In happier news, their other daughter Vivienne was engaged to be married to a dashing young man from a decorated military family, some small relief among the turmoil.

Welser married Adelaide Maturin in Westminster that April. On the same page of the register index, just a few lines down, read Leslie Sheridan and Caroline Margaret Welser. They married in June. The Cold War was not the only arena of shifting loyalties, intrigue, and betrayal; they stood on the scorched earth of old friendships once built on trust and duty, now incurably poisoned. The working relationship was ruined.

Sheridan moved away from the Welsers' world of fakes and forgeries and threw himself into building his overseas empire of covert publishers. The Sheridan Committee seems to have disappeared. Instead, he went on overseas tours, crossing West Africa, Southeast Asia, and India, promoting

controlled avenues and searching new channels to sell commercial books around the world. He remained chairman and managing director of a publishing company called Ampersand, which he had established alongside Maturin after the war and which had signed a secret deal with the IRD back in 1953.[3] Despite his cover as a public relations consultant, Sheridan was secretly still Editorial Adviser to the Information Research Department, and Ampersand existed solely to enable the IRD to publish books of their choice with a commercial imprint on the open market.

It was a clever scheme. Sheridan would find an author, negotiate a fee, and then pass the draft book to his former colleagues for comment. When the text was agreed, Sheridan arranged the printing, delivered copies to the IRD, and paid both the author and the printer using IRD money.[4]

Balancing a double work life and a turbulent personal life, Sherry was feeling the strain; he did very little actual PR consulting and devoted most of his time to propaganda work. He had toured the world, spent weeks negotiating contracts, dealing with authors, and managing various rights. He thought long and hard about how to make Ampersand books sell as commercially as possible. Some of this was basic stuff: treble their length, on the grounds that nobody wanted to buy pamphlets; make their covers more attractive; and, like any other publisher, have a list of forthcoming titles he could give to booksellers.[5]

But he was up against it. He reckoned that the Soviet government had produced some 40 million books, in at least twenty-five languages, for export in 1960 alone. Another 100 million might have been printed, on behalf of the Kremlin, outside of the Soviet Union. This was an astronomical number. And the Soviets were selling them cheaply—or even giving them away for free. Where the UK famously exported *Animal Farm*, George Orwell's satire of Communism, the Communists were even churning out Charles Dickens—whose books on the lives of the working classes, Sheridan explained, proved popular; Mark Twain, which was apparently shocking; and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which was 'easily misinterpreted'.[6] Unable to operate on anything like the Soviet scale, Sheridan's strategy was not to flood the market, instead preferring precision. His books would target specific opinion formers who, he hoped, would then adapt and disseminate the ideas further.[7]

Still, Sheridan often felt the need to remind the Foreign Office that this time spent—on essentially uncompetitive commercial activity—should be paid by the IRD. A small committee, on which Sheridan sat, oversaw the publishing programme. Welser was nowhere near it.[8] This was perhaps surprising given Welser's growing remit and the deliberate use of a fake commercial imprint to make the UK hand deniable and given the complementarity of the subjects, both exposing the same Communist front organizations through different channels.[9] On a more personal level, it was not surprising at all.

With his own personal life in flux, Welser also kept busy at work. In June 1961, as Sheridan married his ex-wife, MI6 provided him with an opportunity to disrupt Soviet propaganda and a welcome distraction from his marital issues. Alongside his well-established programmes and channels, he was an opportunistic man always on the lookout for usable material.

MI6 had acquired intelligence that the Rome office of Novosti, the Soviet press agency, was in fact run by the first secretary of the local Soviet embassy. This proved beyond doubt that Novosti was an outright propaganda instrument of the Communist state rather than a news agency. Welser whirred into action, aiming to expose Russian operations. His playbook was simple.

First, he double-checked the source's veracity and the spelling of the Russian's name with his colleagues. He did not want to spread falsehoods.

Second, he cleared it with MI6 to make sure the source would not be blown.

Third, he asked MI6 to tell him as soon as the leaked story appeared in the Italian press so that he could then quote it in propaganda material elsewhere.

It all went smoothly, and by the end of the year Welser was able to then quote the newspaper as a source to expose and disrupt Novosti more widely.[10] It was neat, simple, and deniable laundering. Welser was satisfied.

He continued to target front organizations, treading a fine line between, as he put it, 'sowing dissension in the peace camp' and launching operations which 'might smell too much of "fun and games"'.[11]

Feeling increasingly confident, he turned his attentions to the International Union of Students. The Bolsheviks had thought of young

people as a politico-ideological weapon long before the Cold War, and now used this umbrella body, with headquarters in Prague, to influence students across the non-aligned Global South. Even the United Nations recognized it, adding regrettable legitimacy, in Welser's mind, to Soviet meddling. Worse, it felt like a monopoly because the Soviets also worked through the World Federation of Democratic Youth.[12] To expose the Soviet hand and disrupt the organization's work more generally, Welser recommended a forgery.

The task fell to one of his small team of so-called 'black' writers: László Zilahi, another old hand of British wartime propaganda, having worked on writing and clandestine radio for the Political Warfare Executive, perhaps after a brief stint with MI6. He had then ended up in the Vienna embassy conducting more covert propaganda after the war. His and Welser's paths would probably have crossed multiple times before Zilahi joined the IRD team. They had plenty in common. Although Hungarian by birth, Zilahi was working in Vienna when Hitler's army marched in; like Welser, he fled to the UK and took British nationality. He was Catholic, like Welser (nominally), although far more devout, and had a fractured family life, spending ever more time away from his wife and daughter. A lawyer by training, Zilahi had a flair for languages and an interest in psychology—a potent combination for Welser.[13] At some point between 1952 and 1960, he joined Welser's team. Now overweight and in his early seventies—and feeling it—he found himself drafting a booklet ostensibly commemorating fifteen years of the International Union of Students.

The aim, as ever, was to expose it as a Soviet tool.

In the Foreign Office, cautious men preferred clean hands. Forgeries, after all, smacked of something unBritish—messy, unsubtle, and dangerously liable to rebound. Fearful of reprisal and demonstrating the nuances of plausible deniability, one colleague added a cheeky suggestion: 'if possible an attempt should be made throughout the text to insert pointers which might lead a critical analyst to suspect that it was a Chinese rather than a Western forgery'.

It was a game within a game, as Welser and Zilahi well knew. Each forgery served two masters. For the masses, it must pass as authentic. For the elites—more suspicious and alert—it had to sow suspicion, a subtle trail pointing to anyone but London. 'There seems some advantage', they

agreed, ‘in taking trouble to conceal our tracks’, and, more than that, in stirring tensions between the Russians and the Chinese in the process. Zilahi obliged. When the Soviets suspected foul play, they would look to the Chinese rather than the British as the culprits.[14]

Welser was unimpressed. ‘It may have gone off the rails’, he complained, dissecting drafts like a grumpy professor. Too few people would believe it was a genuine document and would dismiss it outright. Stepping in, he offered to edit the text himself.[15] The problem still hinged on speaking to two audiences: crafting something convincing enough to fool casual readers while baiting the experts into pointing fingers at a rival state. A fine balance, but one he believed he could strike.[16]

A month later, on 21 March, Welser was ready. He sent it off to MI6 along with a genuine International Union of Students booklet, its typography and tone painstakingly analysed to ensure the forgery mirrored it perfectly.[17] In June, the operation launched. From undisclosed European locations, the CIA and MI6 posted some 12,000 copies in multiple languages to newspapers and youth organizations around the world as well as participants attending an international youth festival in Helsinki.[18]

It did not take long for the fallout to begin. Canadian and Yugoslav student organizations took the bait, treating the booklet as genuine. Communists in Uruguay were quicker to cry foul, blaming the US for the obvious forgery. The Austrians declared the fabricated booklet genuine whilst dismissing a subsequent—and genuine—International Union of Students denial as a forgery itself.

For Welser, it was a triumph; he could scarcely contain his glee at the irony. He thought adding a bogus denial, drafted by Zilahi but posted by the CIA, into the mix would further add to the confusion.[19]

A year on and the students would still not let the matter rest. ‘The IUS still keeps bleating on about it’, Welser observed with faint amusement, ‘which one tends to think is an indication as to the booklet’s impact.’ He scoffed at their amateurishness. ‘It is difficult to see why the IUS should make such a fuss when surely the best thing they could do would be to hope that this will now be forgotten.’[20]

The Americans were impressed, telling Welser’s boss that yet another denunciation was ‘still another proof of the skill and competence of Hans

and his colleagues. May I also specifically mention Laci Zilahi. I believe he deserves a large measure of credit for this pamphlet, which perhaps has enjoyed a success exceeding even his fondest hopes!'[21] There were backslaps and quiet toasts all round.

Impressive results from other operations started to trickle in, and Donald Hopson claimed another win. He trumpeted how a 'small spoiling operation' had embarrassed the International Institute for Peace and the World Peace Council. In the particularly baroque world of international peace movements, the International Institute for Peace was a front for the World Peace Council, effectively allowing it to operate after being expelled successively from France, Prague, and Vienna for subversion. And the World Peace Council itself was a front for Soviet intelligence to campaign against American militarism and Western imperialism. Welser's ruse was a low-key, pot-stirring, almost schoolyard operation designed to exploit arcane and confusing divisions within international Communism.

The ploy started with a forgery—a letter ostensibly from the International Institute for Peace. Welser's team, with their usual precision, crafted it to remind delegates of an awkward truth: the Stalin Peace Prize, once an annual celebration of Soviet supporters, had been quietly renamed the Lenin Peace Prize. The rebranding was part of Moscow's de-Stalinization campaign, an attempt to erase the shadow of the old tyrant and his cult of personality. The letter, dispatched to delegates heading to a Stockholm peace conference, was designed to sow just enough doubt to distract, and, more importantly, to set the stage for the next move.

Secret sources listening in on the meeting reported back that it had hit the mark and, sure enough, the Institute publicly described it as a hoax. Success.

Then came part two. This time, the team forged a letter from the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, a rival player in the tangled web of international peace propaganda. The forgery suggested that the Chinese were launching their own rival Stalin Peace Prize, a clear jab at the Kremlin's decision to rebrand theirs. The forgery, posted from Berne—where China's embassy had become an increasingly active hub for influence operations—was crafted to fan the flames of Sino-Soviet discord.

The press swallowed it whole. Both *Le Monde* and the *Sunday Telegraph* reported the letter as straight news: a bold provocation by China

against Khrushchev himself, the man who had personally abolished the Stalin Peace Prize. When Indian intelligence intercepted a copy, it landed on the desk of an MI5 contact for advice. Recognizing Welser's touch instantly, MI5 played their hand with practised brazenness. Deny everything, headquarters instructed, and with a straight face offer to authenticate the letter as genuine for the Indians.[22]

Hopson, the pragmatist, assessed the scheme with detached candour. 'This operation was not seriously expected to cause the peace movement grave embarrassment, but merely to generate a little more Sino-Soviet friction and make a diversion whose investigation might interfere with more important business', he told Leslie Glass. 'I think it reasonable to suppose that both these aims have been to some extent realised.'[23]

'Well done'.[24]

The Americans were far more effusive, telling Hopson: 'I am writing to offer my compliments to you, and specifically to Hans, for the highly professional and well-timed circular letter from the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace.'

'It is not always easy to measure the effectiveness of a black operation and reports in the Western press are not necessarily a sign of success; but I think that in this instance the spontaneous and extensive press replay attests at the very least to the letter's technical excellence.'[25]

'I agree', Hopson told Welser, passing the compliment down the line. 'Well done'.[26]

'Your work really!' Welser praised the writers and runners, Miss Houghton, Daphne Asplin, and George Wye.[27]

But not everyone shared the celebratory mood. This was 'utterly unconvincing', grumbled Ronnie Burroughs, of the Foreign Office department which liaised with MI6 and GCHQ. 'I should have thought that such minor irritants only served to remind the Russians and Chinese of their common interests in combatting the West and as far as neutralists are concerned would make them feel that we are no better than the communists —only feebler.' Besides, he wondered tersely, 'what "important business" is considered to have been left undone as a result of our operation?' Publicize facts instead.[28]

It was a fair point. Hopson did not respond.

Ignoring such negativity, Welser pushed to do more to expose Communist duplicity. ‘We are not paying enough attention to the contradictions in hostile propaganda.’ Russia was speaking ‘in two voices’ to different countries about the same issues. He wanted his team to expose Moscow’s two-timing and double dealing. This was professional stirring.[29]

And he was good at it. In January 1963 he became Special Operations Adviser, reporting directly to the head of the IRD. His title, perhaps deliberately, echoed that of Sefton Delmer’s whose own title in 1943 was Director of Special Operations against the Enemy and Satellites (Black).[30] Delmer was a legendary figure in these circles whose wartime memoirs had just hit the shelves and whose approach still influenced his successors. Welser’s star was on the rise, as was his wife Adelaide’s, as she coordinated the covertly controlled news agencies. Although estranged from the pair of them, Leslie Sheridan was also working hard building the book publishing side of the operation. Things seemed to be going well.

Across Horse Guards Parade, resentment was brewing in the regular Foreign Office. Ronnie Burroughs was not the only diplomat pouring cold water on Welser’s schemes. A colleague, also liaising with MI6, found the whole business of working with the ‘friends’, as MI6 was euphemistically known, trying. ‘It drove me slightly batty’, he later recalled, ‘dealing with a number of people whose work had made them strangely devious.’ Perhaps they had to be, after all, their job, as he saw it, was ‘to get down in the gutter and not try to do things that were semi-diplomatic’.[31] The same would have perhaps applied to Welser who, after all, was only semi-diplomatic himself and worked closely with friends down in the gutter.

Another diplomat, Hugh Cortazzi, who had briefly worked for the IRD before more conventional postings in Bonn and Tokyo, was even more dismissive about his old colleagues. He recalled: ‘There were these people who had established themselves. There was a mafia and I wasn’t by any means convinced that we were spending all the money effectively.’[32]

No matter how hard he tried to fit in, Welser would always be an outsider. Still, Hopson and Glass had protected him and his team, and the Soviets had ramped up their own activities meaning something had to be done in response, and Cold War forgeries were meticulous work. Welser’s deputy had left in autumn 1962, and, following Welser’s own promotion, he

needed reinforcement. He needed a new head of the Special Editorial Unit, and found someone whose experience was matched only by his eccentricity.
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6

The Master Whisperer

Like his new boss, John Rayner arrived in the attic of Carlton House Terrace with a background as a talented journalist and veteran of covert propaganda. His father was a journalist, literary editor, and then news editor of the *Weekly Despatch*, and young John had grown up in a literary household. He had attended the same private preparatory school as MI5 officer turned Soviet spy turned royal art historian Anthony Blunt, although Rayner's lasting memory of the school was one of quiet defiance: of rejecting the headmaster's sexual advances. He had then headed off to the expensive Cheltenham College and a privilege that should have elevated him to the upper echelons of society.

Fate had other ideas. When his father died unexpectedly in 1925, Rayner had to leave the school and, through his family connections, cut his teeth writing gossip columns for the *Weekly Despatch* as a 17-year-old. Hugely talented, he rode a meteoric rise to become features editor—the youngest in Fleet Street—and then assistant editor of the *Daily Express* by 1938. His brilliance lay in visual design, especially bigger and bolder typography and colourful headlines, which helped turn the *Daily Express* into the bestselling newspaper in the country. One colleague remembered that his feature pages possessed an elegance rivalled only by his shirts.[1]

Rayner, 'JR' to his friends, was tall, broad-shouldered, well dressed, with grey eyes and a sharp face. He was owlish yet handsome enough; although perhaps he thought himself more handsome than surviving photos suggest—but that was Rayner, eager to bend reality to his will with confidence, charm, and panache. There was a theatricality about him, a sense that he was always performing slightly. Although born to a middle-

class family in Dulwich, and leaving school at 17, he spoke with a clichéd clipped—perhaps affected—Oxbridge accent, easy to mock.[2]

Rayner had met his wife, Joan, known as Molly, in 1933, and the pair quickly married after finding out she was pregnant. Molly was a social climber; a name dropper who eagerly posed with her baby son, Thomas, in the pages of *Tatler* and other magazines. Rayner lost interest, leaving poor Molly convinced he was having affairs, and she even hired a private detective to follow him. The detective reported back that he was too busy drinking in Fleet Street pubs to be having an affair, and thought it more likely that he would die of alcohol poisoning.

Molly was right to be suspicious though, and Rayner left her in 1937 when she was pregnant with their second child, for Joan Eyres Monsall: blonde, high cheek-boned, witty, and a talented photographer to boot. After meeting when Rayner had chosen her as one of five contemporary beauties to be profiled in his newspaper, they bonded over shared loves of travel, art, reading—and cats. They began an affair soon afterwards. Perhaps guilt-ridden, he later claimed that Molly had tricked him into getting her pregnant again to prevent him from leaving. Rayner and Joan married in a modest Westminster registry office in July 1939, at which the poet John Betjeman was a witness. His colleagues had no idea about the marriage until they read about it in the evening papers, which struck them as impressively casual and aristocratic. This was probably the exact response for which Rayner, ever the effete showman, had hoped.[3]

When war broke out in September 1939, Rayner was out of action in a private nursing home. He was laid low, delirious with typhoid fever, which he blamed on a rogue ice cube in a gin and tonic he had drunk on a Tunisian beach. The fever nearly killed him, being misdiagnosed at first, and he was still too weak to leave by Christmas. Convalescence was slow, impeded by nasty bouts of flu that seemed to follow him around. It was not all bad though, and Rayner had a way of making the best of things. As others mobilized, he hid out in Cannes where the air was warmer and the food richer and he ate partridges and drank fine red wines. After seven months, he returned to work.[4]

As his health improved and the pace of war accelerated, Rayner left the *Express* to work first in the Ministry of Economic Warfare as a public relations officer and then with PWE. Working closely with Leslie Sheridan,

his job was to concoct rumours, known in the business as sibs, and whispers to be spread behind enemy lines. Using his editorial and design experience, Rayner also oversaw the make-up of forged leaflets.[5] By spring 1942 he had become, in the words of one colleague, the ‘master whisperer’ and head of the PWE Rumour Factory.[6] Others called him the ‘Sibster’.

Here, the Master Whisperer began an affair with Isabel, the exuberant, talented, and pretty wife of his colleague, Sefton Delmer. Delmer had been a fellow journalist and Isabel an artist; the two couples had shared many boozy blackout nights waiting out weekends as the war worsened. Delmer was now working on black propaganda for the neighbouring Special Operations Executive. Isabel used her artistic skills designing, among other things, pornographic propaganda to discredit decadent Nazis.[7] Delmer blamed Rayner for the subsequent break up of his marriage—and felt considerable antipathy towards him afterwards.[8] Rayner’s own marriage ended in divorce at the end of the war after he, rather hypocritically given his multiple affairs, struggled to cope with Joan’s own casual sexual adventures.

In December 1943, Rayner was working in Algiers, planning psychological operations for when the Allies would confront enemy forces in Italy. By January 1944 he was in Sicily, from where he moved on to Bari and Naples, becoming responsible for coordinating all combat propaganda activities, including black propaganda and sibs. It was dangerous work. He had arrived by torpedo boat at the beachhead south of Rome just four days after the Allies landed, armed with a portable medium wave transmitter. Travelling at high speed, he found fires blazing, the port shattered, an overturned cruiser resembling a turtle, and streams of wounded sailors sliding off its hull. In the chaos, nobody knew who he was: he lacked insignia and uniform, eventually donning an American GI outfit because no other was available. He had to persuade the commanding officers not only who he was but also to be allowed to use his transmitter.[9]

Whatever he said had clearly worked because he was part of the mass celebrations when liberating forces reached Rome six months later. He lived in a charming flat at the top of the Spanish Steps, near to where the poet John Keats once lived, and briefly with the writer Evelyn Waugh, from where Rayner worked on radio propaganda. He also travelled to the retreating front line as far north as Florence where, under mortar and sniper

fire, he produced a daily newspaper using a jeep engine as the power supply for his battlefield printing press. The newspaper went behind German lines to the Italian population still under occupation. He travelled light, sleeping under pines or in shell-shattered palaces. He told Isabel: ‘haven’t had a bath for 6 months, am ageing creased, balding, dictatorial’. He admitted to being terrified.

In November 1944, his jeep crashed, and he broke his back. Having reached the impressive status of Director, Psychological Warfare Branch, Italian Theatre, the Master Whisperer was now back in London, convalescing. Again.

Once he had recovered, Isabel suggested marriage, but Rayner instead took a post in Ceylon as head of psychological warfare with Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia. And that was the end of that; Isabel was heartbroken.[10]

When the war ended, he transferred to Singapore where he headed the regional British propaganda effort in the early Cold War, although he was seemingly far from first choice for the role.[11] He was perhaps less elegant, donning a bush jacket and a pair of old white walking shorts that looked as if he had been wearing them for at least a week.[12] One of his schemes out there involved distributing a pictorial version of *Animal Farm,* George Orwell’s satire on Soviet Communism—until an exasperated Leslie Sheridan told him to stop wasting more time on it because they could not secure the rights.[13]

Rayner met his third wife in Singapore: Miranda Lampson, tall, blonde, slim, and bearing more than a passing resemblance to Joan. The pair married in Sydney, again quickly and with a baby on the way, although he did not seem especially happy with her and appeared full of regrets. It would be another marriage with a swift beginning, turbulent middle, and inevitable ending. After finishing in Singapore in 1956 he received a CBE for his services, to add to his MBE collected at the end of the war—ever the enigma, he then seemingly went off to write and farm in Australia where he had lived off and on since the late 1940s: ‘a land’, he wrote home, ‘of milk, butter, honey, steaks, oysters, peaches, tweeds, woollens, books, sun, sea, kindness, geniality, the well-fed, & well-organised Communist brake on industry’.[14]

It could not last forever. Rayner was plucked from the drowsy shadows of bucolic Antipodean obscurity, perhaps through gilded connections to the aristocrats at Petworth House. He used to party with the artist Richard ‘Dirty Dick’ Wyndham, a scion of the family,[15] in a dissolute orbit of champagne and cigarette smoke before Dick’s untimely death. By 1962, Rayner was back in the game, sliding effortlessly into the familiar twists and turns of propaganda.

Now in his early fifties, and eight years older than his boss, Hans Welser, Rayner was in some ways the flotsam and jetsam of propaganda operations past. He was, however, rather more talented than his boss, more experienced, and had held far more senior roles during the war. It made for a tense relationship.

Rayner was a complex man and quite the character around the office. He continued farming, taking entire Augusts off work to attend the harvest, and developed eccentric hobbies, including collecting early printed books and practising Elizabethan calligraphy, which he tried to reflect in his own handwriting.

Rather fittingly for a propagandist, he was obsessed with the nuances of language. He once noticed a CIA visitor watching him quizzically as he slowly undid the strings of a black hard-cover file marked ‘most secret’.

‘Oh yes’, Rayner smiled slightly,

> you see, our chats with you chaps are most secret certainly. But is it the language that you really find curious? Let me ask you something. I just don’t know what you people are trying to say when you say something is top secret. What are you talking about, some place you think it belongs? Up not down, perhaps? After all, things are either secret, or more secret, or most secret, aren’t they really?[16]

His fascination with words extended to interior design. He used to decorate his walls with dozens of clippings from old newspaper headlines featuring editorial slips that produced double entendres such as ‘King Flies Back to Front’.[17] Whereas Welser had a neat and tidy desk, adorned only with a beautiful enamel-covered pocket watch, Rayner’s was a mess. A Japanese teapot sat alongside piles of paper and burning incense sticks up in the attic of Carlton House Terrace.

Extremely clever, talented, and great—if slightly disreputable—company, Rayner was an asset to the team in many ways. Known for his roving eye and his eccentricity, he could easily be seen as an oddity, if not a

bit of a joke figure; moreover, having survived war, typhoid, and a broken back, he did not take things too seriously. Welser, equally enigmatic in his own way, who had arrived as a refugee with nothing, did not always get on with him. They were tied together though, not only by virtue of their positions, by a joint sense of being anomalous, perpetual temporaries in a strange and closed world. Both men, professionally and privately, were a mixture of truth and artifice, reality and illusion. With a shared self-confidence, pretensions, and an ability to turn on the charm, perhaps both men, in their own ways, were faking it.

In early 1963, tensions—exploitable tensions—broke out between Ghana and Kenya on one hand and Bulgaria and the Soviets on the other. At the time, between 350 and 500 African students were living in Bulgaria as part of a transnational mobility programme designed to enhance solidarity and understanding. In February, a group of these students began protesting against racial discrimination, political pressure, and poor facilities. The protests soon turned violent as local police moved in. One Ghanaian diplomat suggested bringing all Ghanian students home immediately.[18]

The crackdown and diplomatic fallout provided Rayner with an early opportunity. He, or more likely old László Zilahi, forged a response by the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the leftist international youth organization. His aim was to expose the organization as a Soviet front, stoke divisions between Africans and Eastern Europeans, and induce paranoia among the adversary.

Buried amongst flowery platitudes about Soviet–African friendship, lip service to the horrors of racism, and strong criticism of the ‘ultra-colonialists’, Welser and Rayner played the race card. They—posing as the World Federation of Democratic Youth—defended the heavy-handed Bulgarian police whilst denouncing the students as uncivilized, ‘primitive’, and morally weak. The young Africans had ‘emerged from the jungle darkness of want’ and so these ‘backward’ people could hardly be expected to act as ‘socially responsible’ as the more advanced Eastern Europeans.[19] It was smug. It was condescending. And it was overtly racist.

They knew exactly what they were doing: to ‘intensify indignation’, as Rayner put it, amongst African students. They were content to stoke racial tension if it meant driving a wedge between the Communists and the Global South. It proved successful. WFDY swiftly denounced it as a provocation,

but the forgery received press coverage across the African continent anyway, with many newspapers reacting violently. It led to at least one college directly protesting the World Federation of Democratic Youth.[20]

Rayner was delighted. Back in the war, he had thought carefully about target audiences of his rumours and propaganda, dividing them into three categories: political rumours for well-informed leaders; something extraordinary or unusual for what he rather snobbishly called run-of-the-mill people; and operational rumours designed to make the audience do something in particular. Rumours, Rayner theorized, could create hostility towards the enemy, create alarm or dejection, or create mistrust within enemy alliances. They could be general or with specific local targets in mind, although the latter required excellent intelligence.[21] Spreading the idea that Bulgarians were racist was designed to create tensions amongst the population; it was based on specific intelligence but had a general, non-operational, target. It was an old trick: to drive a wedge.

Rayner kept up the pressure, and a spate of forgeries targeting international front organizations followed. As work piled up, he quickly felt overstretched. Meanwhile, his superiors worried that his burst of operations lacked nuance. They complained about too much of a disconnect between Rayner's team of writers hidden up in the attic away from prying eyes and the researchers who collated the information, working from bedrooms below that had been poorly partitioned into cubicles. The divide left his black propaganda poorly tailored to individual countries. Perhaps there could be some sort of merger between the researchers and the writers to alleviate this?

To be fair, British intelligence had been guilty of overplaying the monolithic nature of international Communism in the early Cold War,[22] and these assessments were bluntly reflected in the cadence and logic of Rayner's output. This was changing by the early 1960s as splits emerged between the Soviets and the Chinese and as international Communism interacted with a wider range of nationalist and leftist thought.[23] Rayner had long espoused the importance of knowledge of local languages, cultures, and media in propaganda,[24] and now accepted that better tailoring to local concerns and ideologies would increase the appeal of each forgery.

It was a difficult balance. Rayner felt overworked and did not want to lose his writers to research, but he also knew that his output had to be more

sensitive to local contexts. He compromised by suggesting that members of his team each take on more of a regional specialization from the attic.[25]

Welser was in no mood for concessions. 'I know from experience', he declared in his familiar pontifical tone, 'that research workers very rarely make good writers in the journalistic sense; conversely, journalists generally are very bad at research. It is best if each keeps to his trade.'[26] The research desks should simply produce 'ammunition for propaganda', unearthing whatever other governments want to keep secret. Too many researchers were producing too many papers and trying to write stories for journalists 'who can write much better stories in their sleep than the Desks ever will'. Journalists were not interested, he scoffed, 'in the views on presentation of some little woman somewhere'. He thought fondly back to the war and how PWE had produced short and snappy pieces at five or ten minutes' notice. There was a sense of urgency back then. 'Had this not been the case Delmer would have blown the roof off!'[27]

Diplomats from all corners of the globe provided constant feedback on the fakes and forgeries—much of it negative. Readers in Japan reported that monolithic output was not suitable for what they deemed a unique target culture.[28] From Rangoon, one complained that the black propaganda looked too Western: 'we see some merit in making unattributable productions look more scruffy and of less high quality. At the moment, all IRD productions tend to look the same and, because of the quality of their printing and paper, are clearly Western productions.'[29]

From Lima, Rayner learnt that unattributable material was not cutting through. Most readers assumed it was American and so inherently did not believe it. Black propaganda falsely attributable to 'commercial firms in Europe' or some sort of fake research society 'would have a much greater impact'. Perhaps booklets published in Mexico could 'bear the imprint of a London firm?'[30] Meanwhile, readers in Beirut wanted 'bright imaginative lay-outs which we can copy or adapt',[31] an artful suggestion which would certainly have appealed to Rayner given the success he had enjoyed redesigning the look of the *Daily Express*.

The ambassador to Guinea complained that IRD material perpetuated hair-raising allegations about how Cuban revolutionaries were training guerrillas from all over Africa in Guinea. He had heard nothing of this, and was sure it was false. After digging, he was alarmed to find that the story

rested on a sole report originally published in some small and obscure south German newspaper, likely planted to launder and lend credibility to rumours.[32] It had Welser's fingerprints all over it.

The most critical feedback came from Caracas, where Rayner's forgeries had targeted student organizations. British diplomats there warned Rayner against patronizing local university students who particularly disliked 'being lumped willy-nilly with Asian and African students to whom unconsciously they feel superior'. Rayner sighed, perhaps brewed himself another tea in his Japanese teapot, and lamented not having the staff and budget to differentiate as much as he might have liked.[33]

He read on, scowling, as local users soon drifted into blunt stereotypes of their own. 'Most of the students, like their elders, have a parochial political outlook and are inclined to be mentally lazy.' Target students, Caracas advised, 'but in an adult tone … Mud-slinging and holier-than-thou attitudes alienate the students.' Most importantly of all, keep the propaganda short if there was to be any chance of students paying attention.[34] One diplomat in Caracas later dismissed IRD support as consisting merely of 'a propaganda expert from WWII mostly absent in other regional countries propagating anti-Soviet Cold War propaganda, entirely futile in US-dominated Latin America'.[35]

Rayner should have known all this. At the end of the war he had persuasively argued about the importance of experts, knowledgeable not just in propaganda techniques but in local cultures, languages, people, and media ecosystems. Propaganda was a valuable weapon, but it could not be used bluntly from afar; it had to be tailored. Times had clearly changed, and the British government could not devote anything like the same level of resources to the global Cold War as they had done to Nazi Germany.[36]

New to his role and with a point to prove, he took the feedback on board and kept up the pressure in the battle for students' minds. He put out another forged International Union of Students booklet, this time about higher education in the Soviet Union. His aim, as ever, was to expose the organization as a tool of Moscow and disrupt its activities in the process. He took a genuine booklet and selectively emphasized things designed to antagonize Latin American students, mostly around state control. The operation failed miserably. MI6 sent 400 copies to Santiago for distribution at a youth conference in March 1964, but for some reason only twenty-five

copies actually reached delegates. Still, Rayner ensured MI6 posted another 500 copies to student organizations, universities, and the press across Latin America. He sat back and waited, just as he had done during the war for his rumours to surface—he had called it comebacks, signals, or retorts.[37] Now they were called reactions.

No reactions noted.[38]

Undeterred, the team tried something similar with an International Union of Students poster. Again, they took a genuine poster—this time condemning Western nuclear tests—and subtly doctored it in the hopes of exposing Communist hypocrisy. It now read: 'students of the world condemn *all* nuclear adventurers' and the picture of the bomb (already on it) was labelled in Chinese characters as being property of the Chinese People's Government. MI6 posted hundreds of copies to an international student congress in Sofia.[39]

No reactions noted. Again.

Despite the uptick in black propaganda, there was a curious touch of pathos in the air. Rayner and Welser fired off bulletin after forgery after leak into the ether and sat back waiting for reactions. They watched and read, but only around 10 per cent ever received attention. The best Welser could point to was a Committee bulletin exposing the presence of 'Soviet watchdogs' at the International Organization of Journalists' annual congress, taking place on board a Soviet ship. It was quoted in *The Times*, the BBC, a local Tunisian newspaper, and Ankara Radio.[40] Local authorities gave a cool reception to the cruise at the various ports of call and were under no illusion about the Soviet role. 'It is at least possible that some of the exposure operations helped in bringing this about.'[41]

Both men clung to their convictions with the fervour of true believers, whether through faith or blind necessity. They vehemently, perhaps vainly, believed in what they were doing and the immeasurable impact it was having, brushing aside questions of efficacy. 'Impossible to measure', Rayner would say, as if the ambiguity of cumulative effects itself was part of the craft.[42] They were totally committed to the cause, seeing the enemy equally as evil, as insidious, as the Nazis they had fought years earlier. They knew—instinctively and intangibly—that their black propaganda was making a difference even if victories could not be tallied on a scoresheet or

celebrated. They gave no sense of doubt, at least in the written record, about the potential endlessness or purposelessness of it all. And so they kept at it.

It was a far cry from the earlier reaction of another IRD man, Hugh Cortazzi, who had since moved on. He got fed up. 'They were constantly saying "Oh we've had so many publications in such and such". I said "What the hell does it matter if you have a publication in the *San Jose Times*? A snippet, meaningless".'[43] Demonstrating the impact of coverage, or turning headlines into behavioural change, was a perennial challenge and one which both Welser and Rayner struggled to address. They preferred a 'trust us' approach where intangible success could take many unexpected forms, from unprovable behavioural change through to imperceptible disruption through paranoia.

Their Soviet counterparts were doing much the same thing—and more. In spring 1964, Harold Caccia, the top civil servant in the Foreign Office, warned British diplomats around the world of Russian subversion and clandestine operations. Russian intelligence, he said, was placing ever greater emphasis on agents of influence and operated far beyond merely gathering intelligence. They wanted to shape and influence and meddle—deniably, of course.[44] They sought to weaken the stability of non-Communist societies, something Russian intelligence officers called 'decomposition work', and they sought to discredit—or even remove—individuals who frustrated Soviet policies, thereby paving the way for the spread of international Communism. They used forgeries, faked photographs, false rumours, double agents, agents of influence, and general harassment.[45] One Soviet propagandist later recalled that the 'preparation of disinformation material is a demanding and complicated affair, because pure disinformation unsupported by hard facts and without any documentary confirmation is quickly exposed and may well do more harm than good'.[46]

Mirroring Welser and Rayner, the Soviets used 'mainly right-wing' or at least 'neutral publications' to place articles overseas, including the French agency, Pathé.[47] One KGB general liked to try to place a story in the developing world such as India or Thailand where journalists could be manipulated, or in Japan where reporters could be bribed. From there it would be laundered worldwide. Local KGB officers would then transcribe the newspaper article back into Russian so that other Soviet media organs

could republish and distribute it as if it were a genuine article in the local press.[48] It would have felt familiar to Rayner.

The Russians were also watching British activities closely, although they knew surprisingly little about the Information Research Department. Their information was out of date, and, perhaps indicative of their own thinking, the KGB conflated the IRD with MI6 and conflated propaganda with counterintelligence and military deception. They focused on something they erroneously called the Interdepartmental Committee on Disinformation.[49]

But the Russians did privately rate British intelligence as the oldest and most experienced in the world, known to have organized and advised other 'imperialistic and bourgeois' countries globally, even if they had become more cautious and less influential than the Americans in recent years. And they did know about an earlier MI6 operation using circulars issued in the name of a fake group to undermine Communists in West Germany. They noted that the British had deemed it successful, adding that similar methods of disinformation were still under way.[50] And they did believe—correctly—that the British had since intensified efforts to undermine Soviet influence in the Commonwealth and newly independent states. It involved 'espionage and provocations' as well as extensive propaganda—or 'disinformation', as they called it—to discredit Soviet specialists or equipment deployed in these areas and to exploit existing tensions—whether religious, national, economic, or political—for anti-Communist purposes. According to the KGB, the British trade was planting defamatory articles in the press.[51] This was not far off the mark.

The Russians and the British, and the Americans and Chinese for that matter, knew that developing states were key to these emerging propaganda battles where lines of influence were relentlessly being drawn and redrawn. The Cold War had become intertwined with decolonization as states, large and small, competed for post-imperial influence.

From the attic of Carlton House Terrace, acrid cigarette smoke curling up towards the ceiling, Welser and Rayner knew the game was already in motion, the board larger than either man could control. Yet winning was not really the objective; the point was more staying in the game and not visibly losing. This task would stretch them to their limits, and in order to help maintain Britain's world role and stave off decline, their small team had to go global.

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PART II

The Worldwide Firehose

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7

Arab Brothers

‘We must also remember that IRD is not only an anti-Communist propaganda organisation’, Hans Welser professed in late 1963. ‘It is a sort of fire brigade, and has in the past been called upon to cause discomfort to the Queen’s enemies wherever they may be.’ Setting aside the fact that fire brigades are rarely supposed to cause discomfort, Welser revelled in the persona he was crafting. The image of a propaganda hitman—moving silently through a maze of misdirection and deceit—was one he savoured.

The Cold War had truly gone global, with Russia, China, and the United States competing to move in on parts of the world which had until recently been British or French colonies. Meanwhile, the declining imperial powers sought to protect their own influence in the places over which they had long enjoyed control—and of course rising nationalist leaders everywhere from Egypt to Indonesia were intent on having their own say, and not just in their own countries.

Hans Welser told his bosses that he had honed particular skills; he would find enemies wherever they were on the planet, and, if not eliminate them, then severely discomfort them.[1]

He recalled, with a glint in his eye, the time he was instructed to conduct so-called black broadcasts against the nationalist Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, both before and after the 1956 Suez crisis; ‘this we did for nearly a year and a half’. More recent hit jobs included ‘certain highly covert operations against the Egyptians in the Yemen’ and those ‘publicising difficulties experienced by African students in Cairo’. The call had come direct from the foreign secretary himself.

If he was going to operate in an underworld of cloaks and daggers, he insisted that secrecy was vital. His work, he explained with a certain flair, involved ‘action in direct opposition to the declared and overt policy pursued by HMG’. This was a curious claim to make given that it was not strictly true; his skills often complemented the declared and overt policy. It was no secret, for example, that UK foreign policy still sought to keep Nasser off balance. Claiming to pursue his own private foreign policy would only have added to the suspicions of the IRD held by regular diplomats. Welser’s self-important version certainly added to the mystique of his business, and perhaps his ego could not help cultivating the idea of a small team of mavericks making their own rules. ‘There is no doubt’, he added, ‘that some of these operations will hurt the foreign governments concerned and, particularly in the case of the pathologically suspicious Egyptians, they will of course suspect the British.’[2]

He did not know it, but Hans Welser would be operating against the Egyptians for a good while yet.

In late September 1962, a republican coup had overthrown the Yemeni imam and established the Yemen Arab Republic. The plotters had botched the job by allowing the imam to escape with his life to the mountains from where he organized a royalist rebellion against the new regime. Coups and feuds may have been commonplace in this part of the world, but this one reached Welser’s in-tray for two reasons.

The first was Nasser. The charismatic Egyptian president was a longtime *bête noire* of the British on account of his desire to export revolutionary nationalism and supplant British influence in the region. He had even apparently reduced one Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, to screaming ‘I want him murdered!’ down an open telephone line after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal back in 1956. Now, Nasser quickly supported the new republican regime in Yemen, flooding the country with tens of thousands of troops in an attempt to extend his regional influence, bolster his prestige, and use Yemen as a base to subvert its neighbours.

The second reason was imperialism. In 1962, the UK still possessed the nearby colony of Aden, a dusty jewel of strategic necessity. This large natural port, at the southern gate of the Red Sea, stood sentinel over oil supplies and Britain’s waning global presence. It provided access to the Indian Ocean and on to Southeast Asia beyond. British governments did not

want to give it up and used the rugged South Arabian hinterland between the colony and Yemen as a buffer to protect it.

The Yemen civil war threatened South Arabia and Aden, especially given that it coincided with a vicious insurgency, partly inspired by Nasser, against British rule in the region. A grenade attack nearly assassinated the British high commissioner in December 1963, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in Aden. This was all sufficiently alarming for the British to wage a programme of special operations and political subversion in Yemen, alongside Saudi Arabia and Israel, designed to give Nasser a bloody nose.[3]

Saudi Arabia was Nasser's main adversary in this affair, and there was a barrage of vicious propaganda between the two sides, as well as a coordinated campaign waged against Egypt by other opponents in the Arab world.[4] Nasser had himself been guilty of ceaseless subversion for years, volunteering Cairo as a hub for the training, arming, and financing of all sorts of Arab revolutionaries, and he had been especially proactive in Yemen throughout the 1950s, including a bungled coup in 1955.[5] Nasser had also targeted the British and, shortly before intervening in Yemen, had specifically called for a propaganda assault against the UK.[6]

Within this melee, Wesler inevitably soon found a role for his team. Just weeks after the coup, a colleague called Ann Elwell had suggested creating a fake Syrian group to warn Yemenis about Egyptian infiltration and domination in the aftermath of what had become an ill-fated union between Syria and Egypt. She knew that Nasser was personally disappointed that the short-lived United Arab Republic had failed; this could be exploited.

Elwell had risen to become the acting head of IRD's Middle East Section, largely because the chosen candidate, a diplomat with sixteen years of experience working on the region, had point blank refused to accept the role. It did not, in his words, involve 'an honest day's work for a relatively honest man'. He wanted no part in dealing out 'slightly seamy propaganda towards the Middle East', and, refusing an order, even resigned from the Foreign Office altogether, such was the antipathy towards the IRD amongst many regular diplomats.[7]

It was Ann Elwell's gain. A remarkable woman, she spoke Italian, French, German, and Spanish, and had worked for MI5 both during and after the war, balancing secret work with a hectic and exhausting social life

in which she mixed with literary figures and press attachés. She then followed her MI5 husband, Charles Elwell, to the Far East, where she worked on countering propaganda—a job she loved, especially given her artistic interests. She adored opera, had trained as both a bookbinder and an actress, and had enjoyed a wartime secondment as a scriptwriter on propaganda films. When the couple returned, Charles became a legendary catcher of Soviet spies, and Ann, successful in her own right, worked her way up the IRD ladder. She loved her job, and the family house was soon bustling with spies and propagandists, including the likes of John Rayner, enjoying her hospitality and legendary cooking.[8] She was witty and charming; she was also completely—fervently—dedicated to restoring British influence in the aftermath of the Suez humiliation and to preventing Russian influence from taking a foothold in the region.

Elwell and Welser now set Marisa Savery, one of the 'black' writers, to work impersonating disaffected Syrians. The aim was to undermine support for Nasser's adventure in Yemen by using credible local voices. Unfortunately, the operation flopped and drew the ire of the Foreign Office's North East Africa Department: 'I should find it hard to subscribe to statements that are obviously false.' Welser was warned, 'Exaggeration sometimes defeats its own ends.'[9]

Marisa Savery had been busy though and, just days later, Welser shared two more pieces of her work which he hoped could be adapted as the basis of a new attempt to expose Nasser's activities, undermine local support for him, and begin to build a wider international coalition against his aggression.[10] Drawing on gruesome descriptions of chemical weapons coming from British mercenaries in the field and amidst allegations that the UN was downplaying accusations of Nasser's war crimes,[11] Savery unleashed her inner Wilfred Owen to get the message out, urging reader to beware the

> poisonous Russian gas which destroys the blood-vessels, paralyses the body and warps the brain. Those who inhale large quantities of this gas die in writhing agony—so prolonged that the victim goes mad long before his tormented body ceases its inhuman convulsions and finally passes into the merciful oblivion of death. Those who inhale smaller doses of this gas lose control of their mind and body becoming impotent, useless hunks of flesh—an offence to man's creator![12]

It was hair-raising stuff, and Rayner was unimpressed. ‘I am not sure whether we want so much about poison gas’.

‘*Much* less about poison gas’,[13] Elwell snapped uncharacteristically austerely.

The team had already been warned about unnecessary exaggeration, and the War Office had tested samples of the bomb fragments and assessed them unlikely to have contained lethally toxic chemicals.[14] Elwell agreed it was best not to lie. She also knew that Nasser was adept at turning any accusations against his accuser. Stories of gas bombs were simply anti-Egyptian propaganda, he would shout, before turning them, like an angry and articulate alchemist, into an attack on British imperialism in Aden.[15] Besides, the bombs were pretty amateurish and ineffective; why make Nasser appear more powerful than he actually was whilst terrifying the opposition into surrender?[16]

Savery seemingly had little experience in either Yemen or Syria, or, indeed, of chemical weapons. She was the daughter of a major in the Intelligence Corps and had married an army captain alongside whom she had served in Cyprus during the 1950s. She may have had experience of producing intelligence reports and of conducting search operations against Cypriot insurgents, but she was perhaps a strange choice to be imitating the rich emotive literary expressions found in Arabic leaflets of the time.[17] To be fair to Welser and Rayner, there was not a great deal of choice available. Another ‘black’ writer, a man called Dickens, was sent out to the Middle East in preparation for a posting to an embassy in the region; unfortunately, he struggled to learn Arabic and came home with his tail between his legs. In a rather sad indictment of the talent pool, the powers that be still considered deploying him on IRD work in the Middle East regardless.[18]

A Soviet shipment of gas bombs arrived in January 1964, rapidly improving Egypt’s amateurish campaign. Still, the world sat silently.[19] And Welser, Rayner, and Elwell still refused to publicize chemical weapons. Miles away, on the Yemen front line, David Smiley grew frustrated at the handwringing and prevarication. A veteran of British covert operations in Albania and Oman, he was now working with Saudi-funded mercenaries in Yemen and unofficially reporting back to MI6.[20] He disagreed with the War Office’s toxicology autopsy and with the subsequent lack of British action.

And so he went rogue, embracing his journalistic cover a little too much, by writing privately to a Swiss-based news organization—perhaps even one of the same used by Welser—encouraging them to provide more publicity for the gas attacks. 'I am convinced', he pleaded, 'that some other type of poison was used. How else can one explain the fact that people died from its effects?'[21]

Welser would have admired the ingenuity, and familiar choice of channel, but would have been horrified by Smiley lumping him in with the wets of the Foreign Office. Back in London and with Elwell's help, he and Rayner stepped up the campaign against Nasser, albeit without mentioning the gas attacks. GCHQ had sent them some intriguing intelligence about poor morale amongst republican fighters as well as some intercepted chatter about Russian pilots flying Egyptian bombers. He could sanitize it and put it to good use by laundering it through various news agencies.[22] GCHQ was where some of the best material lay, if only it could be safely used, which was easier said than done. As one MI6 man told an IRD-affiliated journalist: 'that's the stuff that really gives you an intellectual erection!'[23] Rayner would have smirked.

Welser and Rayner sent multiple stories to the Near and Far East News Agency, covertly controlled by Adelaide Welser and her team. The scoops breathlessly hit practically every attack line they could think of to discredit Nasser: Egyptians killing Yemenis; violating Yemeni women; low Egyptian morale; high rebel morale; Soviet aid to Egypt; Chinese aid to Egypt; Egyptians training saboteurs and terrorists; and how Yemenis think Egyptians are 'worse than dogs'. They forwarded many of these on to Aden for local use too. And they managed to land plenty of material in the *Sunday Telegraph*. Still nothing on gas attacks though.[24]

Instead, they continued to expose Nasser's espionage and expansionism in Yemen. In June 1964 they exploited tension between Syrians and Nasser, following the short-lived and ill-fated union between their two states, by pretending to be a group of frustrated Syrians criticizing Nasser. 'Brother Arabs, we are tired of Egyptian intrigues and their never-ending plots and counter plots'. In Yemen, 'Egyptian "technicians" that is secret agents, spies and troublemakers, lord it all over the pale and chase the women, married or unmarried, violating Islamic traditions and Arab customs.' Rayner was also

comfortable attacking the ‘hated Zionists’: ‘what the Arabs want is an army to hold at bay the Zionist gangs and not to suppress our own brothers!’[25]

‘Good for the Syrians’, cheered diplomats in the Foreign Office’s Arabian Department, completely oblivious to the fact that it had come not from Syria but yards away across Horse Guards Parade.[26] Welser would have smiled.

Between June and August, Rayner issued a series of three leaflets by yet another fake group: the Council of Arab Unity Brethren. The driving force was Kit Barclay, the head of the IRD.

A popular boss and keen bonsai tree collector, Barclay was independently very wealthy, and generous with it. Unlike his predecessor, Hopson, he was quiet and gentle but had arrived with much experience in propaganda and the Arab world, having worked in Jerusalem during the war, as an information officer in Iraq shortly afterwards, and later as the regional information officer in Beirut.[27]

He now suggested creating a phantom organization to spread the next wave of anti-Nasser material, again designed to expose Egyptian activity in Yemen and build a coalition of opposition to it. Together they chose the Council of the Arab Unity Brethren, ‘which apparently makes more sense in Arabic than in English’.[28] Posted by MI6 from Libya, they attacked Egyptian expansionism, designs on Libyan oil, and Nasser personally on religious grounds.[29] Nasser was certainly far from innocent here, having earlier launched covert action of his own, handing out money and guns to rebels and sponsoring attacks on oil pipelines.[30] Rayner wanted all of this commonly known.

‘No reactions so far noted’.[31]

Welser wanted to go bigger and pressed for something Communist-inspired. Could they swat—or at least discomfort—two flies with one slap? If only he had known that the KGB had successfully recruited spies inside Nasser’s entourage; or how many in Moscow had mocked and jibed when Nasser received Russia’s highest honour, the Hero of the Soviet Union award, in 1964; how there had been songs and jokes.[32] The capital Welser and Rayner would have made of this—if only they had known.

Perhaps they had a hint of it. How about, they wondered, sharing photos of Khrushchev dressed as an Arab sheikh and Nasser dressed as a Soviet

lieutenant-colonel?[33] Or forging Chinese attacks against both Nasser and Khrushchev? This would give the impression, Rayner explained, that 'the Middle East was likely to become a battleground between China and the Soviet Union, and that the Arabs are in danger of becoming involved in somebody else's quarrel at their own expense'.[34] He promised it would not be traced back to the UK. László Zilahi, the team's elderly Communism specialist, drafted a particularly fiery diatribe designed to stoke tensions between Arabs and the Kremlin—before horrified diplomats got wind and blocked the whole thing altogether: it was factually wrong, unbelievable, and an obvious fake, they huffed. Some on the Foreign Office's Middle East desk quite liked Rayner and Welser's work, but those on the Soviet and China desks were far less enthusiastic.[35] Too much was at stake, and the meddling mavericks of Carlton House Terrace were pushing their luck.

Welser had to settle for planting an article in an obscure Swiss newspaper exposing espionage and subversion by the Egyptian intelligence services. He knew few people would read it, but hoped that once it was published in a neutral country his colleagues could launder it by quoting it in propaganda elsewhere.[36]

Shortly afterwards, Nasser privately complained to the Chinese that 'the West is spreading rumours, saying that Nasser has gone communist. They do not want that we develop ourselves and do not want to see our social revolution.' He was particularly worried about other, more serious, forms of covert action. 'The enemy has more than 50 times plotted assassinations and coups d'état against me.' The most recent would-be assassin, he recounted, had met CIA officers in Vienna who, although claiming there was no present plan to kill Nasser—'the CIA is very careful'—paid him £40 in pound sterling every month until Nasser's internal security arrested him. 'The Americans are all double-dealing.'[37]

With Nasser on high alert, Savery struck again in December 1964 with another fake group, this time called the Defence of Non-Totalitarian Socialism. This one exposed Egyptian intrigue in the Sudan and criticized Nasser's war in Yemen—whilst still refusing to mention the earlier gas attacks. The team was delighted when Egypt wrongly assumed that the Syrians were behind it;[38] Welser insisted that the operation had 'hurt the Egyptians', although did not give any evidence as to how.[39] By the time it landed, Marisa Savery had left the team. She followed her husband to

Sarawak, where he took a job with the Malaysian Special Branch. She did not leave the propaganda business behind, now earning about £50 a month writing leaflets and radio scripts for the Malaysians to use against the threat of Communism.[40]

Savery's departure did not spell the end of fakes and forgeries targeting Yemen. Welser and Rayner had a friend on the ground in Aden, where an insurgency against British rule was in full swing.

Tony Ashworth had served for almost twenty years in the armed forces and, after the Second World War, he had specialized in psychological warfare and deception. He was one of the leading authorities in the UK, having attended courses in the US, ran the UK's joint services school of psychological warfare on the south coast of England, and delivered psychological warfare courses to officers in Cyprus during the insurgency in the late 1950s. His final posting before retiring from the military in 1963 was in psychological warfare at East Africa Command. Imaginative and self-confident yet still only in his early forties, Ashworth had amassed a wealth of experience. It was little surprise, therefore, that Welser snapped him up as a black writer. As the situation in Aden deteriorated, he became Welser's man on the spot. He sported a cold, thousand-yard, stare, and a ruthless streak—yet beneath the steel in his eyes lay a surprising wit—dry, quick, and disarming. Like the others, he thoroughly relished his job.

Ashworth wasted little time, soon boasting of his tricks to Welser. His mission was to counter not only Egyptian subversion but also the growing violence of the National Liberation Front, a paramilitary organization in Aden: twin threats that Ashworth believed were intimately interconnected. He enjoyed a huge boost in resources—and a comparatively free hand—now that a state of emergency had formally been declared in Aden. Violence spiralled, with guerrilla fighters targeting off-duty British officers and policemen. The 24th Infantry Brigade was soon deployed in an unsuccessful attempt to restore order.

Ashworth was a smooth, quick, and effective operator, effectively controlling two-thirds of the Arab press in Aden within months of his arrival. On one occasion he managed to replace the editor of a pro-Communist newspaper with someone who, although seemingly leftist and anti-British, would work under Ashworth's influence. He used this platform

to shape public opinion and even try to influence 1964 elections.[41] Welser and Elwell lapped it up.

He told Welser how he had ‘lifted’ a National Liberation Front newsletter from the post, intercepting it before it reached the editor of a particularly anti-British Kuwaiti newspaper. He inspected it closely and realized that the paper and typewriter used were very common and so, in his words, ‘took the opportunity of making a small addition to the content’ in the hope of creating ‘a certain amount of annoyance’ in Kuwait. Amid the usual rants about the evil British, Ashworth cheekily added a line about the wonders of true Arab socialism which, when implemented, will ensure that rich nations such as Kuwait share their wealth around the region. He knew it would be unpopular and undermine Kuwaiti support for the anti-British fighters.[42]

‘Well done’, Welser applauded.[43]

Egged on by his friend, Ashworth followed up with outright forgeries of National Liberation Front material. He proudly told Welser that locals had taken the bait and assumed a split among the terrorists. ‘It seems to me that we have got the NLF on the raw with this particular operation; it has certainly succeeded in discrediting it locally.’[44]

‘Good stuff indeed.’[45]

Welser enjoyed reading mail intercepted by Ashworth. It was serious business, but it was also good fun. ‘Good show!’, he quipped upon reading an intercepted letter about a Yemeni marrying a Hungarian girl. Another Yemeni complained that some comrade had failed to return an overcoat he had borrowed from a Yemeni student.

‘Quite amusing.’[46]

Ashworth’s other trick was to send Welser and Elwell captured terrorist documents for the London team to use in their own propaganda, and to leak some of it himself to the newspapers—all whilst slipping something that may not have been entirely genuine into the pack.[47]

In a mirror of IRD activity, Nasser’s spies and propagandists launched their own operations working tirelessly to break trust between the British and local people in Aden and South Arabia, just as Welser’s team was doing between locals and the Egyptians. Egyptian intelligence also trained dissidents inside Aden and the buffer zone beyond in the use of explosives,

mine laying, and ambushes.[48] The aim was simple: export the Egyptian revolution and supplant the British.

On Tuesday 16 March 1965, two Special Branch detectives moved discreetly through central London, squinting through the glare of fresh puddles on a bright but showery spring day. The dull thud of their footsteps muffled by wet ground, they cautiously followed Percy Allen, a 33-year-old army sergeant with a shock of dark hair and deep-set eyes, towards Charing Cross Station. Allen moved inside a dark passageway close to the River Thames; trains rumbled noisily overhead, vibrations passed through stone walls. The detectives watched from the damp shadows as Allen exchanged two large brown envelopes, each stuffed with secret military documents, and one small white one containing a £10 note, with an Iraqi man. They moved in swiftly once the deal was done.

The Iraqi turned out to be the assistant military attaché at the embassy and quickly claimed diplomatic immunity. Allen was arrested under the Official Secrets Act and later confessed to receiving a total of £65 for handing over secret documents to envoys from two Middle Eastern countries; he was desperate for money, he pleaded, and living off overdrafts after his wife was diagnosed with cancer and he had to take care of their four young children.

The other country was Egypt. Allen had met its military attaché under streetlights on Park Lane a couple of weeks earlier. The temperature was rapidly sinking as the pair walked the upmarket streets together until Allen —going by the fake name of Mr Norman—pulled a document from inside his overcoat and handed it over.

Allen was disappointed with the paltry £15 he received in return. The Egyptian offered an old spy line in response, claiming the money had been a goodwill gesture from his own pocket because the documents provided had been valueless. Could Allen do better? Increasingly desperate and chasing a big pay day which would never come, Allen offered more. They next met on Oxford Street, dodging sleet showers that sliced through the air. All for another £15. A paltry sum. More disappointment. Allen kept on going in his hopeless pursuit, only to be arrested shortly afterwards.[49]

Almost exactly two months to the day after Allen’s arrest and sitting just minutes away from the scene of the crime, British diplomats in the Foreign Office received alarming news from the ambassador in Cairo. Allen’s secret

documents were now in the hands of the Egyptians.[50] This would hardly have come as a surprise, but it jolted the British into thinking about a defence; the propaganda war was no longer confined to the sands of Yemen but had come to the wet streets of home.

The material was discomfiting more than devastating. It covered secret military strategy, but also included embarrassing comments about various world leaders. One document criticized King Hussein, the Jordanian monarch and an ally of Britain, as 'acting stupidly'.[51] Others risked showing Lebanon as a Western stooge or could easily be spun to portray the British as persistent imperialists secretly plotting interference. Nasser could show the documents privately to other governments to turn them against London, or he could make them public. One thing was for sure, Welser refused to sit helplessly and wait for the propaganda attack. He turned to advice from an experienced colleague recently returned from a long period as the IRD man in India.

Although not yet 40, Peter Joy was already an IRD veteran. He had served in propaganda roles in Ankara with the Central Treaty Organization and in New Delhi. Welser proudly remembered that it was Joy who had written the forgery which had got the World Federation of Trade Unions expelled from Austria back in the 1950s. He was a large and affable man, rather more resembling a regular diplomat than some of the eccentric figures with whom he worked. More interested in the developing world than the likes of Welser and Rayner who saw everything through a Cold War prism, Joy now turned his attention to thwarting Nasser's propaganda coup.

He wondered conspiratorially to Wesler 'whether we should not consider ways and means of encouraging Egyptian suspicions by exploiting, for example, Sargeant Allen's own eagerness to sell the documents and the ridiculously low price accepted for them'.[52]

'Two ways in which we could get this across might be (i) in conversation with the Iraq mission here following the sentencing of Sergeant Allen; (ii) through a rumour campaign' suggesting that Allen had been secretly released. Or, perhaps, 'we should arrange for another "Sargeant Allen" to attempt to sell to the Iraqis and the Egyptians documents which would this time be made to suggest a real plant'.[53]

It was elaborate, devious, and Welser could not help but admire its elegance.

The best course of action, he agreed, weighing up the options, was to lie. We could ‘imply convincingly’ that any documents which may be published are forgeries, just another in a long line of deception spun by the Egyptian Intelligence Service. All entirely unattributably of course. To bolster this, the IRD should also reissue its standard briefing on forgery as a weapon of hostile subversion.[54]

Whirring into action, Welser asked the local team in Beirut to prepare suitable pieces for use in the local press if and when the Egyptians went public. He added that ‘covertly, our objective is to encourage the [Egyptian Intelligence Service] to believe that they [the papers] are in fact a British “plant”’.[55]

‘Given the tendency of the Arabs to believe almost anything of the British there seems to be possibilities of starting a rumour campaign in Beirut to make the Egyptians think that they have been taken for a ride. Could you do something on these lines?’ ‘It might be bruited abroad’, Welser suggested, ‘that Allen had been seen in Ireland, Canada or Australia, having been secretly released after doing his gallant job for British Intelligence.’[56] A rumour here; a nudge there …

The IRD’s man on the ground in Beirut, Norman Reddaway, prepared some propaganda lines for the local press but was reluctant to do much else. He told Welser that the Lebanese press was ‘making the right points extremely well without any prompting from us’. ‘I think that “plants” on the lines you suggest would stand out like a sore thumb here.’ It would be far better to ‘let the press debate go on unaided for the moment without seeking to influence it’.[57]

On the very same day, an Egyptian newspaper published a photocopy of a document signed by Lord Mountbatten, chief of the defence staff, and marked ‘top secret—UK eyes only’. It exposed British plans to use Libya and Lebanon as landing sites in a future conflict. Egyptian intelligence had examined the documents carefully, not discounting the possibility that they may have been planted by British intelligence but concluded they were genuine. Why else would Allen have been tried and sentenced? If Allen had been a plant, then surely, the Egyptians wondered, British intelligence

would have asked him to demand more money given the value of the documents?[58]

Welser did not like feeling outplayed. He doubled down, pressing Reddaway to reconsider. The growing chatter about forgeries in newspapers at home and abroad might provide cover for a few well-placed rumours. Can we not do more?[59] His mind wandered to Rayner, his own deputy who had been in charge of rumours during the war and was likely itching to give this a go.

Another elaborate idea arrived from the IRD's man in Kuala Lumpur. 'We feed some really good material on spying and spy-catching to a writer like John le Carré, Len Deighton, Marshall Pugh, or some similarly expert feature writer.' They could pay tribute to British security services and point out that Allen had no access to 'truly secret material—as is borne out by the trivial sum of money (£65) he received' and that 'he may well have used his position to invent spurious but authentic-looking documents'. 'In the present spy-crazed era…a good feature article would be widely reproduced and read.'[60]

As Welser mulled it over, the British embassy in Cairo continued to press for some type of ploy to sow doubt amongst Egyptians about the documents' authenticity. Given that Egyptian readers sensed that the documents looked too good to be true, 'We think there would be advantage (and cannot see disadvantage)' in exploiting this and encouraging the Egyptians to think that they had been taken for a ride by British intelligence.[61]

In his enthusiasm, Welser had forgotten an important lesson: in this world of intrigue and intricacy, sometimes doing nothing was the best course of action. Not everything had to be manipulated and, in the end, the regional press did the IRD's job for them. Lebanese newspapers began to cast doubt on the documents themselves: 'the British were too clever to allow their top secrets to fall into the hands of others'.[62]

The British ambassador in Beirut, Derek Riches, insisted that the whole saga had 'aroused surprisingly little interest'.[63] Still, Welser could not resist sending an article to the covertly-controlled Near and Far East News Agency highlighting anti-Nasser riots in Cairo.[64]

Riches's complacency was slightly premature. Shortly afterwards, the Lebanese Prime Minister summoned him from his holiday in a mountain resort outside Beirut for a dressing down.[65] The ambassador refused to confirm or deny the veracity of the documents, simply replying that the government did not take newspaper reports seriously. Unimpressed, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry followed up by expressing 'surprise and dismay' and pointedly reminded the British to respect Lebanese sovereignty.[66]

Soviet propaganda jumped on the bandwagon, of course. The Kremlin revelled in reporting suspicion not only amongst the Lebanese, who had not received a 'logical reply' from London, they claimed, but also in Iraq, Kuwait, and elsewhere. The British, they gloated, had gone to great lengths to suppress publication of these secret plans.[67]

Despite some last-minute stirring by the Soviets, Nasser's operation failed. It failed not because of any masterful counterplot—although Welser and Joy had been eager enough to try—but because local audiences, already sceptical of government-controlled press, assumed that the perfidious Brits were far too cunning to be caught so easily. And for some readers, the story even inspired a reluctant admiration for British military readiness to protect allies in the Arab world. In the unpredictable world of propaganda, where second-guessing reigned supreme, distrust and paranoia sometimes worked in the target's favour.

Like Welser, Ann Elwell itched to do something anyway. 'Would you like IRD to do anything unattributably in the European press', she asked in that deep, husky voice of hers, 'or shall we leave it alone?'[68]

'I don't think we should touch this now', Welser replied. It was over.[69]

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8

Loyal African Brothers!

Just as it was in Egypt and Yemen, Hans Welser knew that the Cold War was playing out in the trade union halls of places like Ghana as much, if not more so, as in the back-alleys of Berlin. As the British and French dismantled their colonial positions across Africa, the Soviets, Chinese, and even the Cubans hoped to move in, rendering swathes of the continent a battleground for influence and ideology. Some saw it as a second scramble for Africa, although leaders within the many newly independent countries could happily resort to dirty tricks of their own.

Welser therefore found himself increasingly frustrated when the grey suits in the Commonwealth Relations Office refused permission for his team to wage operations. They offered stubborn resistance, even obstinacy, thwarting not just his but also wider MI6 covert operations. To Welser, it bordered on sabotage. And not just in Africa. In India, for example, a huge sphere of Cold War competition, Commonwealth officials pushed back on maddeningly familiar grounds: the country was simply too important diplomatically, economically, and strategically for black propaganda to be worth the risk.[1]

In place of fakes and forgeries, grey propaganda dominated. A pallid substitute, Welser thought, lacking teeth. In sub-Saharan Africa, where fault lines spanned radical nationalism, Cold War non-alignment, and control over huge mineral wealth in places like Congo, much of this grey propaganda revolved around Leslie Sheridan's side of things: getting books into the continent. It rested on discreet deals with publishers; one IRD man had already encouraged a disillusioned Nigerian Communist to write a book warning Africans of the dangers of Communism, which was duly published by friends at Allen & Unwin and then widely translated.

As the arrangement gradually moved to a more formal and commercial footing, Sheridan's Ampersand, and thus the IRD, paid publishing costs on books that no self-respecting commercial house would touch.[2] Occasionally, it worked the other way around, with Allen & Unwin publishing Ampersand books—at no risk to themselves, of course.[3]

Sheridan complemented this with other schemes. One involved working with a particularly remarkable IRD woman based in Central Africa—and someone providing another curious link between the IRD and the magnificent Petworth House in West Sussex.

Elizabeth Wyndham was adopted by the aristocratic Wyndham family as a baby–becoming a cousin to John Wyndham, the man who would end up as Macmillan's private secretary—and grew up at Petworth. She was extremely intelligent, a gifted pianist, and multilingual. She was well-educated to a bizarre degree: her eccentric adopted mother insisted she learnt to do everything possible using her toes, lest she lose an arm! Elizabeth broke codes at Bletchley Park during the war, presumably with her hands, as had Pamela Wyndham-Quin, who would become her cousin-in-law shortly afterwards. She then worked in Rome, living briefly with Ann Elwell (then of MI5) and the pair became great friends. Elizabeth followed Elwell into the IRD in 1955, where she specialized in Africa but also worked closely with Welser on a programme feeding material to influential contacts overseas. She had been posted to Khartoum, where her professional achievements seemed destined to be overshadowed by more personal exploits with local men; she was famously beautiful, a beauty that felt even more enigmatic and glamorous during a brief period where she kept a cheetah as a pet. And she served in Leopoldville and Bamako, where she impressed local ambassadors with her propaganda work—and her bravery; on one occasion while driving to Mali from Congo she was briefly kidnapped and beaten by guerrilla fighters, but she somehow intimidated them to such an extent that they eventually let her go.[4]

Sheridan had weighed up a possibility: could she, whilst journeying through the equatorial republics—preferably avoiding guerrillas this time—find possible outlets for anti-Communist leaflets to be distributed to African pilgrims on their way to Mecca? He was keen, but thought it wrong to target them on their way *to* Mecca; it would be bad sport to introduce what he called political bias into a holy occasion.[5] Best to wait for the way back.

With a growing track record of such schemes and now armed with a more weighty publishing business, Sheridan seemed to be making inroads at last.

Leslie Sheridan died suddenly in January 1964. He died inside the very same flat where Welser and Margaret had once tried to make a life together. Kit Barclay, the boss, was taken aback. ‘We have all been very distressed by the death of Sheridan’, he said. ‘He was only seriously ill for a comparatively short time.’[6]

He was not old by any stretch, merely in his mid-sixties. They had not been married long and had got together in the strangest of circumstances, but the death notice described him solemnly as the ‘dearly loved husband of Margaret’.[7] An obituary by an anonymous friend claimed he had ‘carved out for himself a new career in the difficult field of public relations, and later in an advisory capacity to the Foreign Office’. He was a professional propagandist ‘in a crowd of amateurs, gifted perhaps but certainly scatterbrained’. It spoke of Sheridan’s memoirs unwritten. ‘Fascinating reading’, although no one would ever know.[8]

At the time of Sheridan’s death, Ampersand had a balance of just £28; the profit made afterwards was nil. His office was emptied out in no time and let to another tenant; Ampersand restructured as best it could. ‘Maybe we can do better next year’, his old business partner muttered, shrugging off the loss.[9]

Whatever feelings Welser may have had about his former friend’s untimely death, he stayed focused on the mission. His attentions were now directed towards Kwame Nkrumah, the once wildly popular and charismatic Ghanaian leader who had led his country to independence in 1960. Now styling himself *Osagyefo* (roughly translated as redeemer but ridiculed by young American diplomats as ‘old soggy shoes’ behind his back)[10] and building a cult of the personality, his brand of pan-African nationalism—pushing for continental unity along political, economic, and military lines—and socialism, combined with increasingly dictatorial tendencies, worried the British. Even a royal visit, during which Nkrumah famously danced with the Queen, who privately found him ‘naïve and vainglorious’, had done little to halt his march away from London’s orbit.[11]

British intelligence now thought him a Trojan horse allowing the Communists into West Africa. The Lenin Peace Prize he had accepted in 1962 foreboded, in Rayner's words, 'a "forward" policy of subversion in other African countries'.[12] Soviet intelligence officers soon appeared in the embassy in Accra, offering advice and bringing forged documents of their own, clumsy but plausible enough, suggesting that the CIA wanted him ousted. The documents may have been false, but the underlying message was true: the CIA was covertly funnelling cash to his political opponents.[13] These forgeries were another layer of the tapestry, another nudge to 'prove' Nkrumah's suspicious. But when Nkrumah survived an assassination attempt at the start of 1964, the Soviet ambassador there spread a rumour that British intelligence was behind it.[14]

Paranoid, corrupt, and increasingly drunk on power, Nkrumah's own propaganda seemed to be playing well among certain audiences; Ghana's intelligence service was cultivating contacts as far away as Uganda, on the other side of the continent, where President Milton Obote repeated his lines about Western plots.[15] Elsewhere, the Bureau for African Affairs, a pan-African institution operating outside of Nkrumah's orthodox Foreign Office, ran controversial missions supporting radical opposition groups inside independent African states both by hosting them within Ghana as refugees and by sending agents across borders to infiltrate those same states.[16]

Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee, its most senior assessment body, paid unusually close attention and rattled off a long list of African states at risk of Ghanaian subversion: Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon, Niger, Ivory Coast…[17] Plenty of these states agreed. Nigeria was adamant that Ghana had helped plotters attempt to overthrow its government in 1962; both Nigeria and the Ivory Coast blamed Nkrumah for sponsoring a coup in neighbouring Togo, in which the president was assassinated, at the start of 1963.[18] The UK and US increasingly worried about the growing role of China, seeing it almost as a puppeteer as more arms and training arrived.[19] The puppeteer image may have been alarmist but Nkrumah *had* privately told the Chinese foreign minister in January 1964 that he had organized a recent revolution in Zanzibar and that he agreed with the

Chinese that peace had to be brought about by war and not by 'begging other countries to be reasonable'.[20]

For all these reasons, the IRD designated Ghana the most dangerously subversive country in sub-Saharan Africa.[21] Nkrumah—his arrogance, his embrace of the Communists, his attempts to further undermine waning British interests—simply had to be stopped. Welser again and again asked to wage a campaign against him. Again and again, the Commonwealth Relations Office, backed by MI5, said no. They were wary of what they saw as underhand interference with their own work.[22]

In May 1964, Welser tried again. He wanted to draw on highly classified material to publicly expose Nkrumah's activities by using a phantom nationalist group called the Freedom for Africa Movement. Exposure, he hoped, would disrupt Ghanaian subversion, disturb links with the Soviets, and undermine support for Nkrumah himself.

Welser had to go covert, not least because the Ghanaian press was increasingly controlled by radicals who instituted a tight system of obstacles.[23] But he faced familiar problems. First, the intelligence had not been cleared for use, even when laundered through a fake group. Second, the Commonwealth Relations Office again refused. Welser turned to Rayner. Did he have any usable dirt on Nkrumah they could deploy? And how could they get authorization?

The best Rayner could offer was a line or two on the Ghanaian newspaper, *Spark*, which had recently become the primary platform to promote 'Nkrumaism'.[24] It was not much and presented merely 'a more superficial aspect of Ghanaian subversion', but it was better than nothing. 'Enough for a first shot.'[25]

To overcome the second problem, Welser this time tried to bypass the Commonwealth Relations Office altogether. Fortunately, he had an ally in the cabinet secretary. Burke Trend was a John Le Carré-reading quiet enthusiast for secret operations, and a supporter of the IRD. He asked what they were working on to counter Ghanaian subversion. John Ure, of its Africa Section, happily obliged.

Ure was a natural fit for this sort of work. As a young man, he had worked in the publishing industry and had hoped to make a career of it before the pull of the Foreign Office changed his ambitions. He had already played poker games with the composer Dmitri Shostakovich during a stint

in Moscow and been rescued from an angry mob setting fire to the embassy during a subsequent posting to the Democratic Republic of Congo.[26] From there, he found his way to the IRD, a place where writing could flourish—but he remained a keen adventurer and still found time to publish biographies of famous explorers and vivid accounts of his own travels mixing diplomacy with adventure. His current work, he told proudly Trend, was a fake.

Welser and Rayner were surprised and delighted in equal measure when the Prime Minister himself, Alec Douglas-Home, instructed them to 'get on with this'.[27] With chests swelled, they wielded his intervention like a sword slicing through the fluorescent-lit trenches of bureaucracy.

Just weeks later, in June, leaflets from a mysterious group arrived in the post-boxes of influential Ghanaians, attacking the subversive activities of *Spark*, and of its editor, Kofi Batsa.[28] 'Loyal African Brothers!', it thundered, 'the great visionary' Nkrumah had permitted a newspaper which sought to 'destroy' the very values of African unity he promoted. As for Kofi Batsa, he was a 'well-known communist and closely allied to the Chinese.'

'BROTHERS! AFRICAN UNITY IS IN DANGER FROM SUCH TRAITORS TO THE CAUSE AS THIS BATSA KOFI AND HIS PAPER "THE SPARK"!!'[29]

To be fair, *Spark* did have form in laundering Soviet disinformation.[30] It had also accused the CIA of being behind an 'unscrupulous forgery' of a document about revolution in Africa, supposedly emanating from Albania.[31]

Welser had been using the Freedom for Africa Movement, supposedly heralding from some deliberately unspecified part Francophone Africa, in the battle for post-imperial influence since late 1960. It was his weapon of choice.

The Brothers, as they became known, fascinated him and Rayner. They blurred the real and unreal; through them, and other phantom groups, they could bring things into being that might not otherwise exist; they breathed words into people. Their documents may have been fake, but the emotions on which they drew and which they induced in their readers were real. They half-interpreted and half-fashioned the world—an image of a romantic poet in which Rayner, in particular, would have revelled.

Each leaflet began with the same rallying cry: ‘Loyal African Brothers!’ Each consisted of material derived from a mix of published and secret sources designed to expose Soviet and Chinese encroachment into Africa. Each drew on local issues in an attempt to appeal to local readers.[32] As Welser put it, the aim was to ‘smear certain Africans who are known to be in Communist pay’.[33] Ad hominem attacks, blurred with salacious rumourmongering, made in what Ure called ‘semi-educated prose’, was the order of the day. It supposedly appealed to ‘the half baked intelligentsia’ because it drew, another colleague sneered, on ‘the hideous jargon which Marxist polemics have made fashionable’.[34] Each was, according to Rayner, ‘roneoed and somewhat scruffy’ and printed ‘on sheets of absorbent duplicating paper, of poorish quality, and the largest size most generally used locally.’[35] The wartime Master Whisperer was in his element, specializing both in concocting rumours and visual design. Unfortunately, the target was quite different from the Nazis and Italian Fascists—and Rayner’s team lacked anywhere near the same level of knowledge.

In both style and form, the Brothers mimicked local debates about how, post-independence, to project a unique African identity free from Western neo-colonial influence. Welser and Rayner, of course, ran with this but turned it on its head: the neo-colonial risks actually came from the Soviets and Chinese.[36] MI6 posted each batch of leaflets from multiple countries to give the impression that the Brothers had branches all over the continent.[37] This would, they hoped, provide encouragement and the perception of grassroots authenticity to the masses.

TOP SECRET

LOY AL AFRICAN BROTHERS!

To all our comrades who still struggle to win the right to true independance and to consecrate themselves to the realisation of our noble aspirations, our best fraternel salutation!

Those among our brothers who have already acceded to independance know that the way towards true self-determination is not easy for us. It is sown with many obstacles, placed on our path by the traitors and perfidious who work for the imperialist-colonialist ennemy.

BROTHERS! We all know that the future of Africa depends on the formation of our cadres, and thatamong the youth of today are our leaders of tomorrow. It is for us a great avantage to benefit from the experiences of the developped countries to train and educate our youth, but we are learning more and more that the so-called "unselfish friend ship for the african peoples", claimed by the countries of the communist east-europeen, does not exist.

To the contrary, the influence from these countris is a veritable danger on the road to african independance and unity. Inspite of their seducing words, the raciste néo-imperialistes from the countries of the communist East are ~~not more unselfish~~ just as ~~than~~ the old imperialist-colonisers, and as soon as we wrest our freedom from the occidentals, so immediately do the communist imperialists insinuate themselves among us in order to take their place.

We quote, as exemple of the kind of trickery they employ, the "International Union of Students", communist organisation which pretends to represent the opinions of youth of the whole world. This so-called "international" union had projects to hold its 8the Congres in an independant african country, at Lagos in Nigéria, where some of its leaders believed that such a great propaganda manifestation would dupe our youth more easily. But the soviet-influenced leaders were afraid that, in the free forum of an independant africain country, they would run the risk of giving to their ennemis in the "socialist camp" - the bellicose chinese - the opportunity to exploit yet more violently the sino-sovietic quarrel, and their fear that their veritable caracter would thus be unmasked in the eyes of the students and peoples of Africa and the world, forced them to retire again to their own territories of the soviet east-europe, their only safe place.

Now we learn that the Congres of this "International Union of Students" will take place in november, in the town of SOFIA in Bulgarie!

LOYAL AND DEAR BRO THERS! Is it possible that these merchants of subversion imagine that we could have forgotten the terrible and frightening photographs which we have seen in our presse two years ago, photographs of african students who returned home from this same town of SOFIA enveloped in blood-soaked bandages as a result of horrible wounds they had suffered at the hands of the bulgarian autorities ????

The "crime" which merited such a dreadful and brutal punishment was

TOP SECRET

Figure 3. Loyal African Brothers leaflet, attached to Rayner (OP 33645/1), 12 Nov. 64, FCO 168/1407, The National Archives, UK.

From the very outset, the Brothers were trouble; they had rather stumbled into life. Ronnie Burroughs, the diplomat overseeing Foreign Office relations with MI6 and GCHQ, had warned Welser about deniability. All else was secondary. Burroughs had shown little patience with Welser's more reckless designs, having pushed back against some of his earlier work as being unconvincing and counterproductive, foolish even. He had laid down his position early, refusing to authorize the very first Brothers operation unless Welser removed a particularly careless phrase. The offending line referenced the infamous forged British cabinet document that had surfaced in Ghana back in 1960 and was suspiciously similar to something in a recent *Daily Telegraph* article, which, inevitably, Welser's team had also manufactured.[38]

Other early drafts were similarly savaged as lacking subtlety, the language unconvincing and out of touch.[39] Welser promised that Michael Webber, the man actually writing them, was 'reading African papers and gradually learning the language'.[40] It was all very underwhelming, a far cry from the precision and teams of devoted experts, including émigrés from the target communities themselves, who had conducted this activity alongside Rayner during the war.

The very first leaflet had begun, 'Greeting to you and all our heroic friends', before warning about the dangers of 'exchanging one form of slavery for another'. It ended, 'we must make certain that everyone knows the snakes and traitors working in our midst. Do not be misled by their fine words. They are paid by the new imperialists who want African riches but not African freedom'.[41] And with that, the Brothers were born. Or rather released into the imagination.

Other operations followed in quick succession with mixed results. One failed to reach its destination,[42] another was intercepted by the Rhodesian intelligence services who, paranoid as ever, assumed it was a Communist conspiracy to undermine white minority rule—much to Welser's derision.[43] 'At any rate it speaks for the quality of our productions,' he mocked, 'even if the Rhodesian Security Service is not excessively bright.'[44] Other operations allowed him to point to the occasional victory, however tenuous.

He had claimed success back in 1962, when a Brothers leaflet accusing the Soviet ambassador to Leopoldville of espionage supposedly led to his being reprimanded by the Congolese government.[45] Welser had little proof, but certainty was a luxury rarely afforded to men in his line of work; he had to take the wins, real or imagined, where he could.

Now, in June 1964, the Prime Minister had personally intervened and Welser felt the team's work was firmly on the Whitehall map. Alec Douglas-Home was an understated but steely supporter of covert operations, once lamenting the loss of what he euphemistically called 'old-fashioned diplomacy'.[46] He promptly threw his weight behind Welser: 'Can we not leak some detailed facts about Nkrumah's actions, through which channels could not be brought to us?'[47]

British prime ministerial intervention overrode any remaining objections. Hot on the heels of the Brothers' attack on *Spark*, the Commonwealth Relations Office finally authorized another. This time an ostensibly anonymous group of patriotic Ghanaians attacked one of Nkrumah's advisers as being a Marxist loyal only to the Soviet Union. Next, Welser used this same anonymous group to complement the work of the Brothers by again attacking Kofi Batsa, editor of *Spark*.[48] The aim of both was to expose Soviet subversion and disrupt its encroachment.

Despite Douglas-Home's encouragement, Welser and Rayner stopped short of attacking Nkrumah directly. They figured that doing so would imply that nationalism had failed and would turn off potential readers; they preferred to portray him as sincere but flawed, manipulated by the dastardly Communists.[49] There were echoes of wartime practice here when, under Sefton Delmer's leadership, Welser, Rayner, and the rest of them appealed to the patriotic but misled. The Americans were unimpressed, complaining that British countersubversion was too soft in treating Nkrumah as an 'erring child rather than a political menace'.[50]

Still, *Spark* retaliated. Its editorials accused 'plotting exiles and others of circulating leaflets, rumours and lies about members of the Party'. Nkrumah took up the theme himself, condemning 'those with wicked intentions who, even among us, are writing and circulating anonymous letters and documents with threats and calumny to other people'. He threatened, in a speech broadcast nationally, 'whoever they are, and wherever they may be,

I would like them to know that we know who they are and where they are. We will not tolerate subversion and sabotage.'[51]

Back in London, Welser and Rayner knew their handiwork was hitting the mark. They escalated, at the request of the Commonwealth Relations Office,[52] by hitting Nkrumah himself. A third anonymous leaflet warned 'Nkrumah to shake off once and for all the foreign stranglehold on the country, or risk losing it all.'[53] 'You, Kwame Nkrumah', it rallied, 'have become a FEEBLE MINDED and NON-AFRICAN weakling who swallows the duplicity and of [*sic*] the new recolonizers whole, and you MUST BOW TO THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE TELLING YOU THE TRUTH'. It ended with a threat:

> KWAME NKRUMAH, in spite of the oppression, we are GROWING IN NUMBER and MASSING to put all our hands on the deck to deal a DEADLY BLOW to crush the highly criminal tendencies of the devilish oppressors from outside and those of our fellow-countrymen who are helping the new 'scientific socialist' recolonizers to enforce their rule of tyranny.[54]

'No reactions so far noted.'[55]

Except for one. The British high commission reported some of these anti-Nkrumah leaflets to London, unaware of their provenance.[56] It was awkward for Rayner but at least the British hand was well hidden.

These attacks, whether through the Brothers or anonymous patriots, rang out against the backdrop of a steady beat of British newspaper propaganda also designed to expose and disrupt Soviet and Chinese activity and, by extension, protect London's dwindling influence.

Welser's team planted stories in Lion Features Service, based in Munich, and the *National Guardsman*'s Africa edition. Originally set up as a newspaper produced in Vienna by a group of Hungarian émigrés, the new African edition was, in theory at least, picked up by the African press and served as a useful channel to inform African leaders about the dangers of Communism.[57] The pace was relentless, but the political content was low. Articles supplied by Welser and Rayner included headlines such as 'Khrushchev Rebuffs Africans' and 'Chinese Subversion Worries African Leaders', but they were outnumbered by general-interest material typified by an article headlined 'Edible Spaceships?'[58]

Details may have been murky and rumours thick, but Welser and Rayner knew they had competition: the CIA had also been targeting Nkrumah. The editor of the CIA-funded literary magazine, *Encounter*, had already travelled around Africa and published a book highly critical of Nkrumah, at one point drawing comparison to Hitler and Stalin. It received positive reviews, including by one American writer who just happened to work for another CIA-funded magazine, this time in Uganda. By 1964, the Americans were talking of 'psychological warfare' to discredit him.[59] Nkrumah privately told the Chinese that 'the United States engages in propaganda and subversion to force him to change. If you do not follow the United States, they will do you in.'

'The Central Intelligence Agency carries out assassinations.'[60]

It was not for nothing that Nkrumah later sighed, 'I've turned my back on the Western press.'[61] He still read it though,[62] thus giving Welser a means of reaching—and influencing—him.

In October 1964, Kit Barclay asked Welser to accompany him on a trip to Washington, DC. It offered a chance to visit the competition and to showcase their peculiar craft along the corridors of American power. Barclay listened delighted as CIA experts 'paid a handsome tribute' to their work, whilst senior United States Information Agency officials made 'extensive use of it'. He may have briefly enjoyed prime ministerial backing but, like Welser, Barclay felt under pressure. He sucked in his pride and awkwardly asked his hosts to put all this in writing so that he could brandish it to those dismissive colleagues circling back home. When the Americans then asked to send one of their own to London, a propagandist on secondment to the IRD, Barclay could no longer suppress his grin.[63] This was a compliment, but, more than that, it was a chance to gain insight behind the locked door of American covert activities (something that had been a key concern since the start of the Cold War).[64] He and Welser returned to London bolstered with a renewed sense of superiority in the unorthodox arts of fakes and forgeries.

For all the backslapping, transatlantic tension hung in the air. The so-called special relationship was, after all, more pragmatic than the romantics suggest, punctuated by disagreements over tactics and priorities.[65] The British, with the simmering grievance of a superpower supplanted, sought constant reassurance about US plans which, they had long feared, drifted

towards a recklessness that undercut British interests.[66] In return, the Americans grew frustrated with British timidity. In Washington, Welser had warned the CIA about the dangers of using propaganda to stimulate insurrections behind the Iron Curtain, especially when doing so would provoke the Soviets to violently crush them. The West, he explained, would look impotent at best, complicit at worst.

'A little wet'. The CIA dismissed Welser's worrying.

Another Hungarian revolt was not in the West's interests, Welser shot back. Prudence was not timidity. The CIA took the point, but it was rare for Welser to be called out as timorous. Barclay came away thinking that the CIA was far more ideological than his own team. Given Welser's rabidly anti-Communist streak, this was saying something.[67]

At the same time, Nkrumah pursued machinations of his own. He developed propaganda machinery to reach every part of the continent, including newspapers, radio, and pamphlets, and stepped up the training of African freedom fighters.[68] His government covertly sponsored *The African Review*, a supposedly independent magazine covering cultural affairs, book reviews, and socialist politics. Run by an African American novelist, Julian Mayfield, and once boasting Maya Angelou as features editor, the magazine championed African nationalism and exposed racism in the US.

These were standard tactics, familiar to the likes of Welser and Rayner. In fact, another magazine also called *African Review* competed with Nkrumah's vehicle. This also covered African nationalism, albeit from a very different perspective. Operated covertly by the IRD, the publication shed its diplomatic restraint by October 1965—around the time Nkrumah released his book on 'neo-colonialism'. With his Commonwealth membership now less of a limiting factor, the magazine began openly targeting Nkrumah with personal attacks.[69]

With the active support of their Prime Minister, Welser and Rayner worked closely with colleagues on their Africa Section, like John Ure, and those running the *African Review*. Their aim, as Ure unequivocally spelt it out, was 'contributing to the creation of an atmosphere in which Nkrumah could be overthrown and replaced by a more Western-orientated government'.[70]

They did not yet know it, but that day would come—and when it did, Welser's boss would claim his team had made 'a useful contribution' to

Nkrumah’s downfall.[71] In the meantime, and as they waited, the smoke created by cumulative propaganda operations began to blow back towards London.

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9

Publicizing the Tanzanian ‘Plot’

Oscar Kambona’s mind was racing as he abandoned his sick leave to fly back to Dar es Salaam. The Tanzanian foreign minister, a man whose youth —he was still only in his mid-thirties—belied scars from the long campaign for independence from British rule, seemed on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

A recent army mutiny in Tanzania still troubled him; it had forced the president into hiding and was followed by the humiliation of asking their former colonial masters to help rescue the government. The causes of this collective insubordination were as contested and exploited as ever: Western voices portrayed the mutineers as pawns in a Cold War conspiracy to destabilize East Africa; local politicians conspiratorially wondered whether expatriate military officers had deliberately provoked the soldiers so as to provide the UK with a fig leaf to reimpose its authority; the rank-and-file soldiers—often overlooked—listed a host of grievances from poor pay to lack of promotion.[1] Kambona sat in the middle of it all. Meanwhile, a violent revolution in nearby Zanzibar had brought Soviet agents into the region and, like the mutiny, also exacerbated fears of the Cold War coming to the warm waters of East Africa.[2] Although his own country had since amalgamated with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania, and continued to walk the tightrope of Cold War non-alignment, both events gnawed way at Kambona as he recuperated in the cool, misty, foothills in the north of the country.

He felt ruffled as he consulted with the president, Julius Nyerere, about troubling letters they had just seen.

‘Let’s handle this in an African way’, Nyerere had said. ‘Oscar, do you remember what you did as a schoolboy when a bully threatened you?’

‘I shouted as loudly as I could.’[3]

Now, all of a sudden, Kambona was back in the capital shouting loudly at a hastily convened press conference.

‘Some of the Western Powers, in collusion with the Government of Portugal, are preparing to use subversion and threats towards the United Republic of Tanzania and preparing the Government of Portugal to attack this country.’ These powers, he continued dramatically, were spreading disinformation to justify the attack, ‘fabricating the story that Tanzania had become a centre of subversion’.[4]

As abruptly as he had emerged, Kambona retreated back to his sick leave in the forests, leaving speculation to fill the vacuum.

It was early November 1964 and, with help from Kambona, journalists at the local *Nationalist* newspaper now published the scoop of a lifetime: documentary proof of the foreign plot. One intercepted letter, supposedly from the US embassy in Leopoldville to the Congolese foreign minister, promised American support for plans to bomb strategic points in Tanzania being used by the Chinese, and, more than this, that the State Department was considering overthrowing the government. A second letter, seemingly from the French embassy in Leopoldville confirmed that Tanzania was a base for subversion against Congo and Mozambique. A third revealed mercenary plans to organize a coup in Tanzania. The dramatic triple exposé, confirming and closely following Kambona’s announcement, had the desired effect: a wave of virulent anti-American editorials, confiscation of British farms, and protests across the country against foreign aid organizations tarred as fifth columnists.[5]

The *Nationalist* had form here. Not only had it acted as an outlet for Soviet disinformation,[6] but earlier in the year it had launched its own propaganda campaign against the UK, falsely accusing the Foreign Office of instigating the army mutiny and of wanting ‘to manipulate President Nyerere as if he were a marionette’. Some inside Tanzania called the anti-British propaganda a smokescreen to obscure domestic problems, others called it a brilliant act of insulation.[7] All knew that locals were perfectly capable of whipping up propaganda of their own.

The British took it seriously. London's once privileged post-imperial position providing intelligence and security assistance to Tanzania had been supplanted, first by Israel and then, from 1964, by a consortium of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, the Soviets, China, and, under pressure to step in as British influence declined, Canada.[8] It was imperative for London to stem the tide, but the team would struggle without good access to the intelligence and security elite.

Kambona and Nyerere also took the letters seriously. Portuguese intelligence *had* been waging a propaganda campaign claiming that Tanzania was becoming a base for subversion and *had* been targeting Kambona, smearing him as pro-Communist. This was because Tanzania was supporting rebels fighting for the liberation of neighbouring Mozambique from Portuguese rule. Meanwhile, Tanzania *was* also supporting rebels in eastern Congo with supplies, including weapons from China, in a move pitting Nyerere against the United States which was supporting the other side in the civil war.[9]

Even within this febrile, epistemologically fragile, climate, Western diplomats were furious that such sloppy—if worryingly well-informed—forgeries could be given such credence. They frantically tried to complain to the Tanzanian government but could not get hold of anybody. Kambona had returned north under the pretence of convalescence; his close friend, Nyerere, was away on holiday at Lake Manyara in northern Tanzania. And so, they complained to each other. The French ambassador pointed out stylistic solecisms and grammatical howlers. This may have been enough to prove that 'no self-respecting Frenchman could have written it', but local anger was mounting.[10]

As word reached the Foreign Office in London, Leslie Glass put Welser on the case. Glass knew that newly independent governments were deeply suspicious of Western plots and were obvious targets of Soviet attempts to convince them that such plots existed. Paranoia could easily be weaponized. And so, he asked Welser to prepare an anonymous briefing highlighting famous Communist forgeries to be shared with governments such as Tanzania.[11]

Politics overtook facts. Pretty much everyone on the ground, including Egyptian and Soviet diplomats, knew that the documents were bogus. Even Nyerere, who had finally returned from holiday, privately admitted to

having doubts. It did not matter; the plot was headline news. As Welser and Rayner pondered their response, the Tanzanian vice president announced a mass rally.[12]

Within days, ministers, members of the armed forces, and the police led a huge march—a column half a mile long—through the streets of the capital. Banner-waving citizens hurled abuse at the US embassy as they filed past. Nyerere then delivered an electric and emotional speech to some 20,000 people. The president had once allegedly received money from British intelligence, wittingly or otherwise,[13] but had since placed great weight on non-alignment and the need to avoid both Cold War politics and British neo-colonialism.[14] He now denounced Western governments and refused to kill the story; but he did appeal for calm and challenged the Americans to prove the whole thing was a forgery.

'My brothers', he shouted, 'we are not gods. We are human beings. We have been threatened too much in the past. What should we have done?'[15]

The damage spread internationally. Algeria, Egypt, and Indonesia—each waging their own battles of subversion and countersubversion, each with their own histories unforgotten—happily added their voices against the supposed Western plot. More protest rallies surged across Tanzania; Europeans stranded by circumstance were swept up in the tide, subject to stonings, detentions, and arbitrary deportations.[16]

Rayner kicked into action, working closely with Colin MacLaren, once head of the IRD's Africa Section and now a field officer based in Nairobi. Partly under MacLaren's influence, local journalists belatedly acknowledged doubts over authenticity. One conceded that 'it is highly improbable that sinister James Bond activities would be recorded in language having the semblance of diplomatic French'. Adopting a more direct approach, MacLaren managed to publish an article himself in the *East African Standard* under the byline of 'special correspondent'.[17] MI6 now had its own, disavowed, presence in Tanzania for the first time too.[18] Rayner watched on, pleased that the defence was picking up pace.

Behind the scenes, according to an American diplomat in Zanzibar, a 'document-authentication expert proved to the Tanzanians that the documents were crude forgeries'.[19] And so finally, on 9 December, almost a month exactly after Kambona's dramatic flight, Nyerere as good as

admitted they were fake. It may have been a half-hearted admission and one buried deep within a wider, more bombastic, Independence Day address, but the president insisted that would now be the end of it.[20]

The Americans thought 'Kambona's and Nyerere's readiness to believe the worst of the United States had made them look foolish and must have been embarrassing to Nyerere.'[21] The origin of the letters remains shrouded in mystery; some have claimed it was the Czechoslovaks, others the Portuguese, or even the Americans in an attempt to distract from their own operations in eastern Congo, but the evidence is ambiguous.[22]

Despite, or perhaps because of, Nyerere's words, it was not the end of it, for forgeries, entirely independent of truth, can take on a life of their own. The damage had been done. The British high commissioner, Robert Fowler, summed up the sorry affair with a Swahili proverb: *lililoandikwa halifutki*, or what is written cannot be expunged. The forgeries had damaged the Western position by implanting suspicions about many countries, leading to a chaotic nationwide security clampdown, and whipping up general hysteria. Months later, Fowler reported that Tanzania was still suffering a 'post-plot neurosis or spy-fever'.[23]

Welser wanted Nyerere's 'almost admission', as he sardonically put it, publicized as widely as possible.[24]

Tommy Tucker came up with a bizarre plan. Still under 40 years of age but with plenty of experience behind him, Tucker had served in the IRD's editorial department for a decade and was now its head. Shrewd and highly skilled, he oversaw a large team of around forty-five, many of whom, like himself, came from journalistic backgrounds, and had taken over much of Sheridan's work. Instead of discreetly slipping confidential briefings about forgeries to other governments, why not help a journalist write a bestselling book all about diplomatic forgeries? This, he hoped, would put the Tanzania debacle in the wider context, exposing it for what it was: the latest in a long line of forgeries.

This was Tucker's field of expertise: turning material into whatever format would be most acceptable to the target. Perhaps this book could operate under the classic IRD arrangement, known as see-safe, whereby he would remove any risk to the publisher by suggesting the name of an author, sometimes providing material, and then buying up however many thousands of copies to ensure the publisher made a profit.[25] And he had just

the man in mind: Kenneth Rose, the snobbish well-informed writer of the *Sunday Telegraph*'s society gossip column who moved in royal circles. He was, after all, a man experienced in handling off-the-record titbits.

Welser met Rose in May 1965 and discreetly handed over a bundle of material. Although the idea was not his, Welser seemed on board but shortly afterwards started to worry. 'What about our own forgeries?' Should they be included? Perhaps Rose had cheekily asked or perhaps Welser was belatedly thinking it through a bit more seriously.

'I feel', Welser suggested, 'that we should carefully select those of our forgeries which have had a considerable impact and which were denounced as fakes by the other side.' It would look too suspicious if the book did not include them, and the Soviets had probably guessed that the British were behind most of them anyway. 'We will then have to think how we present the material to Mr Rose and what gloss we put on it.' Perhaps, he wondered, they could be presented as 'mystery documents' to show the 'Communists do not seem to have had it all their own way'.

And what about the 'possible enemy reaction'? The Soviets might counter with damning evidence about British forgeries or they might reaffirm the genuineness of documents which the IRD had previously managed to label as forgeries, reopening old controversies.[26]

Rayner was horrified. He complained 'we would risk losing more than we could possibly gain by gratuitously assisting publicity for forgeries. If we must do this it seems to me that we must certainly include some of our own, which I would otherwise much rather not do.' The whole thing would be 'asking for counter-propaganda which it might be difficult to answer'.[27]

'I do not follow the argument', agreed John Ure equally perplexed. 'Our own forgeries are, by definition, damaging to our enemies rather than to ourselves'.[28]

'This is getting tricky'. Kit Barclay murmured, his mind churning through the possibilities of how it might play out.[29]

Still, they ploughed on. Ure feared that pulling out now would leave 'some very tricky explaining to do to Mr Rose',[30] whilst Peter Joy had already handed over another batch of material, including the Tanzania forgeries.[31]

In mid-June, Rose attended one of those typical establishment parties where high society's movers and shakers gathered and where he could quietly pocket enough titbits to keep his column plump and piquant for weeks. This one was hosted by a diplomat in the Foreign Office's Africa department, and Rose soon found himself making small talk with John Jackson, the deputy head of the IRD. Over a drink or three, Rose indiscreetly let slip that he was 'doing something' for the IRD on forgeries. He proceeded to namedrop various people who probably did not want to be namedropped before fishing for information on one Hans Welser. Jackson was alarmed enough to scuttle off to Barclay, muttering that Rose was 'something of a gossip' who ought to be reminded about the value of discretion.[32]

'I don't like this much', Barclay exclaimed, and began to panic.[33]

Welser returned from holiday to find that Barclay had called the whole thing off. Welser ignored his own hand in the affair and claimed, quite disingenuously, to be 'rather relieved', saying it had been an ill-thought-through endeavour in the first place. It took another two weeks for Tucker to track down the elusive Rose, who was rather annoyed at being unceremoniously dropped.[34] Still, it was relief all around, given that Rose was, as another IRD colleague put it, 'a potentially embarrassing contact'.[35]

At the very same time, the Soviets did accuse British and American intelligence of producing a forgery of their own. The *Penkovsky Papers*, a book about the eponymous Soviet intelligence officer who had since been executed for spying for the West and containing secrets perhaps spilled in Welser's old apartment building, was soon to be published in the US and UK—and the Kremlin's ambassador in Washington was furious.

'They are a crude forgery concocted in the spirit of the worst time of the "cold war"', he complained. 'There is attributed to Penkovsky a whole collection of stereotyped, slanderous fabrications about the Soviet Union, its policy and Soviet leaders.' It was all a 'monstrous lie'. The Americans shot back that it was no forgery—but quietly conceded that the CIA had not objected to publication.[36] They did not admit, of course, that the book was prepared and written by agency assets drawing on genuine case material. The publisher had no idea.[37]

Against this backdrop, Welser and the team did not give up on their idea of a book on Soviet forgeries. The following year, they considered assisting

Sefton Delmer, an altogether more reliable partner than Kenneth Rose, with a book on, in their words, ‘disinformation’. Delmer had already published two volumes of an autobiography about propaganda in the Second World War and would have been a highly credible author of a book about more recent dirty tricks. Any awkwardness this time around was much more likely to come from Rayner, given that Delmer had blamed his wartime colleague for his marital breakdown after Rayner’s affair with Isabel. The ageing lothario, now on his third wife but still with an eye for ladies in the workplace, probably sat this one out.[38]

Delmer would have likely been reluctant anyway, regardless of any personal grudge. He claimed to have no itch to get back into the black propaganda game. ‘For I speak no Russian. And not only is an intimate knowledge of the language of the country needed against which a “black” man proposes to operate but of its living conditions and ideology as well.’ Delmer continued, ‘the “black” artist must have for his intended victim that strange quality which we call “empathy” and the Germans call “*Einfühlungsvermögen*”. And I have none of that, alas, for the Russians.’[39]

It was never entirely apparent that Welser or Rayner had empathy for the Russians either. Still, without Rose or Delmer’s help, they did end up publicizing the Tanzanian forgery alongside another forgery, this time from the other side of the world as part of a great pattern of Communist mischief. ‘We should like it to become widely known’, Barclay told colleagues worldwide, ‘that communist countries regularly use forgery as a political weapon.’[40]

The latest Communist forgery had come from North Korea, created with help from Chinese and East German technicians, and targeted South Korea. In a rare admission of fallibility, Welser realized he had seriously underestimated their capabilities.[41] Since 1962, North Korea had counterfeited a bizarrely eclectic range of Western publications, from the *New York Times* to dry British academic journals, and from compendiums of cowboy stories to a Swiss mountaineering magazine. They had sent copies from France or the US, using forged stamps, to South Korean addresses apparently picked at random from outdated telephone directories. The trick was in replacing inner pages with Communist propaganda or even creating pouches hidden inside. One forgery of *The Times* faithfully replicated the original with only the cricket news swapped for Communist

coverage of the fifteenth anniversary of the North Korean regime.[42] It was all very odd, but in Welser's mind it constituted clear evidence of a forgery factory.

Another existed in Czechoslovakia, in the picturesque heart of Prague's old town,[43] and another still in East Germany, this time intent on undermining West Germany and sowing distrust among NATO allies. Welser and the team wanted it all widely known, especially among African audiences susceptible to the Tanzanian forgeries: this is simply what the Communists did; this was the game.[44]

And to an extent, it was—plenty of states were at it. The head of the Stasi's foreign intelligence service, Markus Wolf, later claimed that the

> central focus of our task was not 'lying' or 'deliberately misleading', but a method of disseminating uncomfortable and embarrassing facts. Call it psychological warfare. We did play our share of dirty tricks, but that was not our prime function. We combined true and false information and disseminated it so as to strengthen our policies, weaken Western policies and organisations, and compromise individuals.

If it sounded familiar to Welser and Rayner, perhaps it was. After all, Wolf claimed to have been influenced by the wartime work of none other than Sefton Delmer.[45]

Welser and Rayner sought to expose the Tanzanian forgeries and discredit them by placing them in the context of this wider Communist activity. It was a risky business on at least two counts. First, some of this activity was not dissimilar to their own activities, as the Kenneth Rose saga had awkwardly intimated. Second, it risked overplaying the Soviet hidden hand at the expense of local voices. This, in turn, risked undermining readers' trust in all sources of information, nihilistically generating suspicion and spreading confusion like an epidemic until no one knew what to believe. Locals from Tanzania outwards would assume everybody lied and nothing was real.

Welser and Rayner risked finding themselves in a race to the bottom, but they could not get out now. And at that very moment, Rayner was plotting his next covert operation in what was becoming a dizzying game of plot and counterplot.

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10

The Brothers go to Kenya

As the Tanzanian storm was unfolding, John Rayner had cyclones of his own to summon. The International Union of Students was due to hold its annual congress in Sofia, and he wondered whether the Loyal African Brothers could warn young Africans to stay away. This could, he hoped, expose the International Union of Students as a Soviet front in the eyes of East and West Africans, disrupt and discredit the congress in Sofia, and, if he got the tone just right, could drive a wedge between Communists and black people.

He worked closely with Jean Scott, who had seemingly progressed from being keeper of the typewriters to becoming a writer herself. Together, they played the race card, ominously pointing out that African students would not be safe there given earlier violence at the hands of Bulgarian authorities. They had returned home, as the Brothers graphically put it, 'enveloped in blood-soaked bandages'.[1]

Rayner tried a clever trick, something he had not attempted before. The Brothers angrily criticized the Soviets' defence of the earlier Bulgarian violence on the grounds that the students were '"savage beasts who had only just come out of the darkness of the jungle"!!'[2] Discerning readers will have recognized the reference: this racist justification, supposedly by the Soviets, had actually appeared in a document forged by none other than Rayner's team. He and Welser were building an intertextual, self-referencing, universe of mirrors and masks. From their attic, Jean Scott was pretending to be African nationalists attacking Communists who were actually László Zilahi, sitting just yards away.[3]

For good measure, and demonstrating his spray and pray approach, Welser worked with his wife's Near and Far East News Agency to circulate an article headlined 'Kenyan Students Reported to be Causing Indignation in Bulgaria'.[4]

A quiet word from CIA sources trickled back to Rayner: some chatter in Liberia where a couple of people had been overheard discussing the Brothers' material.[5] It was a meagre, almost laughable return on so much hard work, but Rayner put a brave face on it: 'It is useful to us to know at least some of the leaflets arrived.'[6]

'No reactions so far noted'.[7]

The Soviets played a race card of their own when targeting sub-Saharan Africa. Oleg Kalugin was a rising star in the KGB, then working undercover as a journalist in New York. He later recalled how 'one of our dirty tricks involved a nasty letter-writing campaign against African diplomats at the United Nations'. From the other side of the Atlantic, his method was not dissimilar to that used by Welser and Rayner in Whitehall. 'Our KGB staff, using new typewriters and wearing gloves so as not to leave fingerprints, typed up hundreds of anonymous hate letters and sent them to dozens of African missions. The letters, purportedly from white supremacists as well as average Americans, were filled with virulent racist diatribes.' Exactly as Kalugin intended, African diplomats then publicized these letters as evidence of rampant racism in America. The press reported the story, egged on by undercover KGB officers.[8]

Like Welser and Rayner, the Soviets exploited a genuine weakness. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson knew that the stain of segregation was a Cold War liability and that pictures of white mobs spitting at black schoolchildren in Arkansas would shock and appal African leaders.[9] Kalugin exploited this. 'I lost no sleep over such dirty tricks', he later admitted, 'figuring they were just another weapon in the cold war'.[10]

The opportunistic Soviets used another dirty trick, something even closer to home for Rayner. British intelligence officers on the ground read the latest rant by the Loyal African Brothers rumbling slowly through West Africa with particular interest. It looked familiar—a standard leaflet operation—but it violently attacked the CIA, rather than Russia or China, for neo-imperial meddling in Africa and for bribing politicians.

Rayner was at first confused; the Loyal African Brothers existed only on paper—paper procured by MI6. And yet here they were—or something claiming to be them—echoing back to him with words he did not recognize. For a moment, he felt a loss of control, but, working through the permutations, confusion soon turned to delight. It was a Soviet operation, coopting his own vehicle. With his covert operation threatening to run away from him, he embraced the unpredictable effects of black propaganda. 'It provided us', he explained to a colleague in British intelligence, 'with a different but gratifying evidence of the impact of our leaflets.'[11] His mind turned from the unexpected to the useful. How, in this hall of mirrors where reflections could be sharpened into weapons, could he turn Soviet propaganda which, wittingly or otherwise, had exploited British propaganda back against them? He refused to lose control of something he had created.

Alec Douglas-Home was now out of office. The IRD had lost a high-powered defender of its craft, and many wondered nervously whether the new Labour government would be as supportive. They did not have to wait long when, in December 1964, Patrick Gordon Walker, the new foreign secretary, instructed the team to maintain 'a "black" propaganda potential' and occasionally 'produce "black" material'. He had wartime experience working on BBC broadcasts to Germany and now came up with an idea of his own: could we not, in our output to Africa 'make something of the fact that the Chinese were hardly closer to black in colour than were the whites'? Essentially, the foreign secretary recommended stoking racial divisions.[12] Welser was delighted.[13]

John Ure took up the case. The Chinese, he explained, had tried to use their non-whiteness to suggest a 'degree of "togetherness" with Africans'. The charm offensive had failed, according to Ure, because locals worried that the Chinese would move in, annex parts of towns, and 'use Africa as an outlet for their own surplus population'. The Chinese fulfilled a role not unlike 'that traditionally filled by the Jews in medieval Europe': socially separate, unpopular, but a useful provision of cheap shops and ready credit. Do not worry, Ure assured Welser, 'all these are lines which we have been using judiciously in our output about Africa'.[14]

The pace of their output soon began to take its toll. 'We are already unable to do all we ought to be doing,' Rayner complained to Welser at the start of 1965. On top of the fakes, forgeries, and phantom groups, his team

were writing around ten articles—of about 1,500 words each—for the *Guardsman* every two months, as well as seven to ten stories of 1,000 words for Lion Features every month. Rayner was short of hands. There was at least one vacancy still to fill, and the writers were stretched to breaking point. László Zilahi, once dependable, was showing his age and slowing down. There was Jean Scott, whom colleagues thought was going slightly mad, hunched over hundreds of newspapers every day, an increasingly manic look in her eye. Then there was Mary Stallard-Penoyre, smart, part of the graduate intake, with promise but still inexperienced. Elizabeth Bingham was older, perhaps the wife of a recently retired colonial administrator, who had worked alongside Rayner on propaganda back in Singapore. Joyce Aston was scruffy and overworked, struggling under the weight of writing so much Loyal African Brothers material. Hubert Kós was a rising star, but he was too busy editing to take on more writing; besides, he was a zealous Central and Eastern Europe specialist. Africa was not his area.[15]

It was a tiny team unable to make much difference amid a blizzard of leaflets blowing in from all directions around almost the entire world. The British, Russians, Chinese, and Americans all competed to influence local audiences, whilst those populations produced plenty of deliberate distortions of their own. Residents in places like Kinshasa knew full well that their news was socially constructed and politically conjured, if not downright deceptive, and that there was plenty of what they termed noise flying about.[16] Russia began sponsoring books in Swahili before the British ever did—and dumping them far more cheaply too.[17]

To cut through, each member of Rayner's team had to read reams of open and classified material, conduct research, and sometimes do translations—as well as write it all up in a convincing manner. Rayner protectively insisted that they could not be expected to write any more than eight stories a week; three was more reasonable. He pleaded for more staff. 'The difficulty', he added, 'remains, of course, to find the right sort of people.'[18] Welser, further from the team than Rayner, sat on it;[19] Kit Barclay, the head of the IRD, refused.[20]

In that case, Rayner snapped back, 'if we have to decide to leave some things undone, then it cannot be helped'.[21]

Frustrated, Rayner narrowed his targets to focus on Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, a senior politician and soon to become Kenya's first vice president. Kenya had only become independent in December 1963 and, despite strong connections to the British, was publicly committed to Cold War non-alignment and African socialism. As the Chinese sought to expand their own influence in the region, inevitably at the expense of the British, Kenya's pragmatic new leaders seized an opportunity. President Kenyatta could leverage Cold War rhetoric and exploit geopolitical rivalries to his advantage in foreign affairs, whilst different factions inside Kenyan politics could do the same as they jockeyed for position at home.[22]

Odinga was one such politician—and the Brothers attacked him personally as a stooge of the Chinese. Rayner did not want to peddle lies, but the truth underpinning this latest hit job was certainly debatable. Perhaps Rayner was seeing conspiracies everywhere.

Odinga *was* an outspoken nationalist and *had* been a major figure in the struggle for Kenyan independence. He undoubtedly held left-wing sympathies and was open to working with the Chinese. However, Malcolm MacDonald, the governor turned high commissioner in Kenya, insisted that that he was an extreme nationalist rather than a Communist. He may have received money from the Chinese, but he was no stooge. Odinga himself pointed out that the British and Americans had refused to support his plans—and he needed money from somewhere.[23] To many he was an opportunist.[24] The British chargé d'affaires in Peking simply had a bad feeling, describing Odinga as 'an Ophidian creature who, frankly, gave me the creeps'.[25]

Or perhaps Rayner somehow knew that Odinga had secretly told the Chinese that Kenyatta should be overthrown.[26] Perhaps he knew that Odinga and the Kenyan foreign minister had met with the Chinese vice premier, Chen Yi, in May 1964. Perhaps MI6 had told him that the pair had declared Kenya to be a socialist state supporting China and discussed covert receipt of Chinese money and weapons.

'If we hand arms to you, are you able to hand them out to the nationalists?' Yi had asked. 'We have arms for 7 million people and we shall provide some and we have a factory in China which can serve the liberation movement…We shall send the arms either through Kenya or Tanganyika. We shall not have any Chinese wording on them. We agree

with you when you say that without armed struggle there cannot be independence.'[27] This was a smoking gun, implicating China in covert action. The next day, Odinga had told the Chinese that 'Kenya is the gate of the Imperialists to control Africa' and warned cryptically 'of intrigues'. Again, the Chinese secretly offered arms.[28]

Or perhaps MI6 or GCHQ lacked this hot intelligence, and Rayner was just taking a punt in peddling innuendo and rumour. Either way, he got lucky. The Brothers' angry missive hit a nerve and ended up in the hands of Odinga himself. Rayner gleefully told Welser that Odinga 'had been enraged by the accusations it contained'.[29]

Odinga sent someone straight over to the Soviet embassy for professional assistance in tracking down the origin of the leaflet. Who was this mysterious Freedom for Africa Movement? The Soviets were of little help, wrongly pointing the finger at someone called Pio Gama Pinto, a veteran of the Kenyan anti-colonial struggle, left-wing journalist, and once one of Odinga's most trusted advisers. Odinga took it, as targets so often do, as confirmation of his growing suspicions of Pinto.[30] Targets do not question what they think they know.

Once again, Rayner had got away with it and this time had rattled Odinga in the process. Beyond that though, the impact was negligible; weeks later he became vice president.

Rayner and Welser responded by exploiting growing friction between Odinga and the president, Jomo Kenyatta, playing them off against each other. Meanwhile, the Near and Far East News Agency put out a string of attacks and innuendos exposing, for example, Ghanaian support for Kenyan trade unions and pointedly asking why Kenyans were receiving military training by the Chinese.[31]

Odinga railed against the British. He told huge crowds how the imperialists had 'sucked our blood for a long time and even now the sucking tube is still connected to Kenya'. By contrast, he pointed out, Communism was nothing to worry about.[32] He grew suspicious of British propaganda, complaining publicly of attacks against him in the press, particularly in the *Daily Telegraph*. He accused MI6 of discreetly passing material to contacts in the press and had already expelled the *Telegraph*'s correspondent from Kenya.[33] He was not far off the mark.

Odinga became, in his own words, ‘increasingly uneasy that forces were at work trying to drive a wedge between Kenyatta and myself’. He thought the British had been trying ‘to divide us and sow suspicion between us’ since independence, whether openly by clipping his ministry’s powers or through more underhand means. ‘Rumour and insinuation seemed to pop up at every corner.’[34]

Back in Whitehall, some feared Odinga was closing in. They wondered whether he would soon figure out the real identity of the Brothers, especially after his prime suspect, Pio Gama Pinto, was assassinated in 1965. Odinga was distracted though; the day after Pinto’s death all Kenyan MPs received an anonymous leaflet blaming Communists and claiming Pinto had been victim of the Chinese–Soviet split. Odinga dismissed it as a clumsy forgery posted from Uganda. It hit the very same themes favoured by Rayner, but, on this occasion, was not one of his.[35]

Still, the awkward questions lingered. Would the Brothers’ identity be blown? And why would a supposedly Francophone group have such an intimate knowledge of domestic Kenyan politics anyway?[36] Colleagues who had never liked the Brothers circled, demanding reassurance that the group ‘will never be attributed to us’.

Rayner casually brushed it off: ‘I think we can be quite sure that this cannot be effectively attributed to us. So far as I know there have been no claims that any of these LAB’s are of British origin.’[37]

He promptly devised another phantom to haunt the halls of Kenyan politics: the People’s Front of East Africa, by implication pro-Chinese activists. It was classic Rayner craftsmanship—a deft construct designed to shield the Brothers while ramping up the pressure on Kenyatta’s regime.

The Front criticized the government as a cesspool of dishonesty and authoritarianism. But they lavished praise on Odinga as a ‘resolute African patriot and great revolutionary leader of the people of Kenya’, before pointing out that Chinese support of Odinga was mutually beneficial. Kenya’s salvation lay in partnership with Peking.[38]

Rayner was not content with mere flattery. He twisted the knife by exploiting a genuine rift within the continent about the uneasy relationship between international socialism and local African traditions.[39] African socialism was not proper socialism, the Front shouted. It was something designed merely to ‘flatter African intellectuals’. Then came the *coup de*

grâce—a brazen call to make Odinga president, cloaked in the language of inevitability and rebellion.[40] Rayner hoped that associating Chinese activity so closely with one person would actually undermine the ability of China to subvert the population more widely.

This one hit the mark. Odinga's true leanings—whether Communist or merely opportunistic—were irrelevant. The allegations struck a nerve with readers. Rayner exulted in the ensuing chaos, proudly announcing that 'reactions to it have been continued and numerous'.[41] From London, both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* reported the call to 'revolt against the fascist and dishonest Government of President Kenyatta'. In Kenya, newspapers, both in English and Swahili, devoted swathes of coverage on successive days to the mysterious People's Front. Nairobi radio broadcast an attack on the document; a commentary in Swahili pointed the finger at Western intelligence services.[42]

The *Sauti Ya Mwafrika* newspaper was particularly scathing. A 'crude and vicious piece of political forgery and provocation', it thundered. Whoever was behind it has used 'a cunning but well-worn technique' of smearing Odinga 'with the old charge of "Communism".' It accused Western intelligence, hinted at American fingerprints, and dismissed the Dar es Salaam address as a diversion—a ruse to implicate Tanzania. 'Would it be too outrageous to suspect the hand of some non-Kenyan? And, specifically, that old dabbler in other people's business the Central Intelligence Agency?'[43]

Rayner, hearing this, would have chuckled into his whisky glass.

Confusion spread across the government, seeping through existing fractures. Ministers scrambled for explanations. Some were taken in; others were less convinced. Kenyatta himself thought it was the handiwork of the Chinese. Tom Mboya, a rival politician closer to the Americans, suspected that Odinga himself was behind it and playing both sides. Odinga predictably blamed the CIA,[44] while Achieng Oneko, the information minister who was also smeared in the document, accused his own countrymen of stoking division and criticized the Kenyan press for giving it too much publicity.[45] Each accusation, true or not, only deepened the confusion.

Then, as if the stage were not crowded enough, Moscow joined the fray. Soviet forgeries began to circulate, painting Odinga as a Chinese pawn in

an effort to force Kenya into breaking ties with Beijing. It was a rare and ironic convergence: Rayner's handiwork and Soviet disinformation marching in step, united in their aim to undermine China's African ambitions.[46] Ivan Agayants, the tall mustachioed head of Soviet disinformation, declared to his Czechoslovak colleagues: 'it is our common duty from now on to stop Chinese penetration of the international Communist movement and in relation to Western powers to show China as the main present and future troublemaker'.[47] Here, at the height of the Cold War and a long way from home, Soviet and UK propaganda were strangely aligned.

Welser did not rest on the success. He and Adelaide Maturin, his wife often going by her maiden name at work, infiltrated newsrooms and manipulated the press to complement the fake groups, creating echo chambers of their own narratives. The Near and Far East News Agency targeted Odinga personally; the *Sunday Telegraph* ran a planted article about Chinese influence creeping through Africa; so too did the *Swiss Press Review*, in the hopes that it would be picked up and amplified elsewhere.

It was the *Swiss Press Review* piece that hit home. Local authorities had found weapons in two of Odinga's properties, allowing this particular story to draw heavily on confidential comments made by the British high commissioner in Nairobi about a possible coup. The rumours were outlandish, and no evidence of an actual coup emerged, with even the high commissioner admitting it was unlikely. But this did not matter to Welser, who had a knack for turning ambiguity into action. He weaponized the comments under a deliberately misleading and inflammatory headline: 'Kenyatta Frustrates Leftist Coup'.[48]

The truth was rather different. Rival factions in the Kenyan government were moving against Odinga under the pretext of countering Chinese subversion. China did continue to fund him, via their embassy in Dar es Salaam, but deep down accepted that the time was not ripe to impose Communism in Kenya. Domestic politics was too complex; Kenya was no passive battleground.[49]

Welser and Rayner were caught between Cold War and colonialism. Their campaign sought to exploit—but then found itself entangled within—domestic power struggles. It felt chaotic, as though the team became lost in a bewildering labyrinth of reflections that they could no longer control.

From Whitehall, Welser perhaps forgot that the Kenyan parliament was awash with allegations of propaganda, subversion, and forgeries, whether from rival politicians or neighbouring countries like Somalia. His and Rayner's own work paled in comparison.[50] Or perhaps Welser knew this too well and happily added to the confusion, added to the sense of fracturing as the government turned against itself. One thing was clear: propaganda was competitive interference.

Odinga, who read the British newspapers eagerly, put it most perceptively of all. He claimed to be 'the victim of manipulation from forces *within* our country whose tactics, if not planned in conjunction with external, neo-colonial forces, nevertheless managed, with astonishing accuracy, to coincide in intention and effect. The strategy seemed to be to make my position so embarrassing for the Prime Minister that he would be forced to dismiss me.'[51] He told the Kenyan parliament: 'we should not be the victims of wild propaganda from our enemies either abroad or in this country'.[52]

Amidst swirling propaganda from all sides and a bitter rivalry with President Kenyatta, Odinga quit his government position shortly afterwards and founded his own political party. He pointed towards 'highly imaginative and slanted intelligence reports' sent to Kenyatta by 'British or British-trained or British-influenced intelligence officers', which left him plagued by the fear of internal revolution.[53] He later lamented how 'Men were judged not by what they said in Parliament or did in their constituencies, but by what the rumour-mongers said about them.'[54]

Welser claimed success, but it all remained a far cry from the glory days of the war, or at least his memories of them. He and Rayner were always playing catch-up with local African developments, buffeted by the winds of local factions, rivalries, terminology, and print cultures as well as the circus of foreign hidden hands.[55] How, Rayner wondered, running a hand through his thinning hair, could he cut through a saturated market of mass leaflets? Blend in too much, be too realistic, and his handiwork would not get noticed. Stand out too much, or overstock the market, and it invited scrutiny. It was an almost impossible task.

Welser and Rayner kept putting them out, hoping just one would blend in and cut through. And one could be all they needed.

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11

‘The Slimy Leech’ of Indonesia

Hans and Adelaide Welser had not been married long before their work lives, forged in the shadowy recesses of the Foreign Office, became increasingly intertwined. They pored over the latest telegrams and news reports, reading how President Sukarno, the leader of Indonesia, nursed a long memory and a longer list of grievances. He was waging an undeclared war against Malaysia, known as ‘Confrontasi’ or the Confrontation, and it was becoming their war too. Though fought in the shadows, it took up more and more of the Welsers’ time.

Sukarno had vigorously opposed the creation of Malaysia back in 1963, interpreting the merger of Malaya, Singapore, and British Borneo as an underhand act of neo-imperialism, designed to increase British influence and undercut his own ambitions. He saw intelligence conspiracies behind every curtain, with memories of a botched Anglo-American covert operation to topple him a few years earlier still fresh in his mind.[1]

Welser read the reports with his seasoned blend of cynicism—of course Sukarno would turn to propaganda—and resolve, spoiling for the next round of the battle. Indonesia was running black radio stations rallying support for guerrilla fighters in the jungles of Borneo, fanning flames of racial discord inside Malaysia, and even broadcasting propaganda aimed at British servicemen in the region.[2] Sukarno complemented this with pamphlets, black newspapers, rumourmongering, and slogans graffitied on walls. One Indonesian operation designed to subvert Malaysia claimed that Chinese people living in Malaya had killed a local Muslim with a butcher’s knife and forced Malays to eat pork; race riots broke out in Singapore days

later.[3] It was predictable, but still a challenge, and Welser was ready to fight back.

The British, for their part, did possess a keen stake in Sukarno's conflict. They kept a protectorate in Brunei, on what was now a contested island, and maintained webs of influence from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, clinging to naval bases and air strips as if the sun still refused to set on their dying empire.[4]

Prime Ministers Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, and then Harold Wilson were all, in turn, deeply committed to this high-stakes post-imperial adventure. The cost was vast, with some 54,000 Commonwealth troops committed to the conflict, including eight Gurkha battalions. At one point a third of all British naval vessels were deployed to what was in effect a war by any other name.[5]

Sketched out in the upper echelons of Whitehall and Westminster, high above the Welsers' pay grades, British strategy at the outset was a slow game, one of attrition: to ensure Indonesian patience ran out first, leaving Sukarno no choice but to accept Malaysia's existence.[6] If it would be a battle of wills, Welser knew propaganda could prove vital.

Indonesian subversion, propaganda, and military raids were therefore yet another fire on which he turned his own firehose. Wesler had vowed to cause discomfort to the Queen's enemies wherever they may be, and now, alongside Yemen, Egypt, and sub-Saharan Africa, he turned his attention to the Far East. Adelaide, as a manager of the Near and Far East News Agency, or NAFEN, featured heavily in his plans. The pair were hitting their stride.

Now in her mid-fifties, her hair sporting a grey streak swept back in deliberate waves, elegant, yet formal and austere, Adelaide Welser brought much experience. She had served as a remarkable SOE operative during the war, working in a small unit known as D/Q which dealt with press propaganda. Leslie Sheridan may have been its first head, but Adelaide, then barely 30 years old, was the immensely capable power behind the throne. With impeccable attention to detail and possessing natural authority, she would specialize in managing propaganda operations, especially the financial side. She was highly intelligent, and, unlike her current husband, reserved. While many SOE secretaries demobilized after the war, she was

the obvious choice to stay on with MI6 to manage covertly controlled press agencies.[7]

NAFEN was one such organization. Formed in 1952 when it bought out the interests of a wartime SOE-run press outfit, the Globe Agency, NAFEN's editorial office was in Delhi where its two most senior staff members, both English, were aware of its real status. It also had offices in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, and local correspondents throughout the Far East whose articles were sent back to Delhi. By the time of the Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia, NAFEN's services went to 173 subscribers in India in five languages, as well more in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Rangoon, Saigon, Sarawak, and Colombo.[8]

Some mornings Adelaide would leave Hans and head off to MI6's new high-rise headquarters above a malodorous petrol station south of the river at Century House. On other mornings she would visit Salisbury Square, deep in a narrow maze of ancient backstreets and small passageways, backing on to Fleet Street, the bustling heart of the British press. Here, NAFEN and other covertly controlled press agencies shared a small office with Reuters.[9] Formally the company secretary, she was essentially the managing director and looked after expenditure. She worked alongside Alan Hare, an aristocrat in MI6, and Victor Cannon Brookes, a wartime SOE bureaucrat whose law firm helped make them look like legitimate private companies.[10]

Her team received daily guidance from Welser's about lines to take and a steady stream of articles produced by Rayner's unit. From London she would coordinate staff, occasionally drawing on her impressive networks to invigorate correspondents who had gone quiet.[11] On other occasions she would stop payments if the stringer was lazy, unproductive, or deemed talentless—or would give small bonuses if their work had directly resulted in extra sales.[12] She attended board meetings, filed company accounts, arranged senior appointments, approved budgets, and sanctioned spend on special equipment such as Arabic teleprinters. As one manager in the field put it: 'in money matters', Adelaide was undoubtedly 'the boss'.[13] She may have been a proper-looking, prototypical English lady, but she was formidable and increasingly senior. Colleagues did not cross her lightly.

Combined, Adelaide Welser's covertly controlled agencies took up over half of Hans Welser's entire budget, a proportion which only seemed to

increase.[14]

As the Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia ramped up, Welser sent NAFEN more and more articles. Adelaide's team enjoyed great success in placing them in the Indian press to expose Sukarno's undeclared war and turn readers against him, but neither she nor Welser ever really knew the difference they actually made.[15] Still, the bosses were pleased. An inspection of the department had recently concluded that Welser's concentration of effort on the controlled news agencies was appropriate, especially in light of increased activities undertaken by Communist news agencies, Tass, Novosti, and the New China News Agency. NAFEN provided a steady stream of useful, unspectacular information with a British background that was widely read. This provided a foundation for the discreet presentation of a relatively small, but constant, amount of anti-Communist material. It, and its sister agencies, also provided a useful forum for MI5, MI6, and GCHQ to leak classified material.

The plaudits rolled in: Leslie Glass now overseeing all information work in the Foreign Office, thought them efficiently run and excellent value for money. Even Cyril Costley-White and Norman Reddaway, two men with very different outlooks, agreed. Costley-White was the wheelchair-bound representative of the cautious Commonwealth Relations Office with a well-earned reputation for saying no; Reddaway headed British propaganda in the Middle East and loved a secret scheme, specializing in bypassing just such human obstacles as Costley-White. And a recent head of British Information Services in Dehi testified that NAFEN was 'undoubtedly valuable'; it managed to place a great deal of material into what he called second-rank Indian newspapers, especially Indian-language ones.[16]

By early 1964, NAFEN was pushing to expand in Southeast Asia. It had gained a foothold in Tokyo, which Welser rated as vital when trying to 'surface stories in Japan dealing with the Malaysian issue',[17] and it had secured a deal with the Malaysian Federal Department of Information. 'Good news indeed'.[18] Welser also pushed hard to get NAFEN material on Indonesia into the Australian press.[19] These articles exposed Indonesian subversion, bribery, and corruption. They accused the flamboyant Sukarno of selling out his people in the pursuit of prestige and personal luxury. It was not untrue: one ambassador there remembered how Sukarno's state house was stuffed with 'pictures and ornaments filched from here, there and

everywhere’. He was ‘full of his own importance’; he was ‘arrogant’ and ‘acquisitive’.[20] Welser’s team sent 112 articles to NAFEN in the first six months of 1964 alone.[21]

Covertly controlled news agencies were not enough. Indonesian cross-border raids increased and became more organized throughout 1964. In response, the UK stepped up its propaganda and there was talk of despatching Welser himself, ‘very much a specialist in this field’ and able to encourage and exploit defections from rebel training camps.[22]

John Rayner should also have been in his element, having served in Singapore shortly after the war. He knew the region well. Now, eight years since he had left, he launched the first of what would be eleven black productions targeting Sukarno—a man who had earlier fallen under Rayner’s jurisdiction upon first coming to power. Perhaps Rayner had unfinished business.

The Indonesian president was a tempting—but tricky—target. Sukarno was a nationalist hero who had led his people out of the long shadow of Dutch colonial rule. He was charismatic and an outstanding orator able to ignite crowds with his words: a self-professed mouthpiece of the people speaking as if the land itself had loaned him its voice. At the same time, he was increasingly authoritarian, and with unchecked power came a rashness and corruption. Despite growing older, his appetites and passions were unbridled, and he juggled a love life which would have made even John Rayner blush. The playboy of yesterday had given way to a flabby man preoccupied with sex, although this generated as much admiration from his people as it did disdain. But he was losing his virility. And he was a vain man. His waistline expanded, and his sagging jowls provided fodder for mocking caricaturists.[23] It would be difficult but, Rayner hoped, these contradictions could be exploited.

The great man, nicknamed Bung Karno—brother or comrade Karno—was due to visit Cairo to attend a conference for leaders of non-aligned states trying to chart a more independent course through the Cold War. It offered a good opportunity to land a strike which could, just maybe, disrupt his carefully cultivated image.

In September 1964, Mary Stallard-Penoyre took on the task of impersonating a group of Indonesian émigrés in a leaflet designed to do just

that.[24] She was smart but inexperienced, new to Rayner's team and having only recently turned 24 years old.

> What are you seeking in Egypt, Sukarno, you bloated grinning slug basking in luxury while your people starve? You have no right, Communist–Atheist stooge of Peking that you are, to come to this all-important Conference of Non-Aligned countries.
>
> You flaunt your hordes of tarts through the streets of foreign capitals in expensive cars, and jaunt round the world in aeroplanes spending millions of dollars—mocking the poverty of the Indonesian people who have no rice to eat.
>
> And when you found that your sexual powers were failing, you impotent, ageing old lecher, you got your agents to buy more and more of your expensive aphrodisiac drugs.

Stallard-Penoyre hit the key themes: Communism, tick; bad Muslim, tick; corrupt tyrant, tick. Swept up in the excitement, she ended with a threat. Sukarno liked to quote the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, 'but do you remember what happened to him? He, too, betrayed his people, and the people killed him and hanged him by his heels beside his mistress. Bung Karno, the patience of the Indonesian people is running out. Beware lest the same should happen to you.'[25]

'Splendid', Welser applauded, and instructed Rayner to get the underpinning intelligence cleared for release right away.[26] Welser's European Communism specialist, Hubert Kós, dialled down the lurid language for a more reserved European audience.[27] The veiled death threat stayed.

'No reactions so far noted.' [28]

Even so, the Cairo conference did not go Sukarno's way, as many of the very leaders he had expected to support him implicitly criticized his Confrontation with Malaysia.[29] Try as he might, Rayner could not conjure any evidence that his work had any hand in this.

Rayner tried to strike again with what he called 'a mildly scurrilous attack on Sukarno'.[30] His writers did not hold back:

'BROTHERS! THE END IS APPROACHING FOR SUKARNO—the slimy leech who is sucking the blood of Indonesia.

HE FLAUNTS HIMSELF AS A WOMANIZER—BUT the millions of rupiahs which Sukarno spends every year on girls only brand him as a would-be old-time potentate like the petty colonialist stooge leaders.'

Warming to the theme, they spat more insults. ‘Anyway, all our money which Sukarno spends in this way is thrown away, for he does not even do anything with the women—expect talk. Fat and getting daily-nightly-balder, Sukarno is no longer potent. Not all the drugs and aphrodisiacs that exist (specially ordered from Hong Kong) can rejuvenate the flabby worn-out sugar-daddy that he is.’[31]

Welser shook his head, he had heard rumours from secret sources that Sukarno might be ill,[32] but who would be convinced by this? This audacious coexistence of the absurd and the serious? If anything, he thought, plenty of Indonesians would be impressed by the womanizing. Rayner needed to be ‘more restrained, more nuanced, more factual’.[33]

John Rayner had competition for who could come up with the most outlandish scheme. A steady stream of plots and ploys emanated from the embassy in Djakarta, much to the frustration of the professionals in Carlton House Terrace and the cautious regular diplomats across Horse Guards Parade.

The British ambassador was a colourful character called Andrew Gilchrist. An outspoken Scot with sharp humour and scarce patience, he had little time for formalities and procedure. He would write rhyming telegrams saying things like ‘they’re changing the guard at the palace, with malice’ or would ask his colleagues back in London to ‘transfer £1000 to my wife who is asking for money’. When questioned, he snapped: ‘Silly fellow, just go to the bank and tell them.’[34] Gilchrist had served behind enemy lines in Asia during the Second World War, and that boldness had never left him; he had since famously played the bagpipes outside the Djakarta embassy, notes wailing above the mob, to disperse anti-British demonstrations.[35]

He had been pressing for political warfare against Sukarno for some time; those back in the quiet rooms of London were not sure what to make of him. He had too many scattergun ideas; ‘over-imaginative’, they said. He was someone to be carefully managed.[36]

‘And what about some anonymous telephone calls in Cairo or elsewhere warning of bombs in Sukarno’s plane/car/boudoir?’ he asked.[37] According to Gilchrist, Sukarno ‘was basically a Javanese sultan. Women and money were there to be used, to be used at his pleasure.’ He had ‘an almost

monkey-like attitude to sex' and 'thought it right and proper to keep a harem'.[38]

Welser promptly ignored the suggestion.

Gilchrist also advised exploiting an ongoing rice shortage, exposing Indonesia's flawed claims of self-sufficiency and implementing the British strategy of attrition in the process. He even advocated lying: 'so much of the story is not, of course, based on facts. We must not, however, do this sort of thing too often.'

Welser promptly watered it down.[39]

What Gilchrist really wanted to do was create and distribute a black newssheet ostensibly produced by Indonesians. He knew that Sukarno tightly controlled the local media, and that it was almost impossible to put different—by which he meant pro-British—views to the Indonesian people. But he also wanted to go further: to spread dissension and uncertainty among the ruling cliques, thereby disrupting the government and putting pressure on Sukarno himself. To pull it off, he would need a well-resourced and locally-based team.

Welser, Rayner, and the professionals in the IRD winced. They appreciated the enthusiasm, and the need to tighten the screw on Sukarno if they were going to wear him down, but mocked the amateurism, managing his ideas with a combination of silence, sanctimonious obfuscation, and creative inertia.

Their convoluted bureaucracy left Gilchrist furious. He would not be outmanoeuvred and went over their heads, he was an ambassador after all, even threatening to march into Cabinet himself. 'It only takes nine months to organize a baby' and, with so much of the British military deployed in this part of the world, 'a modest birth on the I.R.D. side might not be out of proportion. But after nine months it is still, as you call it "an entirely new scheme". God damn my soul.'[40]

His scheme was seductive but fraught with problems. How could they find someone reliable who could speak the language—idioms and all? How would they bypass Sukarno's censors? Where should the team behind it be based? How could it operate at a suitably rapid tempo?[41] And, in light of an economy drive put in place by the new Labour government keen to balance the books, who would pay?[42]

None of this was insurmountable. Welser had overseen similar propaganda teams during the Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising in the 1950s,[43] and agreed that the severity of the situation required a similar response—he just wanted to be in control.

Leslie Glass approved. 'We cannot play about with covert propaganda. Either we do it well, or we shouldn't do it. "Indonesia" propaganda in a "near-war" needs a full scale unit of its own.' It was too much for Welser and Rayner alone. 'I strongly support this proposal'.[44]

Gilchrist's newsletter idea went all the way up to the foreign secretary himself. From Chequers, Lord Carrington agreed.[45]

Now Welser faced the small matter of implementing it: a new unit producing and disseminating regular newsletters supposedly written by dissident Indonesians. A great deal more convoluted bureaucratic choreography ensued. Whitehall wanted it in Singapore; Singapore, with equal fervour, wanted it in Whitehall. The IRD man in Singapore, a man whose house had been gutted, car wrecked, and belongings destroyed during the embassy attack in September 1963,[46] quietly admitted he did not want the extra work.[47] Progress was inevitably slow. The chiefs of staff and the redoubtable Gilchrist waited impatiently, and the Foreign Office felt the heat.

'We are now committed to this Unit and there is no point having doubts about it', Glass told colleagues sharply. 'At the very least, the military, who are risking and sometimes losing, their lives will be deeply affronted if they are not supported by all arms available.'[48] Get on with it.

In the end, they settled on Singapore as the most suitable location—after all, it had best access to the latest intelligence from the field, necessary for the rapid tempo. Next, the IRD struggled to recruit the necessary Indonesian. 'We should be under no illusions,' John Drinkall, its assistant head, warned, 'the people whom we are trying to recruit must be regarded as high class agents undertaking work of a highly secret nature'. This required classic agent recruitment, well outside the collective expertise of the quasi-journalists and misfit writers in the IRD. Could MI6 not help? [49]

By November, they still had not found the right man. 'The scheme stands or falls on such a man being recruited,' Glass unhelpfully reminded his stressed colleagues.[50]

The rest of the team gradually fell into place. Ed Wynne was to be the head of the unit and, with the personal backing of the chief of defence staff, touched down in the evening of 6 December 1964 to tackle recruitment and accommodation.[51] He was experienced, having briefly worked for Welser's team and having run a similar operation in Cyprus during the counterinsurgency on the island in the 1950s. Glass had been director general of information to the Cyprus government back then, and now personally vouched for Wynne.[52] Andrew Gilchrist was less sure, questioning his lack of political background, knowledge of Indonesia, and his ability to assimilate information.[53] Still, he was happy to have someone —and Wynne's administrative skills were solid enough—after earlier complaining how there were no 'intelligence or research facilities worth a damn except those, such as they are, in this pint-sized Embassy; and we are terribly short of staff'.[54]

Rayner's team provided Fritz 'Johnny' Kanitz to be a black writer; he had served in Malaya and was keen to return to the region.[55] He was an Austrian, slender and well-educated; like Welser he had found refuge in Britain after fleeing his homeland before the Second World War. During the war, he had served with László Zilahi—a fellow émigré—and with Rayner piecing together propaganda in the smoke and ruin of Italy. Now approaching 60 and settled into a second marriage, again echoing Welser's background, Kanitz spoke German, English, French, and Swedish—but not any local language spoken in Indonesia. Since at least the early 1960s, he had worked with Welser, Rayner, and, particularly closely with old Zilahi, trading in research, translation, and the occasionally crafted fiction.[56]

Six months had passed since the initial approval before Wynne finally brought the news Gilchrist had longed to hear—and, to his credit, fairly swiftly after arrival. He had found the right Indonesian: conservative, responsible, and enthusiastic, highly recommended by MI6. To seal the deal, he had promised that he would be dealing in facts and would 'not be expected to deal in nonsense'.[57]

If poor Wynne expected thanks from the ambassador, he would be mistaken. When Gilchrist found out, he scowled. 'The chap is promised there will be no "nonsense", that he will deal with "facts", and that everything will be like the Church Times. If this is the kind of tent you have unfolded, you can fold it up again and tell Wynne to steal away.'[58] He left

Wynne under no illusions: ‘nonsense in the form of “black” and dirty at least is (or was when I initiated the scheme) an integral part of the operation’.[59]

So excitable was Gilchrist that Leslie Glass had to remind him not to get carried away. The newsletter would consist of facts. ‘It is not intended it should degenerate into a campaign of personal vituperation against Sukarno, or whom have you. In between there will be plenty of opportunity for glosses, interpretations, rumours etc. of the sort we have been indulging in recently. All of these will be more readily believed if we put in as many verifiable facts as possible.’[60] He promised to send out his ‘chief expert’ Hans Welser to help with the birthing pangs.[61]

Revelling in his own carefully cultivated image of half madman and half incorrigible joker,[62] Andrew Gilchrist continued to fire off ideas. He smiled a toothy grin from behind his sandy beard at the thought of yet another ploy, having just heard Sukarno publicly express admiration for both Hitler and Mussolini.

‘Soekarno’s great current slogan is “*vivere pericoloso*”’, a phrase associated with Mussolini and meaning to live dangerously, ‘and he has just walked out of the United Nations’, Gilchrist explained. He wanted to exploit the fact that Indonesia had just withdrawn from the UN in protest at Malaysia becoming a member of the Security Council and then dramatically brandished military equipment in the chamber bearing Indonesian markings. ‘Could you get out quickly a simple pictorial leaflet showing on one side Mussolini on his meat-hook saying “Tell Soekarno I lived dangerously”, and on the other Hitler blowing his brains out in his bunker saying “Tell Soekarno I left the League of Nations”.’[63]

Welser liked this one—it tapped into the dangers of escalation implicit in what Sukarno had promised would be a ‘Year of Living Dangerously’[64]—and put the plan into action. He found a cartoonist able to turn it around in just a few days and, even though others thought it too risky, sent a mock-up to Gilchrist.[65]

‘The pamphlet seems fine.’ Gilchrist was as bullish as ever. Get on with it. ‘Could you make a stamp to apply on the back of each leaflet representing a Garuda bird with a letter on its leg and the initials P.L.R.I.?’[66]

‘What does PLRI stand for please’?[67]

‘We made it up.’[68]

The experts were nonplussed. Complications ensued—something as seemingly mundane as finding appropriately scruffy paper turned into an ordeal. Predictable yet tiresome clashes between Welser and Wynne followed.[69] The farce dragged on for months, leaving Welser simmering about what he deemed an ‘ill-starred cartoon’. In the end, the ploy was quietly abandoned, never to see the light of day.

In London, strategy staggered forward with little direction until the upper echelons of Britain’s secret state, those mandarins and spy chiefs collectively known as the Joint Action Committee who quietly coordinated covert action, provided something more explicit. Covert propaganda and clandestine operations, they declared, should be playing a role to get Sukarno to call off the Confrontation for good. Albeit within tight constraints.[70]

Wynne received the directive from London. He furrowed his brow, as he read the difficult balancing act he faced. His newsletter had to appeal to intelligent but highly nationalist Indonesians, whilst avoiding the impression of being translated Western propaganda. He must not diverge wildly from British policy, whilst only expressing views that could plausibly be held by nationalist Indonesians. He could have access to top-secret material, whilst not blowing intelligence sources. He could spread lies only once his newsletter had built a reputation for truth and accuracy, and only so long as they did not undermine that reputation.[71]

All the while, Gilchrist manoeuvred behind the scenes. He demanded more *lively* stories, a euphemism for provocative, sharp, pushing the boundaries of truth.[72] What he really wanted was to prod the army and the Communists into open conflict and, under pressure from senior diplomats, themselves under pressure from the military, the IRD was coming around.[73] Gilchrist had no qualms in upsetting his superiors back home. If they did not like his political line, he shrugged with almost performative derision, ‘they can lump it’.[74]

Wynne’s first issue came out in April 1965. Called *Kenjataan*, or Facts, and printed in a garage, it looked deliberately scruffy to give the impression of local amateurism rather than a British covert operation—although its

carefully coordinated distribution, carried out by MI6 across three continents to 600 recipients, would certainly have raised suspicions if anyone was watching closely enough. Like all subsequent issues, the newsletter included material written by a motley, if entirely fictitious, cast: there was the politics student; the ‘sage gentleman who comments sadly on the state of affairs’; the young poet writing in the styles of W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, another potential giveaway considering their distinct voices; and a punchy editorial.[75]

Unfortunately, it was a bit of a letdown. The first newsletter landed without a trace and swiftly incurred swingeing criticism from MI6’s Indonesian expert, who admittedly had never been a fan in the first place. Even Ed Wynne, the man at the helm, conceded its mediocrity before burying himself in plans for the second issue two.[76] Meanwhile, the intensity of Confrontation increased to become a war hidden in plain sight, punctuated by more aggressive special forces cross-border ambushes and even an audacious Indonesian attempt to storm a British hilltop base. Wynne could not afford another misstep; with stakes climbing he knew that failure would be more than a professional embarrassment—although Welser and Rayner were watching closely from afar.

Wynne was determined: the next issue would hit its mark. It had to.

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12

Shadows over Sukarno

Back in the corridors of Whitehall, John Rayner quietly sharpened his focus on Sukarno. Senior ministers had now given some much-needed political direction to the desired endgame: an Indonesia free from Communist influence and living amicably with Malaysia. The tools, black propaganda and other covert manoeuvres, would be familiar enough, but Rayner appreciated the explicit support. Together, he from London and Wynne from Singapore would sow division and dissent: sap the military's will to attack Malaysia by turning the gaze of the Indonesian military towards the local Communist party—known as the PKI—and their Chinese backers; expose the lack of popular support for Indonesia inside Malaysia; encourage dissident groups in the outer Indonesian islands; and tarnish any future successor to Sukarno who might bend too willingly to the Communist cause.[1]

This political direction was already flaky, with some policy-makers beginning to question the attrition strategy and wanting to bring matters to a head. Time, they feared, was a more unforgiving tyrant than even Sukarno and would only favour the Communists. Each week the Confrontation dragged on only bolstered their strength, while a looming defence review pointed towards sweeping cuts to British military capacity. At the very least, covert operations could make attrition bite harder.[2]

With backing from the very top, Rayner launched three more covert operations in quick succession over the summer of 1965, each designed to undermine Sukarno in the eyes of Muslims and to exploit tensions between Communism and Islam. Through rumours and whispers, he set about twisting the president's public image into a scandalous spectacle.

First, he conjured a leaflet in the name of one of Indonesia's main Islamic political parties calling upon the faithful to rally behind Sukarno as the new leader of Islam worldwide. MI6 posted it to delegates expecting to attend a large conference of African and Asian nations in Algiers, as well as to prominent Muslims and Islamic organizations elsewhere.[3] Rayner hoped to antagonize Muslim leaders in the Middle East.[4] He sensed that Sukarno's leadership of the Afro-Asian world, which he had claimed for himself back in 1955, was slipping away;[5] any divisions over the Confrontation could be exploited.

'No reactions so far noted'.[6]

At the same time, the *Indonesian Herald* excitedly reported CIA and MI6 plans to assassinate Sukarno, adding that several CIA agents had been arrested in Eastern Indonesia.[7] Partly tipped off by a Czechoslovak forgery and pincered by the churn of attacks from various sides,[8] Sukarno warned not only would he be assassinated but that 'the imperialists' henchmen' would instigate revolution. They would 'unearth the personal secrets of Sukarno, his foreign minister, Subandrio, and other Indonesian leaders in order to persuade the Indonesian people to rise up against these leaders'.[9] He was half right. Prague feigned surprise.

Second, Rayner issued a leaflet in the name of the Muslim Brotherhood attacking Sukarno's private life. Stanley Budd, the IRD man in Kuala Lumpur, had sent over what he called a 'splendidly scurrilous series of articles' in the Tokyo gutter press about Sukarno's Japanese love life. Perhaps Rayner could do something with them. 'However, I hold no strong views of such an exercise; it is always difficult to know whether Sukarno's philanderings arouse any emotion stronger than a sneaking admiration.'[10]

His colleagues were divided. One warned that the intended recipients, again delegates attending the Afro-Asian Conference, were not 'Feminists or Elders of the Kirk but men who have, in many cases, a multiplicity of wives/mistresses or who would like to have and who will hail from countries which do not have so much respect for women as we do'.[11]

'The Algerians abhor extravagance and promiscuity; there is something of a puritanical fervor about their revolutionary zeal.' John Ure, veteran of Loyal African Brothers operations, was in favour of weaponizing the

gossip.[12] Perhaps hiding his own sneaking admiration for Sukarno's covetous exploits, Rayner went ahead with a full-on hit job.

In the name of the Muslim Brotherhood, Rayner dropped a bombshell: Sukarno's third wife had tried to commit suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. Dewi Sukarno, a beautiful former Japanese geisha less than half her husband's age, had required hospital treatment in Tokyo after Sukarno paid what the Brotherhood, supposedly, described as 'special attention to another geisha girl'.

The allegations kept coming: her younger brother had killed himself because of the shame Sukarno had brought on the family; another of Sukarno's young Japanese women had committed suicide in 1959; two other Japanese girls had disappeared in similar circumstances; and Japanese firms provided girls to Sukarno as gifts in exchange for commercial deals.[13] Rayner brought private scandals into the harsh light of day.

Rayner felt emboldened to attack. Suicides and sex trafficking were serious allegations, much darker than his usual lines and young Stallard-Penoyre's comedy insults issued a year earlier. But was any of it true? Dewi Sukarno's late mother had disapproved of both the marriage and the Islamic lifestyle before she died, leaving her daughter with a guilty conscience. Two days later, Dewi's brother had gassed himself to death in his Tokyo apartment. Another of Sukarno's Japanese women did kill herself, slashing her legs with a razor blade, days after Sukarno asked Dewi to marry him. And rival trading companies did introduce Sukarno to attractive young women, perhaps in the hope of influencing him and winning business.[14]

Rayner enjoyed gossiping about all this with the team, but probably did not know if it was entirely true. He claimed, of course, that truth had a sharper edge than fiction, that it cut deeper, but in practice he seemed indifferent this time. It felt true, and that was enough. What mattered was that claims had already surfaced in the Japanese press and so this time the old Sibster did not need to spin new rumours of his own. Instead, he merely echoed and amplified what had already been printed, seasoning it with a few pointed questions of his own.

The Japanese angle had its uses, too. It might complicate Tokyo's nascent—and, in British eyes, brazenly pro-Indonesian—efforts to mediate the Confrontation.[15] It was all very clever, and Rayner knew just what levers to pull. He allowed himself a rare moment of satisfaction. But there

was one question he overlooked: how would the Muslim Brotherhood have got hold of the Japanese gutter press in the first place?

'No reaction so far noted.'[16] And the Afro-Asian conference was called off anyway following a coup against the Algerian government in June.

In a strange twist of fate, Dewi Sukarno happened to be in London to attend a wedding at the very same moment MI6 posted Rayner's leaflets amplifying her supposed suicide attempt. His conventional colleagues in the Foreign Office proper, entirely unaware of the various plots and ploys, ramped up the diplomatic niceties in a desperate attempt to win her over and, in turn, soften her husband. They scrambled to find somebody young enough to take tea with her and even infiltrated the wedding to gather information on her. The most awkward moment came when she asked how best to deliver a personal gift to the Queen—a gift which the father of the groom described as a 'Balinese ebony stand of great hideousness' and promptly disposed of it.[17] One diplomat on the Burma desk rolled his eyes, observing that her involvement 'in high society in this country caused us quite a merry runaround. I'm quite sure Sukarno had encouraged her to come over here.' Why? 'Oh, just pinpricks against the British'.[18]

Rayner's work was nothing if not cumulative, and the following month, July, he sent a follow-up attack disclosing yet more lurid and scurrilous details about Sukarno's private life.[19] It accused Sukarno of sending 'a prostitute and unbeliever' to accompany Dewi on the pilgrimage to Mecca. This was half-true: a popular film star and model—but not a prostitute—called Baby Huwae, who had converted to Islam from Catholicism, did in fact accompany Dewi on the hajj.

'What devout Muslim does not feel ashamed and insulted and hurt when he hears that this woman eats pig's meat and makes a mockery of Islamic habits and traditions?' She was a fake Muslim who coated 'her lips with paint', who did not fast during Ramadan, who joked about religious ceremonies. 'President Sukarno gives this woman his official support—and as we know goes to bed with her—and has a nude portrait of her hanging on the bed of his second Javanese wife, Madame Hartini.'[20] There were persistent rumours about an affair, but Baby Huwae denied it. Rayner was happy to amplify anyway.

'What is worse is that President Sukarno was not satisfied with one unbeliever and so he took with him as his company a pretty young

American girl he met at a Cairo hotel, Pat Price.'[21] When his team wrote it, Rayner had no idea that, following a tip off from Pakistan, Sukarno's intelligence services assessed that the coquettish Price was a CIA spy and would later evict her from the country.[22]

MI6 sent it out to the same recipients of the other Muslim Brotherhood operation, as well as to Islamic cultural centres in London. Rayner was pleased to hear—presumably via intelligence channels—that Djakarta was troubled. The Indonesian authorities were aware of the leaflet and understood the potential for damage.[23]

In some ways, Rayner was pushing at an open door. Sukarno, always the consummate political chameleon, recognized the importance of Islam in his nation's psyche but had no intention of letting it dominate.[24] And it was no secret that some Muslims had grown disillusioned, feeling removed to the fringes of economic and political power. That resentment was a fault line waiting to be opened. Equally exploitable was Sukarno's growing isolation from Arab states, many of which had turned a cold shoulder to his Confrontation with Malaysia, and indeed to his radical foreign policy more generally. Sukarno would have been sensitive to the Muslim Brotherhood's sharp denunciations; a sensitivity Rayner was more than willing to press.[25]

Rayner had spent his career probing the elasticity of reality, bending and stretching as far as he could. His lines would dance just on the edge of what was true and what was not, and, on this occasion, he stepped over the line: Sukarno was not particularly trying to achieve leadership of the Islamic world; in fact, Islam was notable by its absence from his foreign policy.[26] Rayner shrugged; this was the game.

As John Rayner sat at his desk, gazing out of the window at London's drizzle, he knew that his provocations formed just one small piece in the wider propaganda puzzle. It was no coincidence that Ivan Agayants, the head of KGB disinformation, just happened to have visited Indonesia that April.[27] The Soviets were also playing. They wanted to rebuff Chinese influence in the country, but they also knew that Sukarno's foreign policy created a headache for the Americans and wider West. Like Rayner, the KGB therefore held their own material on Sukarno's renowned sexual escapades with which they planned to discredit or blackmail him; their plan failed when it became clear that Sukarno's public pride in his sex life meant

that he could not be blackmailed.[28] Exactly as sceptics in the IRD had warned.

Working closely with Russia, Czechoslovak intelligence was also playing. Prague's spies were running one Indonesian ambassador in Europe, providing him with a steady parade of young women and an apartment in which to enjoy them whilst feeding him anti-American information destined for the eyes of Subandrio and Sukarno. The Czechoslovaks complemented this by mailing forged documents and distorted information to Indonesian politicians, organizations, and editors in an attempt to discredit individuals as imperialist stooges.[29] Pimping out young women may not have been familiar practice to Welser and Rayner, but the work with forgeries certainly was.

The Chinese, for their part, had grown increasingly uneasy about Sukarno's 'bourgeoise' regime and also sought to influence Indonesian politics, openly and otherwise.[30] Meanwhile, the Indonesians played their own games too. That same summer as Rayner set his triple offensive in motion, British intelligence warned of a new ploy: Djakarta might stage some incident or provocation to rally support among non-aligned African and Asian leaders against the British.[31] And beyond the scope of the Confrontation, the leader of the Indonesian Communists had accused an anti-Communist rival of forging a document—a supposed blueprint to overthrow Sukarno. The president himself had read it.[32] It was a confusing, almost bewildering, orgy of international and local intrigue. Rayner and Welser knew all too well that their efforts did not exist in isolation. They were players in a much larger game.

Inevitably then, the British found themselves victims of a forgery attack —targeting none other than Andrew Gilchrist. He had supposedly written a letter back to colleagues in London detailing a dastardly conspiracy between the UK, US, and Malaysia to invade Indonesia and overthrow Sukarno with the help of 'local army friends'.

The explosive letter was purportedly found at the mountain resort of Bill Palmer, a US film magnate; somebody had then anonymously posted it to the home of Subandrio, the leftist foreign minister. Subandrio later insisted that the Indonesian intelligence service had authenticated it and, asking no further questions, made copies, showed Sukarno, and went public. Sukarno appeared to believe it, quickly summoning his defence minister and army

chiefs.[33] Before long, the scandal was plastered across Indonesian, and international, media.[34]

The whole affair reeked of intrigue, not least because Bill Palmer was persistently smeared as a CIA asset by Czechoslovak propagandists and because Indonesian intelligence later insisted that the document had not been authenticated at all.[35] To the Americans it was a clear forgery, part of a wider anti-American smear campaign orchestrated by influential elements inside Sukarno's fractious administration.[36]

The British should have been well-drilled in their response; Welser and Sheridan had written the standard forgery protocol years ago. In London, the Foreign Office swiftly summoned the Indonesian chargé d'affaires and denounced the story as 'a palpable and clumsy forgery designed to misrepresent and discredit Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the United States of America'.[37] Unfortunately, their less diplomatic colleagues in the military misstepped by furiously denying the allegations in public, denials which only fanned the flames. The Indonesian press gleefully mocked the denials and used them as an excuse to republicize the dramatic revelations. Anti-British, and especially anti-American, vitriol erupted in the press.[38] It was a basic error; Rayner slumped back in his chair, his head in his hands.

The CIA agreed that it was a fake, and claimed that Indonesian analysts —who, unlike the British and Americans, had actually examined the original—thought so too: it was a bad forgery, with clumsy mismatched handwriting, outlining an absurd plot at odds with British policy, and which, if real, would never have ended up in a film magnate's house anyway.

The question, then, was who *was* behind it? The CIA's suspicions turned inward to Sukarno's circle, perhaps Subandrio. Or maybe, they wondered, it was the Chinese, keen to undermine the American position.[39] Subandrio was certainly guilty of exploiting what should have been a suspicious document—but the truth lay further afield.

It was the Czechoslovaks and Soviets who were ultimately responsible, perhaps modifying a genuine letter plucked from the chaos when Indonesians had earlier ransacked Gilchrist's embassy. MI6 was convinced that the mobs, with Russian help, had got into the strong room, although the Foreign Office's in-house locksmiths predictably disagreed. The locks, after

all, were their own work. And so, equally predictably, the bureaucratic bickering began—one of those low-stakes squabbles unfolding beneath the higher-stakes drama.[40]

Even though he did not create it, Subandrio, whom the British had long seen as an architect of Indonesia's leftist stance, thought his decision to publish it had been a great success. He had, so he claimed, deterred British aggression; prevented Malaysian participation in the Afro-Asian conference in Algiers, although even if this was true it was immaterial as the conference was called off anyway; and had helped to neutralize rumours of a shadowy council of generals attempting to stage a coup.[41] He sat back smugly.

As was often the case though, once in circulation forgeries are not content to sit still. Every move had unintended consequences, and this forgery soon took on a life of its own when Indonesian Communists took encouragement from the subsequent deterioration in relations with the US and sensed an ill-fated opportunity to take power in Djakarta for themselves.[42]

Subandrio's position, and even his life, would soon be on the line.

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PART III

Hubris

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13

Coup, Killings, and the Voice from the Well

Sukarno was angry. The Indonesian president was rapidly losing patience with the influx of forgeries and newsletters spamming his country and disrupting his own propaganda efforts. Indonesian radio warned listeners to be vigilant against subversive documents and ‘unlawful leaflets which tried to play one political group against another’. His attorney-general warned that somebody, somewhere, was trying to sow distrust.[1]

Inside the British embassy, Andrew Gilchrist poured himself a celebratory drink and sat back, delighted. As far as he was concerned, his propaganda drive, including Ed Wynne’s black newsletter, had finally hit the mark; it had attracted plenty of attention and unnerved the government. He even claimed that Sukarno himself appeared to be a reader. He was not particularly concerned when Indonesian authorities pointed the finger at the British— even when they gave an unnervingly detailed list of linguistic errors as evidence. Less convincingly, they also claimed the style matched that of the BBC.[2]

‘I am surprised to hear that auntie is so subversive,’ laughed Gilchrist.[3] He may have been blasé about the security risk, but Hans Welser and Ed Wynne could afford no such luxuries.

Welser had insisted on deniability and, already unimpressed by Wynne’s outfit, watched carefully from afar. Wynne, for his part, had personally vouched for his Indonesian recruit and knew, given Welser’s earlier concerns, that he would now be in for criticism as a result of the exposure. Wynne buried himself in the papers, forensically examining every single one of the supposed errors with ‘my man’. He emerged bleary eyed,

exhausted but defiant, insisting that all bar one was entirely correct. There was no foreign—British—scent.

Wynne now faced a linguistic dilemma inherent in black propaganda. ‘If we react’ to the allegations ‘by changing the language we will immediate give the game away because genuine Indonesians would not react that way’.[4]

‘It seems to me’, pondered John Drinkall, the IRD’s assistant head, with decidedly colonialist undertones, ‘that whenever one is dealing with a “newly emerging” language there are no two experts who are prepared to agree on what is authentic and what is not. I am told, for example that every Arab is utterly convinced that only his Arabic is “authentic”.’[5]

If Drinkall was happy to let it lie, Welser was a tougher audience altogether. He narrowed his eyes sceptically, asking an MI6 contact to check Wynne’s workings—and was not altogether convinced when it came back clear.[6] Others still insisted there were errors.[7] ‘Mr Wynne’s exile expert, albeit Indonesian himself, may be behind the current fashion.’[8]

Welser was exasperated. ‘I see no point in pursuing this further: we will never get the experts to agree’.[9] They were quickly learning the difficulties of operating so far from home with so little understanding of the local context.

Back in Singapore, Ed Wynne was stressed, feeling defensive and overstretched. It did not help when Singapore suddenly seceded from Malaysia on 9 August 1965—in a move that blindsided British intelligence and quickly became a disastrous propaganda own goal, making Wynne’s life even more difficult. An independent Singapore seemed only to prove what Sukarno had been saying all along: Malaysia was an unstable and artificial construction; Confrontation was working. Secession left the attrition strategy in turmoil.[10]

Against the wider chaos and confusion, Wynne also suffered personnel problems. Fritz Kanitz had done a good job moulding the Indonesian translator, but he was proving a shoddy writer himself. Poor Wynne ended up doing all of the writing and editing himself, eventually letting Kanitz return prematurely to London where he resumed his translation work for Welser and Rayner, alongside attempts to plant material in the Central

European press.[11] Wynne needed some support; in fact, the whole setup needed better coordination and leadership.

Enter Norman Reddaway. Balding but handsome, the kind of handsomeness that derived from confidence, with a smile that bent into a slight smirk in the corners of his mouth, Reddaway was one of the IRD's most experienced specialists. Sick of being beaten around the head, as he later recalled, by well-coordinated Soviet propaganda machinery, he had helped set up the department back in 1948. An early claim to fame had been raising a red flag about a seemingly brilliant young recruit: the Soviet agent Guy Burgess. 'Dirty, drunken, and idle!' Burgess was summarily dismissed soon afterwards.[12]

Reddaway had then served in Ottawa, Rome, and with the IRD in London as a deputy head, including during Suez when he pushed for more black radio activity,[13] before becoming its Middle East chief in 1960, based in Beirut. He was a relentless schemer and an enthusiastic supporter of this sort of work, believing he and his colleagues operated best under the radar and free from red tape.[14] He was able and he knew it, carrying himself with the self-assurance of someone who felt he did not need to prove a thing. In 1965 he became director of political warfare, tasked with coordinating propaganda and other covert activities against Indonesia. He later claimed to have been given a budget of £100,000 and an enticing brief: 'to do anything I could do to get rid of Sukarno'.[15]

He was raring to go, frustrated with inevitable bureaucratic hiccups delaying his departure. Gilchrist was excited too. 'The sooner you can put my old friend Reddaway to work the better', he said, itching for action, 'send him over here for a few days to get the smell of the place'.[16] He told Reddaway to take charge, to 'establish Wynne's organisational dependence on you'.[17] Reddaway was sniffy about Wynne, describing his newsletter operations as 'larks'—'competently devised. But of course their effect is strictly limited.'[18] He would shake things up.

Back home, John Drinkall listed the Indonesian political schisms ripe for Reddaway's exploitation: the army versus the Communists, the Communists versus the Muslims, the Javanese versus the non-Javanese, and so on. It was an open goal. 'All the evidence suggests that the Indonesians will tolerate without publicity a surprisingly wide range of covert activities

directed against them.' There was, he explained, a 'curious Anglo-Indonesian conspiracy of silence about the true state of affairs along the Eastern Malaysian frontier'.[19]

The stage was set, and Welser was starting to half enjoy himself. Nostalgic for the high-tempo plots and ploys he crafted back at Woburn Abbey, the headquarters of PWE during the war, a part of him wished he was out there with Wynne and Reddaway. It was 'straight Woburn stuff', or as he remembered it anyway, he noted wistfully from afar. 'They are having fun!'[20]

Everything changed on the night of 30 September 1965.

In the small hours of the morning, as September gave way to October, a group of soldiers led by the commander of Sukarno's presidential bodyguard and acting with the informal support of senior Communists, attempted a coup. They assassinated six generals, throwing their bodies down a well. The defence minister, General Nasution, escaped, but his young daughter was fatally shot. Rebel forces occupied central Djakarta and took over broadcasting facilities. Confused residents awoke to the line that these brave soldiers had acted patriotically to forestall a CIA-backed military coup—those same local army friends from the Gilchrist forgery—to remove Sukarno. The president was safe. A revolutionary council would soon take responsibility for government.

It would not last long. Major General Suharto, commander of the army strategic reserve, had escaped with his life. Amid confusion and chaos, he used his own troops to regain control of the city. The coup had failed. Afterwards, Suharto and other generals saw an opportunity not just to punish the plotters but to quash the Communists once and for all. He ignited a deadly purge of Communists and Communist sympathizers which soon swept the country.

It was a time of blood and terror. One diplomat in the Foreign Office's Southeast Asia department later spoke of men murdered in the streets, of severed heads hurled over the walls of the British consulate in East Java each morning.[21]

It was horrific, but not chaotic; worse, there seemed to be a cold order to the violence, presenting Welser's colleagues with an opportunity of their own. 'We should not miss the present opportunity to use the situation to our advantage', local officials in Singapore cabled excitedly to London. There

should be ‘no hesitation in doing what we can to surreptitiously blacken the PKI [the Indonesian Communist Party] in the eyes of the army and the people of Indonesia’.[22] Gilchrist was also on board, insisting that ‘the most important political objective at the present moment is not to support friends (overtly) but to keep the pot boiling and to magnify confusion’.[23]

For once, those back in Whitehall enthusiastically agreed. Here was a perfect opening to ‘encourage anti-Communist Indonesians to more vigorous action in the hope of crushing Communism in Indonesia altogether, if only temporarily; and, to this end and for its own sake, to spread alarm and despondency in Indonesia to aggravate and prolong the present crisis, and prevent, or at any rate delay, re-emergence’ of Sukarno’s government.[24]

‘This gives us all a splendid chance’, Welser’s team enthused. Armed with intercepts of Indonesian military communications provided by GCHQ,[25] and a long list of circumstantial evidence of Chinese complicity provided by the Americans,[26] they knew that the army was ‘making splendid running on the line “it was a Communist plot.”’[27] Welser thought Wynne and Reddaway should encourage them. ‘Do nothing to embarrass the Generals’, he advised.[28]

On the other side, the Chinese also watched closely. Chen Yi, the vice premier, was well informed and counselled that ‘the Americans and the British have also warned the Army and the Rightists: You must continue.’ He looked more towards the Americans though, wrongly claiming that the army and ‘Islamic reactionary forces’ were ‘under the command’ of the CIA. ‘The Americans and the Army, the Rightists, are shaken’, he added defiantly six weeks after the botched coup. ‘For a month now, they have been constantly doing such propaganda, attempting to shake the people’s confidence.’[29]

Like Welser, Wynne, and the rest of them, the Chinese also sensed an opportunity. Chen privately mused that ‘if the rightist forces get rid of Sukarno, it would be a good thing’. He told North Korean counterparts that China could exploit the crisis to enable Indonesian Communists to win what would become a decisive armed struggle. ‘The Korean press has been coordinating well. The Japan Communist Party, Albania, and Vietnam all have been coordinating well’. This awkward period with Indonesia walking

a tightrope between left and right was coming to an end, he claimed. ‘Indonesia is now on the eve of a great storm and a great revolution’.[30]

Ed Wynne would probably have agreed—albeit assuming that great storm would blow in favour of the army rather than the Communists. He was enjoying himself, telling Welser how everybody was ‘madly busy thinking of new ideas!’[31] The atmosphere was frantic, excitable even, as Wynne rushed to work on a special issue of his newsletter.

Drinkall, Welser, and the team quickly issued emergency guidance from London calling for a restrained and unbelligerent tone. A lack of discipline, they warned, could do more harm than good; it risked blowing cover and tainting the generals as stooge of the West.[32] Wynne was not interested. He saw his chance, ignored the IRD, and used his newsletter to call for the elimination of the Indonesian Communist party once and for all. ‘We demand in the name of all patriotic people that this Communist cancer be cut out of the body of the state.’[33]

Ambitions soared and petty tension mounted; Welser and Rayner were so unimpressed that they destroyed the consignment of the newsletter due to be posted from London.[34]

Wynne found himself on the defensive. ‘To meet our commitments’, he vented to Reddaway,

> we are obliged to produce about 1500 words per day—good or bad. This means that, as with many publications, we may not hit the nail on the head. (I once asked Charles Foley [foreign editor of the *Daily Express*] how the *Daily Express* managed to get away with so many mistakes, and he told me that it was because they were always on the street the next day with a new issue, and the previous day’s issue was forgotten!!)

‘Life isn’t long enough to catch up with the news’, Reddaway half consoled.

‘Our first issues were not particularly good’, Wynne admitted, ‘but we have improved.’ The criticism was unfair, he claimed, coming from people with outdated and limited experience of the region. ‘What makes our life even more depressing’ is constant critique from MI6’s Indonesian expert. ‘His criticism is however slightly different. They take the form of nitpicking: “I wonder if Philippines is spelt with an F or a P in Indonesian—otherwise no comment.”’ It irritated Wynne deeply. ‘You will readily see what I mean—we do live in a world in which we submit an examination paper every two weeks to some hypercritical headmasters!!’

‘“The critics” are the bane of most artists and actors’, Reddaway mused in response, his mind half-wandering.

‘But there is the other side of the coin’, Wynne began, desperately reeling off praise—some more faint than others—from various quarters. Hans Welser says: ‘I think no.16 is very good’; John Drinkall says: ‘how clever of you to include poetry by Dylan Thomas’. But ‘I wrote the poetry, not Dylan Thomas’, Wynne noted.

‘You see’, he continued, getting it all off his chest, ‘we started this from nothing, and tried to gain expertise as we went along. We have been very much on our own.’ His frustration rose as his mind returned to his critic in MI6. ‘I will not hide from you my very carefully considered view that our friends’ expert is a grave danger to the success of our efforts’.

‘Not really’, Reddaway sighed. ‘We can ignore him as we get stronger.’

Wynne said MI6’s expert should come out and do it himself for a couple of weeks if it was that easy. ‘Why not try it?’ he harrumphed.[35]

He particularly objected to the IRD’s criticisms regarding inaccuracies in his newsletter. ‘In hindsight, our analysis was about right; just right for a group of Indonesians who had no real news, and had to make their own assessment. In fact we were the only body *fully entitled to be wrong*. There is some advantage in being a notional group.’ On another note, he pointed out, almost threateningly, ‘if our efforts were bogus, they are no more bogus than a lot of African Brothers and various other bogus organisations. I know,’ he added ominously, ‘I have been in the business a long time.’[36]

Plots and ploys came thick and fast after that. Gilchrist remembered how the Indonesians saw British spies everywhere, ‘the world-famous British Secret Service—and for a day or two we think they may right!’[37] For all the spy fever, it was he who was personally targeting attacks based on whom he thought was, in his words, a ‘baddie’.[38] At Gilchrist’s suggestion, Welser arranged for copies of a photograph showing Sukarno pinning a medal on the Communist leader, Aidit, to be sent to the Indonesian army and local press. Gilchrist thought him an easy target: complicit in the coup and ‘not quite normal in his mind’, perhaps through drink and drugs.[39]

‘No reactions so far noted.’[40]

Rayner followed with a scheme of his own. Earlier in the year, his team had landed a hit by forging a World Peace Council statement condemning

Sukarno's apparent intention to conduct a nuclear test. This was just the latest in a series of operations targeting the Council, which Rayner had long sought to expose as a Soviet front and destabilize by driving wedges in the wider international peace movement. When the WPC quickly denounced it as a forgery, Rayner got creative. He now issued a follow-up circular, again in the name of the WPC, denouncing the Council's genuine denunciation as itself a forgery.[41]

It was a clever job. The British forgery claimed that it was obvious that the WPC's (genuine) denunciation was itself a forgery because of its crude use of a stamped signature.[42] A lovely touch; Rayner always tried to use real signatures in his own forgeries to increase credibility. If the World Peace Council would not do it in their genuine communications, then they would pay a price.

Forgeries, denunciations, more forgeries; it was getting confusing. Rayner did his best to explain the convoluted plots as others scratched their heads. It would 'cause confusion in the world peace movement not only by reiterating the arguments used in the first circular, but also by denouncing as a forgery the WCP démenti'. And, as an added bonus, it would incidentally 'draw attention to the failure of the Indonesians to let off their promised bomb'.[43]

'No reactions so far noted.'[44]

Meanwhile, back in Singapore, Reddaway worked the angles with his usual blend of charm and menace. 'We would all be grateful for maximum dirt from the researchers on our terrible trio', he asked Welser. The trio of so-called guilty men were Aidit, the Communist ideologue; Subandrio, the slippery foreign minister; and Omar Dhani, a leftist commander of the air force supposedly complicit in the coup. 'May I suggest that we could do worse than hire a private detective to follow Omar Dhani round the Hague and observe what he is up to. He must be getting pretty bored and worried by now.'[45]

Welser considered the proposition carefully. Dirt, yes. Detective, no.[46]

A month passed, and Reddaway tried again. He was nothing if not persistent. 'I am not sure where at the moment Omar Dhani is, but it occurs to me that he might possibly be foolish enough to write to Subandrio about the present situation in Indonesia in such a way that he referred to his close cooperation with Subandrio just before the *coup*.' A pause, the implication

clear. ‘If we could write the letter for O.D. we could also probably arrange for it to fall into the Generals’ hands.’ He continued, ‘If you like the idea would you like us to have a go at a first draft?’ All he needed from Welser was information on Dhani’s whereabouts and to sort out the posting.[47]

Welser was intrigued. ‘We have been scratching around for the necessary operation intelligence to carry out the interesting little ploy.’ Unfortunately, ‘we are not certain as to the whereabouts of Omar Dhani, nor have we any specimens of his handwriting or his signature.’[48]

As Reddaway sifted through dubious sources to locate Dhani, with one contact falsely claiming he had been shot,[49] Wynne took Welser’s intrigue as a green light. He forged a letter implicating Subandrio and Dhani, signing it with the flourish of another of Sukarno’s inner circle. Without so much as a nod to Welser, he posted it from Hong Kong to a businessman named Markam, ‘a known bad character and crony of Sukarno’, he later explained, knowing that it would be intercepted by curious eyes and end up in the generals’ hands.[50]

The move, delivered as a fait accompli, elicited a clipped response from Welser. ‘Quite ingenious,’ he allowed, though the faint sting of his sidelining prompted a petty rebuke: Wynne had spelled the businessman’s name wrongly, by adding an ‘h’.[51]

Wynne bristled; his reply terse. ‘Our Indonesian expert thinks it is correct’, and besides, ‘it doesn’t much matter either way’.[52]

Weeks later, Wynne delivered the aftermath with the smug satisfaction of a gambler who had backed the right horse, and pointedly stuck by his original spelling. ‘Whether we had any hand in it or not…Markham was arrested by the Army and is now in protective custody.’ He had gone down with a fight, his bodyguard firing shots out in vain.[53]

‘Well done if it was you’, Welser offered doubtfully. ‘If not, the main thing is that the man is where he is. It is tantalising that we will never know. Such is our lot.’[54]

As the murders piled up, schemes grew bolder—and more bizarre, laced with imperial arrogance. Gilchrist came up with his most peculiarly macabre idea yet: The Voice from the Well. It would be some sort of leaflet penned by the ghosts of generals whose bodies had been unceremoniously dumped into a well by the coup plotters and who were now issuing threats

against Subandrio and Sukarno from the afterlife: ‘When Allah brings my broken body together, Subandrio, he will break yours in the pit of hell’. Signed, the ‘exiled sons of Allah’.[55]

Welser rolled his eyes in both impatience and disdain. After seeking advice from friends in MI6, he had his verdict: it was a stupid idea. For starters, invoking the exiled sons of Allah would offend every Muslim in earshot, making it too obviously a Western scheme. Second, the generals were already doing a great job removing the threat of Communism themselves; there was no need to join in and risk undermining them by tainting them as Western stooges. And finally, Welser mused, how would the ghost of a general have access to a printing press anyway? In the end, he leaned on an old Fleet Steet maxim from his journalist days: ‘When in doubt leave it out.’[56]

But Gilchrist was getting carried away. ‘It would be even better if it were a real voice’. It could ‘be kept running for 20 minutes with garbled extracts from tape recordings of Sukarno and mad laughter as a fill-in. What the real message might be, I leave to your imagination and I trust you have an echo chamber to add a sense of doom.’[57]

Gilchrist pressed ahead, muttering excitedly about the ghost of Hamlet’s father. ‘You can rely on us to make it unattributable.’ A local Indonesian could be bribed to post it from Bangkok. Simple.[58]

‘I have just heard the “Voice”’, Reddaway piled in. ‘It is first class. Tapes of it have gone to Andrew. We must now see what use he can make of it.’[59]

The first script was certainly dramatic, if not decidedly over the top. It also deliberately amplified false propaganda lines developed by the generals that the bodies were tortured and mutilated, designed to encourage a more violent response.[60]

‘FADE OUT: The Voice from the Mosque

FADE IN: The Voice from the Well

The Voice from the Well should be hollow and sepulchral. It should begin weakly, as a moan, and gradually gain strength.’

Voice: ‘Subandrio! Subandrio! Subandrio! Can you hear us Subandrio? Of course you can! For you can never close your ears to our voices. The voices you tried to smother in the Well. The voices of us the dead. Those

voices will always ring in your ears, calling you a traitor and murderer…' And so it went on, '…for it was you who planned our torture and mutilation…Worms may feed upon our rotting flesh, but our voices have becomed [*sic*] the voices of the Nation's conscience…'

Yes! Subandrio, we are waiting for you…Waiting…Waiting…Waiting…'[61]

Welser and John Edmonds, a navy man of twenty years who had since become an assistant head of the IRD, stared at each other in silent disbelief. As far as they were concerned, they were slowly torpedoing Gilchrist's unworkable leaflet scheme through bureaucratic obfuscation when, all of sudden, and without reference to London, he and Reddaway had made all these tapes. Edmonds insisted that they not be put into circulation unless local officials were satisfied that they were properly convincing.[62]

'It would do more harm than good if the Voice appeared to be Necolim-sponsored', Edmonds pleaded to the stubborn ambassador, referring to a portmanteau devised by Sukarno's regime to refer to neo-colonial, colonial, and imperial agents.[63]

He, Welser, and Harry Stanley in the Foreign Office's Joint Malaysia/Indonesia Department gave Reddaway a dressing down. 'I am sorry we have had to inject this note of caution at this early stage of our collaboration. It is not just a manifestation of the traditional "better not" attitude associated with Whitehall.' Reddaway's face betrayed a faint flicker of irritation.

First, they continued, 'truly black operations like this one must be watertight if they are not to blow up in our faces'.

Second, their eyes narrowing, 'neither you nor I nor anyone in IRD knows the language well enough to be able to judge whether any particular written or taped material says what we want it to say and sounds convincingly Indonesian.' Their tone hardened slightly. This was not like meddling in Europe, Reddaway, 'where we can count on an adequate supply of really high-class traitors and émigrés'. We were at the mercy of a single 'tame Indonesian'.[64]

'We have here an Indonesian teacher of languages, a highly competent man', Reddaway insisted. 'What we have to guard against is that operations devised by the Ambassador concerned are not vetoed because of allegedly irregular uses of the optative.'[65]

TOP SECRET

THE VOICE FROM THE WELL.

A voice from a mosque is calling the Faithful to Prayer.

(If it is not possible to obtain such a voice a temple drum or gong can be used instead)

FADE OUT: The Voice from the Mosque

FADE IN: The Voice from the Well

The Voice from the Well should be hollow and sepulchral. It should begin weakly, as a moan, and gradually gain strength.

Voice: Subandrio! Subandrio! Subandrio? Can you hear us Subandrio? Of course you can! For you can never close your ears to our voices. The voices you tried to smother in the Well. The voices of us the dead. Those voices will always ring in your ears, calling you traitor and murderer.

No matter how you swear to God that you are innocent, no matter how loud you shout, or how you try to bury your head beneath a pillow, you cannot silence our voices from the Well, for it was you who planned our torture and mutilation. It was you Subandrio, who caused our bones to be broken and our flesh to be pierced and stabbed. You, Subandrio, caused our death. Did you think that that would be the end?

Foolish man to have thought that our voices could be stilled. Worms may feed upon our rotting flesh, but our voices have become the voices of the ~~xxxxxx~~ Nation's conscience. They are the voices which will ring incessantly in your ears. There is no escape for you, Subandrio. No! Not even in death will you be freed from the voices which accuse you of betraying your country. Even when the white shroud is taken from your cold flesh, and your lifeless body touches the damp earth of the grave you will still hear that everlasting accusation of murder and betrayal.

Subandrio! Did you see those words written on the walls? "Hang Subandrio!" That is what the words demanded. Those words were washed away, but you, Subandrio, you can still see them. Every time you pass those walls you see ~~them~~ you see, for ~~those words~~ they were written with our blood. ~~xxx~~ No amount of scrubbing can ever remove them from your sight.

Even when your cold flesh is wrapped up & you should do

Figure 4. ‘The Voice from the Well’, undated 1965, FCO 168/1673, The National Archives, UK.

Besides, it was too late. Gilchrist’s team had posted out seven copies to media outlets and carefully deposited one in a flowerpot in the Hotel Indonesia on 19 November. He dutifully suspended the operation the following morning—knowing the damage was done.[66]

Reddaway was unapologetic and tried to invoke higher authority. He knew that Gilchrist loved all this stuff: the cloak and dagger, the secret rendezvous; the ambassador was enjoying himself immensely. ‘In accordance with Sir Andrew’s wishes’, he began pointedly, ‘eight of the tapes were circulated in Djakarta. I personally welcome this speedy action since the idea was imaginative and timely and the execution of it efficient and fast. We are now at work on a second edition which I hope will be as good as the first.’ He was particularly frustrated, he added purposely, that ‘a linguist, however accomplished’ ended up having a ‘decisive voice against an operation devised and supported by the Ambassador concerned’.[67] So much for experts.

Wynne was equally angry. ‘We find it tends to inhibit us in the lively production of propaganda when we know that almost all our efforts are viewed with a sceptical eye. My Indonesian is a highly educated man with an academic habit of life. He is a professor of Malay languages, a former schoolmaster in Indonesia, and a diplomat who defected from the Sukarno regime. He is a sincere practicing Muslim, who is quite dedicated to the work he does for us.’

‘He said something to me the other day’, Wynne ranted on,

> something on the following lines: ‘How would you like it if you wrote in English “My son has a beaten up old car” and then received word from Warsaw to the effect that a Polish expert in English had said that the correct way to put this was “My son has a car which is old and in a bad condition”, because the way this has been translated indicates to the English reader that the car referred to is old and has been beaten by hammers or other instruments such as bludgeons.’ I must say this is rather expressive.[68]

Exasperated, Wynne accused Welser of backseat driving. The implication was clear: he needed to back off. Welser sighed; at least the row had cleared the air—for now. He and Reddaway agreed that any future editions would be properly checked and, rather than being dropped in plant

pots by excitable British diplomats, would be offered to the Malaysians via proper MI6 channels.[69]

Later, Reddaway confirmed, with a note of satisfaction bordering on smugness, that the tapes had indeed been offered to Malaysian black radio stations—and that the Malaysians were 'happy' with the product.[70] Besides, he claimed, it 'hammered the right people, who, in my view merit the hardest hammering that can be administered'.[71] In truth, Welser was powerless to stop him. And both knew it.

The truce was fleeting. Within days, Welser, politely but pointedly, had to tell Reddaway that, no, he did not in fact, despite Reddaway's assumption to the contrary, have 'carte blanche' to spend IRD money.[72] Edmonds spent New Year's Eve that year digesting Welser's verdict on what he thought Wynne was up to. 'Appreciably thinner than I had hoped,' he told Reddaway.[73] Edmonds and Welser thought the local output was far too combative, woefully suited to the delicate realities of the post-coup landscape. They spoke in guarded tones of reining him in. But Reddaway, as they both knew, was no easy target. He had powerful backers, not least within the military. From their distant vantage point on other side of the world, they could only ever be a handmaiden to Reddaway's schemes. He, for better or worse, had the run of the field.[74]

Instead, they doubled down on their own operations, successfully planting material through NAFEN. One story drafted in Carlton House Terrace exposing Chinese aid for Indonesian rebels, landed in the *Sunday Telegraph*.[75]

Sukarno condemned the 'witch-hunt'. He promised to crack down on any group which was, in his words, 'fanning passions'. 'Frankly speaking', he addressed the nation, 'there is an embassy in Jakarta which engages in subversion. There is an Embassy which wanted to bribe an Indonesian with 150,000 rupiahs for propaganda about "free world ideology" in Indonesia.'[76]

Gilchrist, Reddaway, and Wynne held their breath. Had their free-wheeling plots embodied too volatile a blend of ambition and absurdity, of ignorance and imperial arrogance? Were Welser and Rayner right all along? Were they about to be exposed again? Would they be declared *persona non grata* and expelled?

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14

The Stiletto and the Sausage Stick

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when Sukarno pointed the finger at the American embassy instead. With the US taking most of the heat, Wynne felt able to operate with growing impunity. For all the soul-searching about British decline, sometimes it helped being the junior—and increasingly insignificant—partner.

This time it was John Rayner who recoiled in horror at Wynne's overzealous enthusiasm. By the end of 1965, three months after the botched coup, 28,000 copies of the newsletter had been sent into Indonesia—an astonishing 190,000,000 words.[1] Reddaway proudly referred to the open news machine as his bludgeon and the black newsletter as the stiletto; he was convinced it was drawing blood.[2] Wynne, slightly more modestly, claimed it '*may* have influenced current army and anti-PKI propaganda in Indonesia'; yet he could not resist a flash of vanity, also claiming that Sukarno himself was a reader. The real value, he argued, lay in its ability to slip material past Indonesia's censors. Once through, this could then be picked up and spread by other propagandists, feeding the wider anti-Communist machine. It was, he suggested, a critical cog in the counter-revolution.[3]

Rayner turned to his personal assistant Heulyn Dunlop, for a little quiet digging. She was much younger than her boss and there was something about her which beguiled and quietly captivated the older Rayner. The pair found little evidence to back Wynne's claims, but Rayner hardly minded. The hours spent in her company, the low murmur of their conversations, were reward enough.[4]

Wynne's next issues of the newsletter served only to worsen already frosty relations with Whitehall. The stiletto now reached 1,500 recipients. It was aggressive, emotive, and inflammatory. It derided Communists as rats and then attacked Sukarno for restraining the cats. Wynne egged on the generals, warning against complacency in the murderous crackdown against Communists and Communist sympathizers. A new government was needed, one that would abolish Communism once and for all and call off the Confrontation.[5]

Rayner's response was cool, bordering on disdain. 'Pretty head-on anti-Sukarno', he complained. 'It also supports the generals, who are surely best left alone; openly attacks Confrontation (which I would have thought would antagonize most readers); and defends Necolim. A thoroughly Western number.' In fact, he was so unimpressed that he once again refused to post his batch from London.[6]

'Oh dear.' Welser replied wearily, bracing himself for another round.[7] Wynne's outfit was simply not up to scratch;[8] or rather, Welser thought he could do a better job of it himself and was frustrated at being so far from the front line. His preferred approach was more subtle: 'more in sorrow than anger', as he put it. Sukarno, he argued, was better portrayed as a tragic figure misled by the Chinese, by Subandrio, by the usual suspects.[9] He was, after all, 'the embodiment of the Revolution and the Indonesian spirit for many millions of Indonesians', Welser reminded them.[10] But his chief worry was graver: the whole operation was too blunt, the British hand too visible. It lacked the darkness that true deniability demanded.[11]

'There are many reasons why I believe our émigré group would, and should, attack him', Wynne shot back. 'A certain amount of anti-Sukarno material is not only necessary but helps maintain our cover.'

Wesler scoffed.

'We believe our efforts in general have tended to fall into line with the Generals' own propaganda policy', Wynne pressed on, undeterred. 'And attacks on Sukarno may find them even more receptive to our efforts as they dare not make such attacks themselves.' Besides, Wynne added pointedly, 'we are guided by Norman Reddaway'.[12]

The name, the pointed invocation of authority, landed in London like a thrown gauntlet. Predictably, it went down badly.[13] One of Welser's IRD

colleagues, Peter Hewitt, even suggested cancelling the newsletter altogether on the grounds that it was so obviously Western-inspired that it actually *hindered* the generals' campaign.[14] But he knew he did not have the authority. Rayner meanwhile ridiculed Reddaway's favoured analogy, dismissing it with a derisive smile: 'neither a rapier nor a bludgeon', he sneered, 'but a clown's sausage stick'. And he hypocritically criticized Wynne for not getting enough intelligence on reactions to the black propaganda.[15]

Despite the protective arm of Reddaway around his shoulders, Wynne was not immune from the pressure of Welser and Rayner and so reluctantly agreed to alter his attacks. Subsequent issues focused more on the so-called guilty men, albeit characteristically aggressively. Subandrio was Sukarno's cockerel, 'involved up to the neck in the coup … So far the Army has only pulled out a few of the cockerel's many feathers, they haven't even clipped its wings, but the time will come—*it must come*—when that bird which has done so much to foul our nest will have its neck wrung; and the whole of Indonesia will rejoice.' And as for the Indonesian Chinese who were now facing widespread violence: they only had themselves to blame.[16] The line was egregious given that the masses were not complicit in the coup.

The Foreign Office knew the massacres were taking place,[17] but, in truth, Welser and Rayner seemed far more worried about deniability and blowback than they were about civilian deaths. They did not think for a second that they were complicit in any genocide: as far as they were concerned, this was happening anyway, and they were actually being careful not to support the generals because the generals were doing a pretty good job by themselves.

'Do not despair, Hans, we are getting better'. Reddaway tried to reassure him. Aside from the newsletter, planted articles were picking up pace, and hitting an average of a publication a day. 'By the time confrontation is over we shall be a pretty likely lot.'[18]

'I am so glad things are humming in this way', Welser replied. 'I always find the game of placing things and picking them up again for placing elsewhere absolutely fascinating. Occasionally it works like a charm although one must be careful to get to the stage where in the end one does not know what is what.'[19]

The newsletter did improve, and Reddaway was delighted when an authoritative Indonesian newspaper, the *Herald*, confirmed that the wider propaganda effort was having an impact; that it was even discussed at a meeting of army chiefs.[20] By March 1966, Welser refused to contemplate shutting the newsletter down. Yes, it 'has certainly had its ups and downs', and yes 'there were changes in tone and emphasis when Mr Reddaway arrived and the line taken after the 30th of September according to our judgement, was not always fortuitous', but recent issues had seen a return to earlier subtlety. More importantly, he knew that Wynne's outfit had grown beyond the problematic newsletter and now leaked stories, produced radio tapes for Malaysian black propaganda, and supported military psychological warfare. 'The Newsletter therefore is perhaps not the most important and certainly not the most immediate weapon in the SEAMU armoury.' Ever the pragmatist, he also knew that he and his colleagues could not control the newsletter so might as well offer occasional comment from London to 'help to keep it on the rails'.[21]

All the while, killings, purges, and instability swept the country. Student protests against Sukarno picked up speed. In late February 1966, one demonstrator had been shot outside Sukarno's palace, turning him into a martyr. Many flags flew at half-mast, as momentum built against the president; students blocked access to the palace by seizing cars and deflating tyres. Sukarno banned demonstrations and reimposed a curfew. In March, Sukarno and Subandrio abandoned a cabinet meeting as armed forces began to assemble outside—Subandrio was in such a hurry he left his shoes under the table. They flew to another palace in Java, where Sukarno signed over authority to Suharto to maintain security. As students triumphantly paraded through the streets on foot, scooters, trucks, and even clinging to army tanks, Gilchrist could not quite bring himself to believe the news: 'Sukarno is reported tired and in poor health, but he has recovered from setbacks before and as long as he is above ground is a force to be reckoned with.'[22]

He may have still formally been president, for now, but it was essentially game over for Sukarno. His own wings had been very much clipped. His eyes weak and watery, his face drawn and haggard, Sukarno was a pale imitation of the man he once was. MI6 had been wrongly assessing for years that Sukarno had all sorts of terrible diseases—useful ammunition for

Rayner if nothing else—and was not expected to last more than three or four months,[23] but now he really was suffering. His forced smile for foreign dignitaries was a toothy and ghastly effort. Gilchrist saw him at the end of March and 'got enough to confirm all I had heard indirectly about the degree of restraint under which the Bung was now permitted to operate'. When Sukarno threatened to go off-script, someone at the back clapped their hands twice and Sukarno hastily desisted.

The sentimental old Scot found his own eyes welling up. He should have been delighted, but thought it humiliating and degrading, as he watched Dewi staring at her husband, twisting a handkerchief in her nervous hands and wondering what she could salvage from the wreck. Sukarno, he reflected, had governed for years by magic and now it was all gone. 'Farce, pathos, and tragedy: for tragedy concerns great men, and Soekarno has been one.'[24]

It also spelt the end of Subandrio, much to Reddaway's delight. He had been hoping to remove Indonesia's foreign minister for months and, when Subandrio was arrested following Suharto's seizure of power, he could not quite believe it. 'For a moment the thought crossed my mind', he told Gilchrist, 'that, if Subandrio had been doing a little black operation on his good friend Sir Andrew, quite a few of us would have looked proper nanas.' Still, it was no black op. Subandrio really had been arrested. 'The chief enemy is discredited and in gaol', Reddaway cheered. 'The Old Master is impotent.'[25] Even so, Reddaway refused to let up. 'We can and should for a while go on kicking the men who are down, and stressing the need for their policies to follow them into disrepute, but there is less to be done in this way than in the past.'[26]

Chinese media blamed the CIA for 'daily poisoning the minds of the public with the most brazenly hypocritic and deceptive language of publication and propaganda'. Too many Indonesian journalists had 'sold their service to the US imperialists and the CIA'.[27] The UK, once again, flew under the radar and could continue to deliver the kicking.

Rayner was not yet satisfied either and moved quickly to pile on Sukarno. How about a follow-up Muslim Brotherhood leaflet?, Welser suggested. It could claim that Allah had punished Sukarno and could 'divest Sukarno of any lingering pretensions to near-divinity'.[28]

Rayner was keen, pointing out that the previous leaflets seeking to turn Muslims against Sukarno and the Communists had enjoyed ‘at least some impact’. Since then, though, ‘the real Muslim Brotherhood has come very much to life’, complicating things slightly.[29] They agreed simply to stick the word ‘World’ in front. And so, the World Muslim Brotherhood was born.

There was one other change: Welser insisted that references to Dewi now be omitted; she was a moderating influence, and attacking her might do more harm than good. Otherwise, ‘Go ahead, please.’[30]

‘O Brother Believers’, Rayner—or one of his writers—began, launching into some sort of bizarre sermon. ‘God has passed His judgment and the horrible events against which we have often warned have overcome that arrogant ruler, Sukarno.’ They preached like a diplomat possessed or some fundamentalist ventriloquist: ‘That creature is always running after more authority and sexual pleasures which had made him throw away every consideration for his and his people’s dignity for the sake of his lust. Sukarno’s indulgence up to his ears in sexual pleasures with cheap and easy women, even though his power even in this respect gets weaker and weaker every day, has shocked the believers to an intolerable degree.’

‘Is it strange that God has put his curse on a man whose childish boasts and threats in the field of international affairs have made Indonesia the joke of the world?’

‘There is no God but Allah and He is quick to punish.’[31]

‘No reactions so far noted.’[32]

At the same time, independently of Rayner or Wynne, the generals continued to launch propaganda of their own. According to the CIA, they sanctioned the publication of a series of lurid accounts to chip away at the legend of Sukarno.[33]

Andrew Gilchrist left Djakarta in the spring of 1966. Upon departure, he warned his colleagues back in Whitehall that ‘I must firmly reject the temptation to paint too bright a picture.’ Whilst it was positive that Sukarno’s henchmen were now in prison and the president had nothing but the trappings of power, the new leaders were far from pro-British. Gilchrist characteristically quoted Shakespeare: most friendship is feigning. Confrontation would never truly be over.[34]

He left proud of his achievements but with little gratitude to London, especially after Treasury bean-counters had taken away his hillside bungalow. He vented, 'I doubt if I could have lasted as long as I have if I had not had this escape valve; I daresay if I *had* cracked up, HMG might have been spared certain distressing aspects of their Indonesian policy, such as the overthrow of Sukarno and Subandrio; but forget that.'[35]

It was not all bad though. He told his successor that 'you need not worry as things are now. Perhaps half a million people have been cruelly butchered, but not in the Djakarta area, and no white people have been molested'. He added, 'on only one night have I missed sleeping in my own airconditioned bedroom, and I have yet to see a corpse in the street'.[36]

In more reflective moments, he did wrestle with the moral ambiguities of what he had done. 'What have we to hope from the generals?' he asked Reddaway. '400,000 people murdered, far more than the total casualties in Vietnam + nobody cares. "They were communists." Were they? And are not communists human beings?'[37]

By the summer, Reddaway thought the end was in sight. 'The news machine was our bludgeon; the newsletter and unorthodox operations our stiletto', he repeated enthusiastically. 'The bludgeon was surprisingly effective because we were able regularly to supply publicists with information which they could not find from other sources.'[38] He neglected to mention when singing his own praises that other states had bludgeons of their own, half competing, half cooperating.

The Indonesian military actively sought Malaysian help to put their message across,[39] whilst, acting on advice from the Indonesian generals, the Australian foreign ministry influenced Radio Australia broadcasts and Australian newspapers to editorialize appropriately.[40] Meanwhile, Moscow radio publicly railed against 'American propaganda men',[41] although the Kremlin was generally low key about the killing of Communists.[42] And Subandrio accused certain newspapers of being financed by the CIA.[43]

To be fair, the US had been busy. The CIA handed over lists of names to the Indonesian army, loaned the army communications equipment, and spread anti-Communist material.[44] Interestingly, the CIA knew nothing, initially anyway, about Wynne's operation, despite 'pumping' the local IRD man in Malaysia for information.[45] Voice of America also ran an

information programme into Indonesia, highlighting PKI brutality and blaming the Communists for the coup. By far the most extensive propaganda, however, came from the Indonesian generals themselves.[46]

As for Reddaway's stiletto, it 'likewise achieved good results'. He claimed victory.

> The students who gave Subandrio his final push came out openly in the early months of 1966 with the themes and slogans which the newsletter had been putting to them for many months. It is impossible, of course, precisely to assess the degree of cause and effect. Suffice it to say that the newsletter, based like the press briefing operations on sound research and plugging the same themes, undoubtedly had worthwhile impact. Between October and March all our themes became acceptable to the overthrowers of Subandrio and Co. The Triumvirate have taken them over lock stock and use them daily.[47]

He later reflected that 'We got rid of Sukarno probably 2 or 3 years earlier than he would have gone anyway' and this was simply 'by getting extremely good information about what was going on inside Indonesia and getting it into the right hands'.[48]

All of this was possible in spite of backseat driving from Welser and Rayner in London. 'I am not grousing,' Reddaway groused, 'and the issue is dead, but unduly tight control from London merely resulted in missed tricks.'[49] He was a slippery character. Simultaneously complaining—unfairly—about what he called 'crack pottery in London and elsewhere'.[50] He would later claim that any failure was because 'we let all the professionals in—the black propagandists and the secret service. They devised dreadful things out of Phoenix Park in Singapore.'[51]

Still, he reminisced fondly in private with Gilchrist. Remember that time we generated a story about the Chinese keeping their flag at the top of the mast and it went all over the world and back again and was even quoted by Subandrio when arguing with the Chinese embassy? That time we planted a story of systematic Communist preparations for the coup including carving up the town into districts for systematic slaughter? Or that time we planted details in Hong Kong of nest eggs accumulated abroad by Sukarno and his acolytes? They chuckled nostalgically.

'The outstanding impression I have of my time here and elsewhere spent on this sort of work', Reddaway lamented, 'is of the suspicion and dislike of it on the part of most diplomatic officers. Their whole instinct is to negotiate in private with the people they're accredited to and politely to turn

down suggestions about exerting pressures on them. We thus get a good reporting service and a good messenger boy service between London and country X, but little more. The political side in London has been hostile most of the time, and at best neutral!'[52]

'Committees with carefully cleared little ploys give an illusion of action but often accomplish little but the odd conjuring trick', Reddaway later recalled. 'The prodigiously effective ploys in the past have come from people who understand the game, and keep to its rule, being given license to operate and left to get on with it. This is the key for significant future action.'[53]

Another local post-mortem was sharper still. Sukarno was apparently a reader of the newsletter; 'reliable intelligence' showed that readers were 'influenced in the required direction'; the Voice from the Well series was nothing short of 'spectacular'; and 'student demonstrators had chanted slogans coined in the newsletter'. This was no thanks to Welser and the team. 'There was an excessive tendency to back-seat drive from London, which slowed up reactions to changing circumstances and led to our propaganda being sometimes too stale to be of maximum impact.'[54] Welser and Rayner felt attacked from all sides: the cautious wider Foreign Office; the gung-ho Gilchrist and Reddaway in the theatre; and of course, the propaganda of their actual enemies.

The IRD in London bristled, pushing back against Singapore's unsubstantiated claims of impact. Unproven at best; self-serving at worst.[55] Worse still, local officials had the gall to accuse Welser of not appreciating the nuances of black versus grey propaganda. He apparently failed to understand that, because it was deniable, the newsletter was free to criticize British policy.[56] Patronizing and preposterous, he fumed. It drew a stinging rebuke from the head of the IRD. Some of the newsletter's attacks on Sukarno were so blatant that they risked blowing cover and becoming implausibly deniable; his team fully understood this.[57]

The nature of their art also gave sufficient ambiguity for Welser and Rayner to take credit for their own work but, for reasons of bureaucracy and ego, to question the impact of the other team. Success was conjured in the eye of the beholder; it was political. The newsletter was, in truth, a single cog in a vast and unwieldly propaganda apparatus—an apparatus that reached far beyond British hands. Welser's team, by amplifying the

generals' lines and avoiding any move that might embarrass them, became entangled in a larger machinery of violence. They did not direct events, nor did they fully understand them. But their work helped to grease the wheels. Complicity, rather than culpability, was their mark on the killings.

It was, in its way, a parable of imperial twilight: men fumbling and fighting each other to maintain influence in a world that had already begun to slip from their grasp. There was a particular, almost tragic, hubris in that flailing against the dying of the imperial light.

In the years that followed, 'Indonesia 1965–1967' became a fixture of the military's psychological operations curriculum—an object lesson in the tools of persuasion and their consequences. For some officials, the inclusion of the case made it an apt fit for 'Mr Welser's people' to attend.[58] The episode had certainly thrown up plenty of learnable issues, highlighting the difficulties of coordinating propaganda from afar without backseat driving and slowing momentum; the difficulties of overcoming an imperial mindset and lack of knowledge of local people, languages, and cultures; and the difficulties of knowing when to interfere in events already under way without doing more harm than good. Arrogance, ignorance, and an itch to intervene made for a dangerous combination. The question of whether they would learn from any of this was another matter entirely.

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15

Welser vs Diallo Telli vs Rhodesia vs Franco

Welser and Rayner sat apart from the rest of the Foreign Office in the attic of their outwardly handsome yet crumbling offices backing onto the overcast grandeur of the Mall and St James's Park. It was a drizzly day in early August 1965, Welser's silhouette cut against the grey London sky, and the pair were casually going through their hitlist. Boubacar Diallo Telli, Rayner told his boss, was 'next on our list' to 'attack'.[1]

An outspoken and respected Guinean politician, Diallo Telli had served successively as ambassador to the United States and as Guinea's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York. Aged 40, he was now the secretary-general of the Organization for African Unity, a newish international body aiming to promote African cooperation, defend the sovereignty of the many recently independent states, and eradicate colonialism for good. Diallo Telli had held the post for just under a year by the time he wandered into Rayner's crosshairs.

Diallo Telli may have been experienced but he had struggled to bring much African unity to the big issues which divided the continent during what was an optimistic, yet tumultuous, era as new leaders navigated the pitfalls and perils of independence. Some twenty-six newly sovereign states had emerged in the first half of the 1960s alone, from Algeria in the north to Zambia in the south; chaos wreaked by Cold War politics combined with rapid decolonization led to conflict and competition as much as cooperation.

Both the Congo civil war, which had broken out in 1960 and almost immediately attracted the interest of competing superpowers, and the spread of Chinese influence across the continent dominated his agenda. Some leaders supported the Congolese government against Maoist rebels and

secessionists, others did not; some welcomed Chinese influence, others did not. OAU meetings were plagued with infighting and insults. Various Francophone states accused Ghana of subversion and subterfuge, threatening to boycott the organization unless Diallo Telli took a tougher line with Nkrumah. Others were fully supportive of him.[2] As for Rayner and his colleagues in the regular Foreign Office, they thought Diallo Telli, at best impotent, and at worst, too closely aligned with his Guinean compatriots who, having rejected the French neo-colonial project in the region, were now receiving Soviet aid.

Rayner aimed, initially at least, to discredit and disrupt Diallo Telli in the hopes that OAU activity would then coalesce around a more pro-Western stance. As Britain's covertly controlled news agencies gradually turned up the heat on Diallo Telli,[3] Rayner deployed the Brothers to attack him personally. He was less powerful and revered than Sukarno and so there was no need for the 'more in sorrow than anger' approach here.

'Loyal African Brothers!' they railed, Diallo Telli has congratulated the Chinese for developing nuclear weapons even though 'the great majority of the African States were knocked with horror at this news'.

'WE DO *NOT* APPLAUD IT.'

The Brothers accused him of backing Maoist rebels in Congo and of favouring 'militant' Ghana. Diallo Telli suffered from 'grandeur-mania'. It was 'NOW NECESSARY TO SAY, BROTHERS, WITH DEEP REGRET, THAT M. DIALLO TELLI *MUST* BE REPLACED BY A PERSON *WORTHY OF OUR TRUST*'.[4]

'No reactions so far noted.'

To generate some much-needed reactions, Welser sent a series of articles to his contact in the *Sunday Telegraph*. Unfortunately, the newspaper only ran one of them, amplifying accusations that Ghana was promoting subversion.[5] The attack was not cutting through.

As Welser and Rayner whistled into the wind, Diallo Telli became increasingly problematic. In their eyes he was a politician, and an outspoken one at that, rather than an impartial administrator spending his time on procedural bureaucracy and management of an international organization. Worst of all, he led the OAU's attempts to sever diplomatic relations with the UK over the brewing crisis in Rhodesia, where the white

minority government refused to be part of the Wind of Change blowing across the continent.

Ian Smith, the obdurate leader of Rhodesia, demanded independence, but without majority—black—rule. In November 1965, following a protracted dispute with London, he unilaterally and illegally declared Rhodesia to be a sovereign state. Uproar and sanctions followed. It was a hugely significant move: the first declaration of independence by a British colony since the United States in 1776 and a deliberate challenge to British authority, and, more widely, to decolonization, representative governance, and international law. Still, British diplomats posted in places like Lagos feared that, with the UK not in a position to use force against Rhodesia, most African leaders would be convinced that Smith was colluding with his British counterpart, Harold Wilson, in preserving white minority rule. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence would be, in their eyes, the final proof of British duplicity.[6]

Voicing this sense of betrayal, Diallo Telli grew more militant in his condemnation of Britain's refusal to attack Smith. Even the CIA, less partial than British intelligence on Rhodesia, saw him as a radical agitator riling African states to bandwagon against London.[7] John Ure, on the IRD's Africa desk, complained that he was 'stirring up no end of trouble' on the issue.[8] It was, he told Rayner, 'high time we took another crack at him'.[9]

'Am I right in thinking you have given some thought to a covert operation to dislodge him?', asked a colleague in the Commonwealth Relations Office.[10]

'You are indeed correct'.[11]

If Rayner intended to overthrow the secretary-general of the Organization of African Unity, he would need some decent ammunition.

At almost the same moment, in the fading light of an Addis Ababa evening, John Russell, the British ambassador, sipped a whisky and soda with his American counterpart, the conversation slipping into the easy, unguarded cynicism of old colleagues in foreign services. The topic turned to Diallo Telli, and they dissected the Guinean's growing profile.

He was 'getting far too big for his boots and he can no longer be dismissed as clown'. He suffered from 'megalomania and the most appalling personal conceit'. He dared to see himself as comparable in status

to the UN secretary-general and paid himself a huge tax-free annual salary accordingly. Then there was the free house and car, as well as all the usual diplomatic perks such as duty-free alcohol. And the nerve of it: he had turned his nose up at the OAU's perfectly adequate headquarters and bamboozled the Ethiopian emperor into giving him a 'grandiose brand new multi-storey building recently erected as Headquarters for the Police College'.

The ambassadors' tone sharpened as they recounted Diallo Telli's brazen antics. When American astronauts paid a quiet visit to Addis Ababa, Diallo Telli dared to steal the show. Then there was the time Russell and his wife took an Ethiopian Airlines flight. They had heard a loud voice barking orders at the poor air hostess, 'demanding whether she did not know who he was and threatening the most unpleasant things'. Russell turned around and it was, of course, Diallo Telli. 'But unfortunately for him', Russell told the American, swirling his ice in the bottom of his glass, 'the hostess was an Ethiopian girl, who was not going to take any of this sort of talk from a flat-nosed black ape from Guinea!' His senior staff disliked him; some had left, others looked dishevelled or were about to go around the bend.

Behind the anecdotes and racism lay a deeper concern. He was trying to speak for Africa but could well lead the OAU into some 'disastrous adventure. It is difficult to see what we can do to stop this: it is certainly not a job for the whites, at least not overtly.' Russell leaned in and promised to do his 'dirty best behind the scenes'.[12]

When word reached Rayner in London, it was not the brazen racism or petty gossip that caught his attention. It was the salary—those numbers tickled his instincts. And when he heard that the OAU was nearly $2.5 million in debt, the pieces began to fall into place. An organization strained by financial woes and fractured by internal divisions was ripe for manipulation. Division bred opportunity, and Rayner saw his chance.[13]

The plan emerged along practised lines. Through the Loyal African Brothers, Rayner would orchestrate a whisper campaign painting Diallo Telli as a profligate elite, living in luxury while his organization and the continent it claimed to represent languished in poverty. There was just the small matter of protecting his source. For good measure, and ostensibly to protect Russell, Rayner deliberately inflated the salary further still.[14]

Kit Barclay, the head of the IRD, reassured Russell of the precautions taken.

> We have taken our cue as regards the tone of the letter from your own remarks about Diallo Telli. However, we have, of course, been very careful to avoid using any of the anecdotes or other specific information contained in your letters. We have pointed out the exorbitant salary received by Diallo Telli, but even here we have quoted a figure different from that quoted by you to ensure that there can be no possible suspicion falling on our sources of information.
>
> You may think it best to destroy this letter when you have finished with it.[15]

MI6 spread it across the continent, and John Russell waited nervously in Addis Ababa for any blowback.[16]

None came. Welser and Rayner used another group to keep up the pressure. This one was unnamed and supposedly based in Accra, fitting given the constant allegations of Diallo Telli being soft on Nkrumah's use of Ghana as a base for subversion. The accusations, innuendo, and vitriol kept coming:

'DID YOU KNOW—that M. DIALLO TELLI has made secret trips to meet Russians—we can only imagine to receive instructions about how best to bring Africa and the OAU under their communist control???'

'DID YOU KNOW—that M. DIALLO TELLI has been told by the representatives of the Chinese People's Republic to incite the youth of independent African States to rebellion' and that 'these young gangsters' were 'murdering, burning, looting, raping "under the banner of Mao's thought".'

'DID YOU KNOW—that he acts as informant in the pay of French arch-neo-colonialist DE GAULLE???'

This was more than an exposé; it was a call to action sent to all delegates attending an OAU summit in November 1966: 'HIS ABDICATION SHOULD TAKE EFFECT *IMMEDIATELY!*'[17]

Rayner was pleased with the results. 'Although we have no evidence of the impact of the leaflets', he told Wesler, 'we believe it possible that they may have contributed (among a number of other factors) to Diallo Telli's reported discomfiture during the Summit.'[18] The attacks may have made Diallo Telli uncomfortable but, given that the aim was to dislodge him, the operation failed.

Unperturbed, Rayner tried again the following year, this time returning to the Brothers to repeat the claim that Telli had received secret directives from Moscow to manipulate African politics.[19] Having already distorted Diallo Telli's salary, Rayner now invented something from scratch—that Diallo Telli wanted to move OAU headquarters to Algiers. This was a lie, but Rayner explained that it provided a 'convenient peg for exploiting Afro-Arab friction'. It also created an 'opportunity to attack Diallo Telli'.[20]

The Brothers bellowed: Telli 'gives every opportunity to the Arabs to sabotage and dominate the OAU'. 'Since centuries past, the Arabs have long history of making slaves of our African peoples and, in our epoch, the more it changes, the more is the same thing.'[21]

Rayner had broken one of his golden rules and taken a gamble in his quest to dislodge Diallo Telli, but the lie amounted to little. Diallo Telli was appointed, albeit with difficulty, for a second term as secretary-general and stayed in post until 1972. Welser and Rayner would have declared success anyway. Disrupting Diallo Telli's work and generally making life difficult for him was, in their minds, a win.

1966 was proving to be one of Welser's busiest years since the Second World War, and certainly since the Suez crisis a decade earlier. Rayner's team had swelled to thirty-three people, ten more than in 1960.[22] His writers worked at full speed churning out news articles, complemented by more carefully curated forgeries, fakes, and phantoms. Jean Scott managed to write one Loyal African Brothers leaflet in just twenty-four hours, much to Welser's delight.[23]

The spike in activity came not from Indonesia or more fears of Chinese subversion or pan-African nationalism, but from the white minority in Rhodesia after its unilateral declaration of independence from the UK the previous November.

In addition to undermining Dialo Telli, Britain's secret state rolled into action with an ambitious campaign of covert action designed to remove the Smith regime and resume progress towards black majority rule as quickly as possible. It came from the very top. On Christmas Eve 1965, as the rest of the country had bustled about in the rain putting the finishing touches to their festive preparations, Burke Trend, the cabinet secretary, was in an altogether different mood. He had convened a small group to plan how best to get rid of the rogue Prime Minister. A lot of the ideas were above board,

including finding a suitable emissary to convince him to resign.[24] Trend had simultaneously established a covert action group to complement them.[25] Subterranean plans included economic operations to complement British sanctions, as well as, more dramatically, plans for a coup to overthrow Smith. The idea was rumbled when the Rhodesians discovered British paratroopers practising capturing Luqa airport in Malta as a dry run for a strike on Salisbury.[26] Unsurprisingly, Trend's secret plans included black propaganda; Hans Welser got the call up to remove the renegades who dared defy an empire, or what was left of it anyway.

Trend warned him to be careful. Whereas Welser and Rayner had willingly stirred racial tension elsewhere in Africa, they, and their colleagues in MI6, were expressly forbidden from stimulating racial conflict in Rhodesia. They could only target the white community.[27] As a result, the Brothers were unusually—perhaps suspiciously—quiet, albeit not for want of trying. Less than two weeks after Smith's announcement, Rayner had received authorization for a Brothers operation to urge Africans to avoid 'inflammatory and belligerent declarations of violence'. But that was it.[28] He later developed another operation to, in his words, urge 'Africans to unite to bring down the Smith regime'. It got pulled at the last minute.

'Why?', sighed one of his bosses.[29]

The same fate befell another of Rayner's fake groups: the People's Front of East Africa. He had excitedly hoped to resurrect the ostensibly Maoist organization to encourage Africans to rise up and resolve the Rhodesian problem through violence.[30] If that was too much, Rayner suggested creating a fake extremist white supremacist group instead. Supposedly from South Africa and called Die Wit Hand, it would rally behind Smith and encourage him to suppress wet liberals within his government. Rayner's logic was that association with such a violent terrorist organization would discredit Smith. Again though, it was too risky and, despite preparation being well under way, the operation was cancelled at the last minute.[31] Rayner's enthusiasm outran Burke Trend's strict red line regarding racial conflict.

The Rhodesians were alert to the British action. Smith's government had already publicly accused the UK of having set up what a government

spokesman called ‘Mr Harold Wilson’s new psychological branch’. Rhodesian intelligence tried to expose examples of planted news stories, in which ‘the hand of the professional propagandist can be seen in every paragraph’. The exposure was clever, acknowledging the ring of truth to alleged facts and circumstantial details which combined to produce a plausible story, before dissecting the aims and distortions. ‘Ingenious’, the Rhodesians admitted, but ‘pure fabrication’.[32] Welser would have been impressed.

When Rayner’s team posted copies of a *Daily Mirror* front page covering an exclusive interview with Wilson, designed to show his reasonableness, to white Europeans in Rhodesia, Salisbury was ready and waiting. Local radio told listeners that this constituted a ‘stepping up of psychological warfare’, before again dissecting the purpose of ‘this ingenious piece of propaganda’. It was a ‘perfect example of a form of propaganda best known as the peace offensive, the idea being to make a surrender to British pressure appear less unpleasant’.[33]

Meanwhile, Rhodesia was flooding the airwaves with propaganda of its own. TV and radio up and down the land hypnotically harped on about chaos in black African states, disorder elsewhere in the world, and the monolithic Communist threat. Many Rhodesian whites lapped it all up, inoculating them from the rest of the world.[34]

Under pressure, Rayner and Welser focused on two new fake groups to undermine the Smith regime by creating a platform with a supposedly active following to put over the British line. Both Rhodesian groups were supposedly white, both comparatively tame, but both kept the team busy. The first was called the Matopos Club, named after the distinctive granite Matopos—now Matobo—hills in Rhodesia famous for their cave paintings, wildlife, and, more controversially, for being the burial place of Cecil Rhodes and several other white settlers. Rayner used the Matopos Club to disseminate, through MI6, at least fifteen separate leaflets in the first half of 1966 alone. Each drew on secret intelligence and was, according to Rayner, an ‘absolutely black job and entirely covert and deniable’.[35] To maintain credibility, the Matopos Club railed against ‘those arrogant dictators in Whitehall’, but then attacked Smith for lying, creating chaos, crippling the economy, and, ironically, spreading propaganda. The Club encouraged readers to write to their MPs asking for negotiations.

Controversially, one Matopos operation targeted recipients *inside* the UK. It hoped to highlight, to British audiences, the scale of resistance among ordinary white Rhodesians against Smith's regime. 'We are deeply disturbed that most of the support we get from abroad appears to come from ultra right-wing organisations such as the British National Party, which follows the policies, including the doctrines of white Aryan supremacy, of the original Nazi Party inspired by Adolf Hitler.'[36] Welser thought it excellent—'and an even better list of addresses'.[37] In the Cabinet Office, Burke Trend had second thoughts and vetoed it.[38]

'I am not happy about this', Wesler sulked.[39]

The second new fake group was an unnamed anti-Smith organization. Rayner used it to share news stories censored in the Rhodesian press, under the heading 'more of what we are not allowed to read'. The operation deliberately bolstered the Matopos line about Smith's deceit, censorship, and propaganda.[40] Ultimately, the campaign was mild and largely immaterial. Constrained by colleagues terrified of lighting the tinderbox of racial violence in Rhodesia, Welser and Rayner no doubt privately complained to each other about operating with one hand tied behind their backs. Their campaign barely produced a spark.

The best they got was intelligence that the wife of a wealthy young farmer in Rhodesia thought that the Matopos Club was playing a very important role. Apparently, her friends agreed and all thought it was the work of a mysterious resistance leader.[41] It was not much; but Rayner was desperate for any playback, especially given the constant counterflow of pro-Smith propaganda coming from South Africa.[42] He took what he could get.

Welser complemented the black work by placing articles in the *Swiss Press Review*. These mostly covered the long-term economic effects of sanctions, and, like both the Matopos Club and the anti-censorship campaign, aimed to influence white Rhodesians. They knew that the *Swiss Press Review* mailing list included influential Rhodesian editors, and hoped that it would shape independent African opinion, especially on sanctions. They hoped readers would naïvely assume that Swiss publications on economic matters were impartial and authoritative—not knowing they were actually written by Rayner's team. This allowed Rayner to infiltrate newsrooms in Rhodesia and beyond.

Unfortunately, the propaganda was hindered by a lack of solid and specific intelligence coming from Rhodesia about local attitudes; MI6 had been caught napping before the crisis and struggled to catch up.[43] And Salisbury was generally alert. One radio broadcast publicly named the Information Research Department and accused it—wrongly—of spying on Rhodesia and—accurately—of conducting propaganda. 'One may be excused for thinking that it would have saved a great deal of time and money if Britain were to accept the fact that the existing Rhodesian Government does exist. Then there would be no need for either spying or propaganda; normal channels of information would be open.' And surely, the Rhodesians added, the US and Australia would be livid to learn just how much money the UK is wasting on subverting Rhodesia when their 'young men are dying in the fight against communism in Vietnam'.[44] John Ure did not mind the publicity. In his mind, 'the sharp reaction' from Salisbury Radio merely indicated 'that this has been getting under the skins of the Smith regime'.[45]

Although Soviet media reported growing resistance to the Smith regime in Rhodesia,[46] other reports broadcast in multiple languages by Moscow risked blowing some of the British operations all together. 'London has discovered an extremely powerful new weapon with which to suppress the Rhodesian rebellion', it teased in a tone veering close to revelation. Was one of the fake groups about to be exposed? But the punchline landed with a thud so absurd it might have been comedy. 'The BBC will no longer send to Salisbury the tape of the programme "Top of the Pops", which is listened to every week by 12,000,000 teenagers … The decision to stop sending the magnetic tape is probably considered as the final blow to the Smith regime, which it will not be able to survive.'[47]

Had Welser and Rayner been tuning into the special Serbo-Croat radio show where this was broadcast, they would have fallen about with laughter. The image of the Smith regime, teetering on the brink over the absence of Britain's weekly pop music programme, was farcical even by the surreal standards of the Cold War's propaganda games.

All the while, Heulyn Dunlop and John Rayner grew closer, working together on a more unlikely target. As if they were not busy enough battling the Rhodesians, African nationalists, Soviets, Chinese, Indonesians, and

Egyptians, the team targeted Spain with five separate covert operations between 1966 and 1967.

Tensions between London and Madrid had steadily increased since the visit of Queen Elizabeth during her 1954 coronation tour of the British Empire.[48] It had seemed a great success but, in Madrid, General Franco was furious at the whole spectacle, angrily accusing the British of exploiting Spain by creating wealth in Gibraltar at the expense of the poverty of the surrounding area. He advocated not just that Gibraltar be turned over to Spain but for British decolonization more widely, happily talking up anti-colonialist violence across the rest of the moribund empire in the process.[49] In short, Franco was making a nuisance of himself and, by May 1966, formally proposed returning Gibraltar to Spanish sovereignty ahead of a referendum on the issue due to be held in 1967.[50]

Welser and Rayner decided to play Franco at his own game: if the fascist dictator hoped to undermine British claims to Gibraltar, then Britain would undermine Spain's own imperialist claims across North Africa, in particular by exacerbating tensions with Morocco. If Franco plotted to create trouble for the British at the United Nations, then Welser and Rayner would be more than happy to return the favour. 'We ought', one colleague put it, 'to make a special effort to dirty the white sheet in which they like to portray themselves.'[51] As more states became independent from the early 1960s, the United Nations had itself become a battlefield ripe for propaganda.[52]

Almost immediately after the referendum proposals, the team set to work gathering as much exploitable material they could before launching three strikes in quick succession.[53] Rayner created a fake resistance group, calling it the Front for the Liberation of the Spanish Maghreb. This sounded legitimate enough, not too dissimilar from genuine organizations like the National Movement for the Liberation of Equatorial Guinea or the even more verbose Movement for the Self-Determination and Independence of the Canary Archipelago. There were so many of these little groups, it would soon prove difficult to decipher which was real and which was not.

Rayner used his phantom Liberation Front to, in his own words, 'make trouble for Spain at the UN and elsewhere on the question of her colonies'. MI6 delivered a forged petition to members of the UN special committee investigating decolonization calling for the restitution to Morocco of

various Spanish colonial territories. It left the Moroccan press confused and authorities keen to identify the perpetrators.[54]

He followed the petition with a complementary Loyal African Brothers attack on Spanish imperialism. No reaction.[55]

In January 1967, another fake group—the Organization for the Expulsion of the Spanish Colonialists—incited violence against Madrid. He and Welser had tried the UN route; they had tried the African nationalist route; and now they tried a more direct approach.

The Organization for the Expulsion of the Spanish Colonialists ruefully acknowledged that the French, the Belgians, and even the British—'the arch-colonialists of the world'—had all withdrawn from Africa; yet 'we Arabs' were still subjected to the oppression of Spanish imperialism. It called on the 'loyal men of north Africa to rise up' in the name of God. The Spanish 'owe us, we Arabs, everything they may be proud of today'. The Arabs 'introduced civilisation into the country … we have taught them the arts and literature … we have taught them everything, even the art of war and fighting. Are we, after all this, going to permit them to trample over our dignity and to belittle us?'[56] It was almost Shakespearean.

Enough was enough. 'We will fight with all our strength and with every weapon we can lay our hands on'. 'Victory' would be won 'by God's will'.[57]

Rayner leaned back in his chair, pleased with himself, although his thoughts already seemed elsewhere. He turned to his colleague Heulyn Dunlop, an Iberian specialist thirty years his junior, for the Spanish reaction, although there was more between them than mere professional matters. He had worked alongside her for years, ever since she joined his team as his secretary—a role she quickly outgrew, and no one was surprised when she carved her own path as a writer of fakes and forgeries.

Their bond had grown, and eventually the pair began an affair.[58] Rayner, handsome and stylish in his youth, before illness and a broken back etched lines into his face, had been married twice before—and was now on his third wife. But with Dunlop, everything felt different. She was in her late twenties then, strikingly beautiful with dark hair that framed her face and warm eyes, looking as though she could have stepped out of a Renaissance painting.

Their relationship puzzled friends—who saw only their age and other differences: his extroversion, her quiet intellect, his flamboyant style, her thoughtful reserve. Unlike Rayner, she came from impeccable intelligence stock. Dunlop was brought up in Tangier, overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar, where her father was a doctor and her mother was a pioneering MI6 counterintelligence officer, Teddy, a quiet legend who had crossed paths with Guy Burgess and Kim Philby, whilst somehow managing to balance motherhood and espionage both during and after the war.[59] Dunlop had particular interest in this part of the world and now recorded every piece of coverage for Rayner as they moved through their days together.

Helping Dunlop out, the British ambassador in Rabat, Leonard Holliday, sent cuttings of French-language newspapers in Morocco.[60] The Organization for the Expulsion of the Spanish Colonialists even made headlines as far away as Nairobi. The press wondered who this mysterious group was inciting violence against Spain.[61]

Having already targeted one African diplomat in Diallo Telli, and another altogether different breed of nationalist in Ian Smith, Rayner and his team turned their attentions to a third: John Malecela, a one-time anti-colonial firebrand who would later become Tanzania's Prime Minister. In 1967, he was Tanzania's permanent representative at the United Nations in New York and a key contributor to its work on decolonization. Educated in Bombay and Cambridge, he was bright, politically savvy, popular with his staff, and, since starting at the UN, increasingly impressive at diplomatic manoeuvring. It was a potent combination, putting him in the firing line of Britain's colonial officials who wanted to impede his work on Gibraltar specifically.

Rayner dug around for dirt. What was he like at Cambridge?, he wondered, asking old tutors for gossip.[62] He was particularly intrigued upon learning that, in some earlier political life, Malecela was apparently 'involved in one or two rather unpleasant incidents'—although nobody was quite sure what.[63]

Rayner pushed and pushed until colleagues in the East Africa Department worried that he was getting carried away and becoming indiscreet. They warned him off his inquiries, which were becoming 'dangerous' given the circumstances.[64]

He promptly ignored them, discreetly contacting Malecela's UN colleagues instead. Was Malecela under Franco's thumb? Had he taken bribes on a recent visit to Madrid?[65]

By March 1967, the spectre of UK government budget cuts loomed and Hans Welser began to feel the pinch. Rayner had his schemes, of course—he always did—but to many they were starting to feel out of step, unnecessary, counterproductive even. Reaction had been muted and the sharks in the Foreign Office circled. The Information Research Department, already viewed by many as a bloated relic of the 1950s, was now an easy target for those looking for savings. Welser bristled at the whispers, more so when his bosses—pinstriped accountants in all but name, he thought—were asking awkward questions about results, about outcomes and impact.

To Welser, the very idea was an insult. For him, this was not work that could be captured in a chart or dissected in a committee room. And he was not afraid to say it. The best he could offer for now, when pressed, was that King Hassan II of Morocco had called for Spanish withdrawal from its small city colonies of Cuetta and Melilla on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Welser knew full well that Hassan had long resented imperialism—first French and then Spanish—in North Africa and that there was no evidence that his and Rayner's propaganda had sparked Hassan's latest criticism. Still, he bullishly claimed that it might have done. At worst it did no harm and, either way, the leaflets were timely and likely to cause an echo in Morocco.[66]

Rayner felt the pressure. The murmurs of dissent among the senior diplomats were growing louder, their scepticism a low but persistent hum in the background of his every move. They questioned his methods, dismissed his unorthodox tools as distractions. What he needed now was a win—something tangible, something they could not ignore.

The team continued to work on Malecala, hoping that taking down the head of the UN's decolonization committee would do the job. Rayner returned to the Loyal African Brothers to assassinate Malecela by pen.

'Yesterday MALECELA was a friend of the communists', the Brothers thundered, 'and his declarations in the United Nations were the words of the communistes [*sic*]. But today he is the friend of the Spanish fascist hyenas, today his words are the words of the colonialist oppressor.' The Brothers accused Malecela of taking large bribes in Madrid—when Rayner had no

evidence for this—to do Spanish bidding in the corridors of the UN. Malecela was a ‘secret admirer of the fascist tactic’.[67]

Welser loved it and could not help but get carried away. He suggested rotating it upside down. He had heard that upside down pictures brought ‘v. bad “jou jou”’ in that part of the world. Perhaps next time.[68]

The Brothers were not done. Their demands grew louder, their calls for action more urgent. They exhorted people across the continent to rise up, to send petitions flooding into Tanzania, demanding Malecela’s removal. Their final cry was a battle charge: WE MUST RID THE UNITED NATIONS OF THIS MERCENARY HIRELING OF FASCIST COLONIALISM!!’[69]

Rayner also returned to the phantom Organization for the Expulsion of the Spanish Colonialists to keep the issue alive: ‘we will never abandon the struggle until the destruction of the last imperialist centre in our land … and until the last Spanish dog has left’.[70]

SECRET

CAMERA HAS CAUGHT MALACELA SEEKING INSTRUCTIONS
FROM SPANISH AMBASSADOR TO UNITED NATIONS,
JAIME DE PINIES

LOYAL AFRICAN BROTHERS!

We have already told you of the efforts of the Spanish colonialists to delay the liberation of our fraternal peoples in the Territories held by Spain. Now we have shame to tell you that there is an african who deshonours us by aiding the spanish colonialists for his own gain. This individual, unworthy of the name of brother african, is one of the very people who should do everything in his power to obtain the liberation of ALL peoples under colonial repression - for he is William JOhn MALECELA also called Job MALECELA, the newly-elected Tanzanian president of the United-Nations Committee of Twentyfour on the Granting of Independance to peoples and countries under colonial domination.

Yesterday MALECELA was a friend of the communists, and his declarations in the United Nations were the words of the communistes. But today he is the friend of the Spanish fascist hyenas, today his words are the words of the colonialist oppressor.

One may ask why this man MALECELA has become the tool of

SECRET

Figure 5. ‘Loyal African Brothers leaflet No. 672’, Apr. 1967, FCO 168/2921, The National Archives, UK.

Copies reached United Nations diplomats in New York. One, working for the British mission there, raised a suspicious eyebrow and sent a copy back to the Information Research Department. Was this one of yours?[71] Slightly alarmed that their cover could too easily be blown, its head quickly told officials in the Morocco embassy to destroy all papers on the subject.[72]

Shortly afterwards, gossip reached Rayner that Malecela would be removed from his post. He claimed victory but he knew deep down that there was ‘no evidence that there is cause and effect here’. Even so, this was politics, and Rayner had a team to defend. We can ‘say that our leaflet will have made a contribution at any rate’, he told Welser slightly hopefully.[73] Nothing was confirmed, but the pair congratulated each other on a job well done.

Gibraltar held its referendum in September. The pro-British result may have been a foregone conclusion, but Rayner was left worried that his campaign had failed to blunt pressure from the United Nations. Almost instantly after the referendum, the UN, referencing the work of Malecela’s team, issued a new resolution calling for a return to negotiations ‘with a view to putting an end to the colonial situation’.[74] And to make matters worse, Malecela was still in post. Rayner squirmed awkwardly: he was sure Malecela was supposed to be going and had even claimed some credit in getting rid of him.

One last push. Rayner invented yet another new organization—the International Movement for Revolutionary Action, featuring all the hallmarks of a pro-Chinese revolutionary militant group. His team made sure to namecheck the imperialist Vietnam war, the global spread of heroic Maoist ideology, the ‘sham’ aid to Africa provided by the Soviets. The Movement thought Malecela a ‘revolutionary hero’ who was ‘kicking the rump of this tiger’. He had scored ‘many brilliant victories’ at the United Nations ‘in the war against those who are taking the bourgeois-nationalist road, and opening up the only correct road for the victory of the Chinese revolution’.[75]

They hoped that praising Malecela’s supposed victories, in the voice of revolutionary Chinese militants, would unnerve African leaders and cast

further suspicion on Malecela. The rallying cry to wage guerrilla warfare and create many Vietnams across Africa would have unnerved them further. ‘We pledge ourselves to carry the Revolution through to the end, and vow to make the gun the constant companion in our life!’[76]

The Tanzanian government finally removed Malecela within weeks, making him ambassador to Ethiopia. Mission accomplished, or so Rayner and Welser would claim the next time their managers came around asking for metrics. Senior colleagues even within the department were unsure about the wider campaign: ‘It is’, one assessed, ‘arguable that even if we have been able to make a marginal impact on public opinion, this had no effective influence on the way in which delegates have voted in the United Nations, or on Spanish policy, and that our efforts in this direction have in fact been entirely wasted.’ The best way forward was to focus on the colonial theme—as Welser and Rayner had also been doing.[77]

But the game, as ever, came at a cost. Sheila Harden, their woman at the United Nations, found herself adrift in the rising tide of confusion. The lines between their fabrications and genuine nationalist fervour had blurred almost to the point of farce. In creating so many fakes and forgeries, Rayner had succumbed to the classic propaganda problem of sowing wider confusion and lowering trust in all other incoming information. Harden, uncharacteristically ruffled, fired off an urgent plea to Welser after being handed a petition from an alleged independence movement in the Canary Islands. Was it real? Or was it another phantom conjured in London? She needed clarity. Please give guidance, she urged.[78]

Rayner reassured her. As far as he knew, his team was not involved. ‘It seems that this organisation is making its own running fairly satisfactorily, and if we were to do anything to assist them it might perhaps cut across something they would be doing in the ordinary way.’[79] He had always trodden a fine line between strategy and chaos.

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16

In the Name of God

Gamal Abdul Nasser, the charismatic, nationalist president of Egypt, and a towering figure across the region, was still in power. He had been high on the team's hitlist for at least a decade, having long opposed British dominance in the Middle East. He had nationalized the Anglo-French-owned Suez Canal, leading to the ill-fated collusion between the UK, France, and Israel to invade Egypt in 1956 and to a whole host of covert operations targeting him; he had promoted resistance, nationalism, and republicanism across the region, including using his own covert operations to bolster Egyptian influence; and he had attempted to export the revolution to Yemen back in 1962. Now, five years later, he was still there embroiled in the Yemeni civil war.

It would have come as no shock to either Welser or Rayner when, in the early months of 1967, reports began trickling in of Egypt's deployment of deadly waves of chemical gas in Yemen. British intelligence had long been supporting opposition fighters in their battle against the Egypt-backed government there and had enjoyed good sources close to the front for much of the Yemen civil war. Spies and mercenaries now reported gruesome details back to London.

Victims apparently choked and spat blood, their eyes milky with blindness. Black burns spread across their bodies; skin fell off. The Yemeni imam, ousted yet unbroken and still leading the opposition, sent out photographs to the world's press hoping to stir the world's conscience. But the world sat silently.

The United Nations was paralysed with inactivity. The Soviets refused to condemn their Egyptian allies. The Americans were strangely quiet, claiming it took place in a remote region too far from the US embassy to

verify.[1] The Israelis, also covertly supporting the royalist opposition, began distributing gas masks to their own population but showed little interest in the atrocities across the Red Sea. And so, the desert winds carried more than deadly chemicals—they carried whispers of war without consequence. Egypt was getting away with it.[2]

In the British houses of parliament, members rose one by one to ask what the foreign secretary would do about it. 'Order', the speaker shouted, struggling to make himself heard as they brayed and barked at being roundly fobbed off. It was a matter first and foremost for governments in the region, came the reply from Labour's George Thomson.

'Surely the Minister of State has this wrong', complained Douglas Dodds-Parker, a Conservative politician and veteran of wartime special operations. 'Surely we should be doing something more about it?'

Philip Noel-Baker, an experienced left-wing MP and campaigner for disarmament, chipped in: 'While everybody must regret the use of poison gas in Saudia Arabia, *if* it has happened'—Noel-Baker paused as fellow MPs oohed and groaned from the benches—'in the Yemen or in Saudi Arabia, *if* it has happened—allegations of both have been made—can my right hon. Friend say what protests have been made by any members of the Conservative Party about the use of gas in Vietnam, gases which have killed civilians, destroyed forests, destroyed crops—'

'Order!'[3]

Perhaps American silence was not so strange after all. Still, with the US hamstrung from publicly crusading against the evils of gas for fear of inviting criticism of its own activities in Vietnam and the UK hamstrung by associations with imperialism, Egypt was getting away with continued gas attacks.[4] Egyptian and Yemeni propaganda dismissed any accusations as a cynical ploy to distract attention from domestic problems facing Saudi Arabia,[5] and accused the British press of 'hateful' attempts to discredit Egypt.[6] 'Rumours and lies', shouted Sana'a radio, rumours and lies.[7] British allegations, it insisted, were aimed squarely at covering up British aggression.[8] Welser and Rayner therefore had to go covert to be credible.

The Yemeni civil war had entered its fifth year, and despite fighting other fires in Indonesia, Rhodesia, and elsewhere, Welser had kept a close watch throughout. After all, the UK's position in Aden, the strategic port at

the mouth of Red Sea, remained vital to project power and protect oil—and Nasser's attempts to export his nationalist revolution needed halting.

Welser and Rayner, alongside Ann Elwell in the IRD's Middle Eastern section and Tony Ashworth, their man on the ground in Aden, had issued a flurry of fakes throughout the civil war—but with little impact. Phantom groups displaying a convoluted carousel of names from the International Command of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party to the Socialist Brotherhood of Iraq, attacked Nasser from every angle and used violent imagery, or, as one uncomfortable diplomat put it, 'old testament' language.[9] The Egyptians were expansionist, imperialist, atheist intriguers, and rapists; 'We will fight them until the last drop of blood has been spilled'.[10]

'A little strong?' Elwell winced.[11]

No reactions so far noted.

By the start of 1967, urban warfare, terrorism, and riots had broken out in Aden city. Under sustained pressure, the UK had agreed to withdraw all forces from South Arabia immediately upon independence, slated for November that year. Although dressed up as part of the realignment of British positions east of Suez, this was a humiliating end and an ignominious scuttle. Many saw it as a victory for Nasser's subversion.

When Egypt began using chemical weapons again in December 1966, the beleaguered British therefore sensed an opportunity to land a blow. Even though Elwell and Rayner had shunned this line back in 1963, they now hoped exposing Nasser's war crimes would damage his position and perhaps disrupt the flow of Egyptian support to guerrilla fighters in Aden, thereby allowing as orderly and dignified a withdrawal as possible.

Welser and Ashworth led efforts, via sources in Reuters, to get the Red Cross movement to condemn the Egyptian use of gas. With the Red Cross stubbornly hiding behind the need to be impartial, they turned to their press contacts to spread news of the attacks as widely as possible. Adelaide Maturin and NAFEN also stepped up news coverage, reporting Egyptian bombings and infighting amongst republican leaders and harsh treatment of Yemeni prisoners. Welser successfully planted material in both the English and Arabic editions of the *Swiss Press Review*, as well as in the Swiss newspaper *Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne*.[12]

'We may claim some credit for' the world press finally taking notice. 'The story is getting around very well.'[13]

It was not just Welser's team; the Saudis had also arranged for twenty foreign correspondents, including from the *Daily Telegraph*, to visit one of the scenes of the attack for themselves.[14] Meanwhile, the Saudi representative offered a masterclass at the United Nations, expertly navigating both the General Assembly and Egyptian propaganda, to lodge complaints against the 'silent genocide', as he memorably put it. He launched his own letter-writing campaign to 'wrap U Thant like an octopus'; the secretary-general would not know what hit him. Ultimately, though, even he struggled to make a difference.[15]

At some point the Labour foreign secretary, himself, George Brown came over to visit the IRD. He revelled in asking awkward questions and flirting with the secretaries. 'Strange man', the assistant head later recalled.[16] It fell to Denis Greenhill, the senior diplomat who oversaw security and intelligence work in the Foreign Office, to ask Rayner to leak the Egyptian use of gas. Rayner proudly pointed out that the team had been doing this since the start of the year. They had already launched a string of operations designed both to dispel any doubts that the bombs contained poison gas and to arouse indignation about its use.[17]

The most dramatic came in February, almost at the exact moment the MPs were debating in the Commons. If the Soviets had paralysed the United Nations, the US was sheepish on account of its own indiscretions in Vietnam, and the UK was caught up in painfully familiar debates about evidence thresholds, false equivalence, and diplomatic protocol, then perhaps it would help if someone else—someone more credible—sounded the alarm. Rayner turned to the Islamic world.

He and Welser issued a statement by the notional World Muslim Brotherhood attacking Egypt for dropping bombs on villages in the north of Yemen, close to the Saudi border. Nasser had recently hanged the leader of the real Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyidd Qutb, for his part in a planned coup but, even after his death, the organization continued to justify attacks on supposed apostate regimes throughout the Muslim world.[18] Rayner hoped to emulate them.

He, Elwell, and Welser knew, at least in vague terms, about the political rivalry engulfing Nasser's Arab nationalists and Qutb's Islamists over the past decade; they were aware that it had hardened into a confrontation. But the broader implications meant little: they saw an opportunity and exploited

the schism with casual cynicism. Welser and Rayner used and abused Qutb's ideas, cementing his legacy and exploiting his memory in much the same way that Islamists were doing. Islamists revered him as a martyr; Welser and Rayner treated him as a useful ghost. As far as they were concerned it was all happening anyway; another pamphlet would not hurt.

Nasser, for his part, was convinced that his enemies, led by the US, were using political Islamism against him, funnelling support to enemies and conspirators.[19] He had a point; even after Nasser had Qutb hanged, Welser used his memory as an immortal proxy.

'O believer Brothers', they cried, highlighting 'these horrible and terrifying crimes which make people shudder…' This was a 'detestable and internationally-banned weapon of warfare…which even the madman Hitler did not use against his enemies in the second world war'. They continued, 'these crimes have not been committed by the atheists or the imperialists or the Zionist Jews, but by the Egyptians who are supposed to be believers'.

To ensure credibility, but at the risk of inciting religious violence, Rayner laced the leaflet with anti-semitic and violent religious language. 'If the Egyptians have to go to war and fight, why don't they direct their armies against the Jews?'[20] Egyptian bombs used against Yemen would have been enough to 'destroy Israel completely'.[21]

MI6 posted almost 500 copies to influential people in Muslim countries across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

'No reactions so far noted.'[22]

For Welser and Rayner, the moral ambiguities of the game they played meant little, an unspoken cost of doing business. To their minds, they had not lied. Nasser *had* used these awful weapons; they were merely drawing the world's attention to this verifiable fact. The fake source was a necessary fiction. Anything stamped with the imprimatur of Her Majesty's Government would have invited suspicion or been dismissed out of hand. Credibility demanded something more devious, and so they mimicked the violent and anti-semitic language used by the real Muslim Brotherhood. If the mask fit, they reasoned, nobody would question what lay underneath.

Still, they only did it once. The operation got to the heart of core issues surrounding the nature of truth and disinformation: they claimed a fake source used to spread truth was not problematic, but showed little appreciation of whether the source itself, the context in which the

information was presented, shapes the meaning—the truth. Perhaps slowly aware of this, they complemented it instead with a brace of fake Egyptian groups designed to show domestic opposition to Nasser's war.[23]

No reactions so far noted.

Not to be deterred, Welser opened his impressive address book to stimulate some coverage. He sent further material to his contact in Switzerland, Dr Peter Sager, editor of the *Swiss Press Review*, and an *éminence grise* of anti-Communist propaganda who, since the early 1950s, had founded a number of institutes and research groups designed to shape coverage of the Cold War throughout the German-speaking world. Welser's material promptly surfaced in both the English-language and Arabic press.[24] He and Ashworth then arranged for Sager to visit Aden and write a series of articles on what they called Egyptian 'terrorism' in Aden, including the use of poison gas in Yemen. This series subsequently appeared in five major Swiss newspapers and was so successful that Welser commissioned Sager to turn it into a book and offered to translate it into English.[25]

SECRET No 5

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

There can be no person in the world today, who is a true believer and whom God has filled his heart with the light of Islam, who has not been shocked, bewildered and filled with horror and deep anger after reading the recent news that the Egyptians have bombed several villages in the Yemen with poisonous and burning gases, killing, burning and blinding hundreds of men, women and children who are armed only with their belief in God.

Who can resist the shock when Arab eye witnesses describe how one hundred and twenty men, women and children have been killed at once after the evil Egyptian commanders had ordered U.A.R. pilots in bombers made by the atheist Soviet Communists, to drop twenty five gas bombs, also Communist-made, on the village of Kitaf, north east of Sanaa? All have met the worst kind of death within half an hour of the bombs having been dropped. They died after suffering great pains in their heads, choking, unable to breathe, with wounds and burns covering their bodies, and blood pouring from their noses and mouths. Many others also died afterwards either through breathing the poisonous gases or through touching wounded people or animals, so that in all nearly two hundred people died ... whole families have been wiped out, and many innocent children made orphans.

This horrible massacre of innocent people was not confined to one village because a further one hundred and twenty five people died and one hundred others were severely wounded after the raids which the Egyptians carried out on the village of Katar near Sada. In another village, Ketab, one hundred and fifty people died when the Egyptians dropped poison gas bombs while all the inhabitants were asleep. Moreover reports say that sixty survivors have been seriously and permanently crippled and blinded.

The Egyptians also carried out many other raids during which they dropped poisonous gases on other places, including the village of Halhal, north east of Sanaa. Full details of these raids have not yet been received because these villages are isolated in the distant mountains and because the survivors spend all their time trying to tend the wounded.

O believer brothers: these horrible and terryfing crimes which make people shudder and the use of this detestable and internationally-banned weapon of warfare ... which even the madman Hitler did not use against his enemies in the second world war ... these crimes have not been committed by the atheists or the imperialists or the Zionist Jews, but by the Egyptians who are supposed to be believers.

These Egyptian murderers have gone too far in their hypocricy unpanished but they can no longer pretend to be believers in God and in His Prophet and in His sacred Book. Didn't God say in His

SECRET

Figure 6. 'World Muslim Brotherhood (No. 5) Poison gas', Feb. 1967, FCO 168/2921, The National Archives, UK.

Closer to home, Welser worked with his wife to step up NAFEN's coverage,[26] and with their neighbour, the ageing philosopher Bertrand Russell. A veteran pacifist and public proponent of nuclear disarmament, Russell had attended the inaugural meeting of the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom and had accepted an honorary position on the Congress's International Committee. After the first meeting descended into factional politicking and hysteria, Russell had tried to resign but was persuaded otherwise.[27] He went on to author a book, *Why Communism Must Fail*, with a publisher covertly subsidized by the IRD and contributed a chapter to an IRD-funded book, *Why I Oppose Communism*.[28] He was seemingly blissfully unaware of IRD involvement.[29]

The nonagenarian now had a house across the road from the Welsers in upmarket Chelsea. Hans and Adelaide lived at 40 Hasker Street in a smart terraced townhouse with sash windows and black railings out the front. Russell had a house at 43. Who knows what dinner party conversation entailed, although Russell would likely have considered Welser as a bit of an intellectual lightweight.

Welser asked Tony Ashworth to organize an appeal from Aden to the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation condemning Nasser's use of gas. His foundation campaigned against nuclear weapons and political prisoners, and Russell personally had experience dealing with Egypt and other states in the region.[30] When Ashworth arranged this, Rayner promptly sent copies to the *Daily Telegraph* and a raft of other material to its sister paper. By the weekend, the *Sunday Telegraph* had splashed it across their pages, their correspondents in Aden, Beirut, and Geneva following up with their own stories of gas attacks. The headlines grew louder, the tone more damning.[31]

Behind the scenes, Ashworth was tireless. He tracked down victims of the Yemeni gas attacks, arranged medical examinations, and leaned hard on the attending doctors to tweak their reports. Every detail, every anecdote, was designed to fuel the narrative.[32] But when the photographs arrived, Welser was unimpressed. The pictures were too 'dreary', he pronounced dismissively. 'Unconvincing'.[33]

It was becoming a major campaign and so they drafted in Hubert Kós, who, although a European Communist expert was well-liked by Welser and rapidly rising through the ranks. Kós reported back to Ashworth: we have 'not been idle on this issue'. On the contrary, since January 'we really have been going to town on this in a big way and obtained very satisfactory coverage through all outlets'.[34] The effort was paying off. Even Nasser himself had lashed out, accusing the British of bribing what he called 'insignificant people'—victims of gas attacks—to hold press conferences attacking the Egyptians in Yemen.

'Good to see that our efforts' are 'causing a headache at the top!', Ashworth told Elwell.[35]

Rayner was impressed with the progress. He told Welser that 'the continued campaign of publicity for the gas attacks and of nagging the Red Cross' was having some effect, noting that Reuters had finally reported a statement by the International Red Cross Committee on gas attacks. He, of course, took credit for the breakthrough.

Meanwhile, Ann Elwell had proven her worth yet again. She had funnelled material on the use of gas, alongside copies of the International Red Cross Committee report, to a contact in an American media company. This proved particularly successful: the *US News and World Report* published the Red Cross documents almost immediately. The ripple effects followed as planned—the *Daily Telegraph* and *Observer* picked up the story in London, and a week later, *US News and World Report* doubled down with a follow-up, also based on Elwell's carefully curated materials.[36]

By June, the breakthrough they had been working towards for months finally came. After relentless prodding by Welser and his network of conduits, the Red Cross officially cited concrete evidence of poison gas use.[37] Kós celebrated a 'considerable success'.[38] Ashworth, who had just been awarded an OBE for his services, was almost as equally enthused, telling Kós that 'our efforts during the past few months at publicising the use of poison gas by the Egyptians certainly seem to have paid off'.

Unfortunately, the triumph came at a price: British credibility in the Middle East was crumbling faster than ever. Ashworth worried that conspiratorial locals perceived any mention of poison gas, even when the British hand was hidden, to be yet another vindictive stick with which to beat Nasser.[39] Radio Cairo made the most of exposing British secret

propaganda, broadcasting revelations of a secret British Intelligence Centre in Beirut, branding it the Middle East headquarters for the imperialists' propaganda campaign.[40] This was true, although Egypt was equally—if not more—perturbed by Saudi intrigue and propaganda. It was also notably far less detailed and convincing in its exposés of British operations than its counterparts in Rhodesia. Where Rhodesian radio went forensic, Egyptian radio went frenetic.

When one of the team suggested forging a World Peace Council booklet to expose the chemical weapons, mirroring one of its genuine booklets about American war crimes in Vietnam,[41] Rayner loved the idea.[42]

'I doubt if even Arab audiences are gullible enough to swallow this one.'[43] Elwell did not. 'We have done remarkably well with the gas story up to now, and I am apprehensive that the appearance of this booklet may cast doubt on the whole question of gas in the Yemen.'[44]

'There are dangers in telling the truth in a bogus way for fear that it detracts from the truth', Welser conceded.[45] Questions about the nature of truth might feel philosophical or academic, but, as with the anti-semitic attack, they lay at the heart of black propaganda and Welser had to grapple with their practical implications on an almost daily basis.

Regardless, Russian and Egyptian propaganda still denied allegations of chemical warfare and, as Ashworth predicted, would claim it was all a Pentagon lie to distract attention from Vietnam where, the Russians claimed, the US was 'testing new weapons and chemicals'.[46] Or it was a British-inspired attempt to divert attention from Israeli use of napalm.[47] Similarly, Moscow's Arabic Service would claim it was an attempt to divert attention from 'plots being hatched' by the US and Britain against the Yemeni revolution.[48]

Welser and Rayner were working with Ashworth as their man in Aden so much more effectively than they had with Ed Wynne in Singapore. Partly this was down to Ashworth's better local knowledge, given the UK's long presence in South Arabia; partly Ashworth's less high-tempo and pressured role given that he was not working on anything like the same scale as Wynne's fortnightly newsletter; and partly personality—he and Welser had a warm relationship.

Not everyone, however, was impressed by Ashworth's handiwork. Ann Elwell was surprised to receive a warning from an intelligence contact that the Foreign Office had received a complaint about him, apparently at the behest of one of the South Arabian militant groups.

The complainant was another of those remarkably colourful characters floating around the upper echelons of British society: Tom Driberg. He was a failed poet turned fabulously indiscreet journalist who had then become a Labour member of parliament. He was a brazen homosexual when homosexuality was illegal; he had befriended the Kray twins, notorious London gangsters, and become a regular attendee of parties at Ronnie Kray's flat where, in the words of one biographer, 'rough but compliant East End lads were served like so many canapés'.[49] And if that was not enough, Driberg was also a Soviet spy.[50]

Driberg now turned his attention to Ashworth. He privately referred to him as 'the white man in the woodpile' and saw him as far too influential and untrustworthy.[51] He accused Ashworth of deliberately undermining the work of a UN delegation visiting South Arabia, and raised his complaint with the Foreign Office. Ashworth rolled his eyes when he heard and explained that Driberg was probably also behind an article in the satirical magazine *Private Eye* on the same topic. It was no secret that Driberg had long supplied the magazine with political gossip and, when it now accused Ashworth of seeing himself as a second Lawrence of Arabia, the propagandist put two and two together.[52]

'Malicious', spat Elwell.[53]

Strangely enough, one member of the IRD team was more familiar with the flamboyant, hard-drinking, and one-time occasional male prostitute than most. Back in the freewheeling 1920s, a young John Rayner had met Driberg at some party or other and, upon learning that he was temporarily homeless, had invited him to stay in his snug flat in Devonport Mews in Bayswater. In no time, Driberg had found a job on the *Daily Express* and even introduced Rayner to his second wife, Joan. It became a long-lasting friendship.[54]

Rayner was an enigmatic character, hard to pin down even by those well trained in the art of suspicion. Elwell worried that his fondness for boozy lunches could be more than a mere indulgence. To her mind, they represented a potential liability. 'You will wish to see this at once', she

quickly ran to the head of the IRD with Driberg's latest smear of Ashworth. 'You no doubt know that Mr Driberg is well known to Mr John Rayner,' she added with just a hint of satisfaction, 'who saw him before he went to the Middle East.'[55]

Rayner faced a dressing down, or at least an inquisition. Yes, he had indeed lunched with Driberg but insisted that Ashworth's name had not passed his lips. Still the department's priority was clear: Ashworth's connection to the IRD had to stay buried, especially as rumours were now flying around that Driberg would attempt to discredit him further. Rayner was left with a warning. He was to avoid being drawn into any political comment by Driberg going forward.[56] They remained close though; Rayner and his wife Miranda (and ex-wife Joan) would attend Driberg's legendary parties into the 1970s, and Driberg even left Rayner future royalites in his will.[57]

Whatever Rayner's reactions, far from sacking Ashworth, as Driberg wanted, the local high commissioner praised him: 'it is understandable that such journalists who were exaggeratedly partial to Egypt might have resented the superb way in which Ashworth has carried out Her Majesty's Government's policy. The fact that he has made an enemy or two in these circumstances is only to his credit.' In addition to his OBE, Ashworth would be rewarded with a posting to Hong Kong as the regional information officer.[58]

Rayner was a busy man, but his speed and enthusiasm—as well as his friendships—brought risk. Would he push it too far?

When the Cairo branch of the World Federation of Scientific Workers put out a pro-Arab statement, it put the federation, another Soviet front, in an embarrassing position. Rayner, ever the opportunist, got wind of another formal statement on the Middle East in the works—and so jumped to put out a forged one first, posted from Paris. But haste bred error.

Miss Haworth, a typist with an eye for detail and a familiarity with French typewriters, noticed a problem: embarrassing typos which had the potential to blow the operation. French keyboards, she explained to a puzzled colleague, had slightly different letter configurations from English ones. Letters shift places, commas masquerade as Ms, and without constant vigilance, the fingers of an English-trained typist betray their provenance. 'Obviously', she continued, 'if an English trained typist types slowly and

with a great deal of concentration no mistakes are made, but if, even for a moment concentration stops, the typist automatically reverts to the English "fingering", typing A's for Q's, Q's for A's, commas for M's etc.'

And so it was. The forgery bore the scars of English 'fingering' gone astray—hastily corrected but still visible to the trained eye. It was sloppy tradecraft, and it was enough for a Soviet desk officer, with a nose for intrigue, to decipher the hand of an Anglo-Saxon intelligence service: a smoking typewriter.[59] Welser would have assumed—correctly—that KGB guidance on spotting fakes and forgeries involved tracing documents back to the same typewriter.[60]

Welser, a man with high standards who understood the value of clean work, was horrified. It was not simply that the error risked exposing the operation, though that was damning enough, it was also the context. The Scientific Workers were now practically impotent as a Soviet front anyway. To jeopardize an operation for such a marginal gain was inexcusable.[61]

He considered the odds. Could the error be attributed to an English typist struggling with a French machine, rather than to an intelligence service? Slim. Could they pin the mistake on their American friends, ever the convenient scapegoat? Slimmer still. 'We must not run such risks', he muttered, promising to have stern words with Rayner.[62]

Rayner was no fool, but he lived on the edge and was not afraid to take risks. He knew typefaces and fonts, had grown up surrounded by books, and still counted poets among his friends. He would have remembered, surely, the famous tale from when he was a young journalist of an eminent Victorian book forger undone by the peculiar slant of a single letter.[63] Small indiscretions can have outsized consequences. Yet his team, overstretched and straining under the weight of too many operations—from Egypt to Indonesia via Rhodesia—had let its guard down. Overstretch, Rayner knew, was the twin of carelessness.

Luck, however, smiled on them. The forgery caused consternation within the Federation, and the reaction, fed back through a trusted source, was gratifying.[64] Welser allowed himself a brief exhalation of relief but remained uneasy. He ordered a discreet review of earlier French-language forgeries. Were there other mistakes, hidden but waiting to explode? Were they merely one careless keystroke away from exposure? [65]

Rayner again escaped unscathed. But the shadow of the incident loomed, especially given that it had followed so shortly after he was pulled aside on account of his boozy lunches with Tom Driberg.

Rayner's dressing downs came in the comparative luxury of new offices, creating a contrast between shadowy espionage indiscretions and an increasingly corporate world. Riverwalk House was a nondescript cube, all concrete and glass, on the banks of the River Thames, built in 1966. The IRD moved in that summer. The setup was a far cry from the permanent temporary vibe of Carlton House Terrace with its thin partitions and dodgy lifts. Riverwalk House was light and airy with a sense of spaciousness which would have aroused envy in most civil servants working in the rundown and ramshackle former grandeur of Whitehall.

Riverwalk House rose twelve storeys from the riverbank. From the upper floors, the views of the river were magnificent—broad, gleaming, ever-changing with the light. The first floor was a government conference centre, and the eleventh was a restaurant and lounge—an odd, almost opulent feature, in a building otherwise devoted to the muted functioning of bureaucracy. Welser and Rayner would have been up near the top, away from prying eyes. The restaurant itself was designed with the public in mind, a space meant to welcome and impress—but somewhere in the planning, the intentions of the council and the realities of the building's occupants had diverged. Security considerations ensured there was no chance of public dining. It left a curious relic: a private dining room for civil servants, at once magnificent yet strangely empty.[66]

On the surface, the move from Carlton House Terrace was perfect. In reality, it was an utter disaster. First, it was so vast that it took inspectors just a matter of months to recommend radical cuts to floorspace.[67] Second, it was decidedly insecure. The lavish conference centre was designed to host all sorts of events. One 'ludicrous result of this', one official huffed, 'is that negotiations between Cultural Relations Department and a Soviet delegation are being concluded this month in the building'.[68] Welser's store of fakes and forgeries specimens—known as the museum—was just a few storeys up.

Most importantly, it was hopelessly cut off from the rest of the Foreign Office—doing nothing for the IRD's image as a mini-fiefdom. Overlooking Vauxhall Bridge, it was across the road from Tate Britain, but a trek up

Millbank to the Foreign Office and even further to MI6 in Waterloo, a good half-hour slog. If Welser and the team had felt isolated in their crumbling annexe across Horse Guards Parade they would have felt practically exiled now—even if it was more corporate and comfortable.

To make matters worse, the team was again understaffed. By autumn 1967 there were twenty-seven of them, ranging from Welser and Rayner at the top through to clerical support and those stuffing the envelopes. This was eight people down on what the Foreign Office had budgeted.[69]

They made the best of it, of course. At least two of the black writers—Marie Routh and Denis Rigden—sat on the new Riverwalk Club and its various quirky Restaurant and Luncheon Sub-Committees whose sole purpose seemed to be to make the restaurant solvent and the bar permanent.

It unravelled into Whitehall farce—comic, absurd, but unfolding against the very real dangers of the Cold War. The restaurant made a steady loss, necessitating a slightly fudged loan from the Treasury and leaving IRD officials desperately hoping no one would come knocking for their 'pound of flesh'.[70] Disappearing crockery, glasses, and cutlery did not help; passive aggressive notes began to circulate around the office, in that peculiar tone of bureaucracy: polite yet venomous.[71]

As Welser watched on in bemusement, busy club members roped in colleagues to serve at a temporary bar and man the cash registers, strange work for the state's propagandists.[72] They planned to expand the menu, hoping hamburgers and 'a variety of stuffed baked potatoes' would encourage people in. Perhaps they could sell packed lunches? Could Walls ice cream supply a display top to the ice cream cabinet? It would be free advertising. They organized raffles and ran football sweepstakes, but enthusiasm proved fleeting. They had to cancel a New Year dance and even a party marking the twenty-first anniversary of the IRD—it only sold twenty-eight tickets—after several senior people, at Hans Welser's level, made it clear they would never support such things.[73]

They planned evening social functions but struggled with security. A lone security officer would have had to discreetly double up as a lift operator to ensure nobody got off anywhere other than floor eleven. What if he needed the toilet, someone wondered? And what would happen if there was an accident and a member of the public made some legal claim given that the lift operator was not, strictly speaking, a lift operator?[74]

Most pressing, however, were the club's desperate attempts to install a permanent bar, wrangling with the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in the process. In their quest for sustenance and solvency, they cobbled together a makeshift bar out of collapsable trestle tables, pigeonhole shelves, and a lockable cupboard.[75] The Ministry's jobsworths and busybodies made a formal complaint 'to put in the bailiffs and demolish your bar'.[76] How dare the propagandists 'transgress regulations over the use of office furniture'?[77] 'I noticed to my amazement', the complaint began, 'that a make shift Bar had been erected'. And worse, 'Without permission from Supplies Division'. The absurdity was not lost on those involved; a parody of officialdom at its most petty.[78]

The formal complaint was unexpected, especially as the IRD thought the powers that be had given them 'a wink' about the bar. It 'could not have come at a worse time—just before a visit from the Secretary of State who had agreed to have a drink and luncheon with us'.[79] The secretary of state was none other than the famously hard-drinking George Brown, Labour's foreign secretary.

Beyond the farce and fumbled raffles, the world carried on. They were out of Aden but the Soviets still loomed large. Yet for Welser and Rayner, this world of notes about vanished crockery and illicit bars formed the backdrop to their work. This was the daily grind of bureaucracy in London. It was against this canvas of absurdity that they turned, quietly and methodically, to their task: an opportunity to strike at the Soviets had presented itself, and they meant to seize it—albeit with one of their most absurd ploys yet. Life for the civil servant, it seemed, was always caught between the mundane and the monumental, the ridiculous and the profound.

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17
Send in the Hippies

‘The impact of all this is difficult to judge’. Nigel Clive, the new boss of the IRD, was underwhelmed.

No reactions so far noted; no reactions so far noted; no reactions so far noted. The same maddening phrase over and over again. Why, Clive huffed, was this so often the only reportable result? Rayner’s black productions seemed to disappear in the wind. He was so underwhelmed, he told Welser, that he would not show Rayner’s latest six-monthly report to his own boss, John Peck, the man overseeing all information work in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and himself a former IRD head, ‘unless something more positive could be said. Will you and Mr Rayner speak please?’[1]

‘It is not unusual for reactions to occur considerably after publication,’ Rayner explained. ‘But in a large number of cases no reactions ever come our way and, though it would have been nice to see some positive result, we accept this without too much concern—we do not take it as evidence that such operations are necessarily ineffective.’ Absence of evidence, he insisted, was not evidence of absence. ‘They may have surfaced without our hearing of it.’ Besides, he continued, clutching at straws, every operation was successful insofar as the articles, the fakes and the forgeries all got published in the first place. ‘Meanwhile, we do our best to keep the pressure up, on the shot gun principle.’[2]

Rayner assumed Nigel Clive knew all of this. He was, after all, supposed to be a kindred spirit. When Clive took over as head of the IRD, Rayner and Welser would have been forgiven for breathing a sigh of relief. He was every inch the stereotypical covert operator. Strikingly handsome, clever, and hugely charming when he wanted to be, Nigel Clive brought with him

vast experience in dark arts and secret statecraft. He had worked with the Greek resistance during the Second World War, been MI6's head of station in Baghdad, Tunis, and Algiers, and had even headed its special political action department, the top-secret team devoted to covert manipulation and interference. Indeed, he had once planned a coup against President Nasser. Rayner and Welser might well have been surprised by his lack of appreciation for their own particular set of skills in laundering Clive's old colleagues' titbits.[3]

Unfortunately, he was a reluctant head of the IRD, likely transferred because of some bureaucratic reorganization inside MI6. His natural swagger turned to sneering superiority, thinking the likes of Welser and Rayner amateurs compared to his former colleagues south of the river. He did not suffer fools gladly; many in the department found him terrifying.

In spring 1968, keen for validation, Rayner held one of the periodic brainstorming sessions he so thoroughly enjoyed, sitting around devising plots and ploys. What rumours would hit the mark? Which fake group would get the most traction? Or perhaps a forgery? What would the design look like? The touch? The feel?

His target was the ninth World Youth Festival due to be held in Sofia at the height of summer. World Youth Festivals had been staged intermittently since 1947, bringing together thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of young progressives from over 100 countries. They purported to encourage free exchange of cultural and political views, yet in reality were discreetly sponsored by the Soviets and carefully curated to stifle debate.[4] Needing results, he and Welser returned to a happy hunting ground. The festival's fourth iteration, held in Bucharest in 1953, had been one of Welser's first targets after joining the unit; he had printed a fake guide to the following one in Warsaw; worked closely with MI6 to undermine the seventh held in Vienna in 1959; and issued at least one forgery to target the 1962 festival held in Helsinki.

The ninth festival was originally due to be held in Algiers in 1965. He and Rayner had returned to their usual tricks: their fake think-tank issued a research paper exposing the Communist hand;[5] the Loyal African Brothers cried racism, sharing an Algerian cartoon depicting African delegates as monkeys.[6]

Back then, one trick had stood out as bordering on the comically absurd. The January issue of a magazine called *Czechoslovak Life* had a titillating front cover, which naturally appealed to Rayner. It featured a topless blonde woman posing seductively with a pair of cherry-topped melons over her breasts. Two men ogled and smirked. Rayner, perhaps enjoying an ogle and smirk himself, inserted a new caption: 'Choose your "Miss Festival" at Algiers.'

Written in English, French, and Arabic, and stamped with Czechoslovak authorship, the aim was simple and provocative: embarrass the Czechoslovaks and antagonize the conservative Muslim population in Algiers. Rayner loved its combination of smut, bold print design, and deception. Others looked down their noses and had to be convinced. 'My first reaction to this proposal was that it was all a bit far-fetched', sneered John Ure, 'but I have now discussed this with Mr Rayner and have been persuaded that on balance it would be useful.'[7] It got approval but, like the other plots, never went ahead. The festival was cancelled because of a military coup in Algiers and its subsequent rescheduling in Accra collapsed following the fall of Nkrumah in 1966.

It was therefore no surprise when Rayner eagerly turned to the Sofia event as an opportunity to disrupt the Soviets and, feeling insecure, prove his worth. It would not be easy though, as the KGB had been on high alert for months. In spring 1968, its chairman Yuri Andropov reported that the 'governments and intelligence services of the USA and other imperialist states have intensified their aggressive and subversive activities', including through 'large-scale anti-Soviet propaganda'. To put Rayner's work into perspective, the KGB had convicted ninety-six people for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda in 1967 and registered almost 12,000 anonymous leaflets circulating within Soviet territory. On top of this, the KGB had identified nearly 1,200 anonymous authors.[8] Still, Rayner was not targeting Soviet territory and he wanted to add his own material into the melee.

Tom Barker of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Northern Department punctured his enthusiasm. Barker's team was working hard trying to get closer to the Russian and East European governments and worried that the likes of Rayner, Welser, Kós, and Dunlop were creating friction which would undermine the more conventional diplomacy practised up the road in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office proper. It made for an

uneasy relationship.[9] Although twenty years younger than Rayner, the diplomat would lecture him as if he were an errant schoolboy. Beware 'the danger of anti-Western backlash of any propaganda ploys designed to encourage student violence and extremism (not to mention nihilism). It is for consideration whether Western or Communist societies have more to lose from such encouragement. Particularly since Dr Martin Luther King's assassination, I should have thought it at least arguable that the West have as much if not more to lose.'[10]

He did acknowledge that some discreet encouragement of resistance was good, but it simply must not risk the Soviets intervening. This was especially important in Czechoslovakia, where the stakes were highest. A reformist president, Alexander Dubček, had come to power in Prague and, promising socialism with a human face, began loosening restrictions on freedoms, decentralizing the economy, and even making nods towards some sort of democratization. From Moscow, the Soviets watched on alarmed and naturally assumed Western interference; from London, Barker watched on hopefully, praying that nothing would derail the reforms. He thought that they would succeed only through what he called 'small slices of salami'. Anything Rayner cooked up which encouraged the Czechoslovaks to go too hard too fast, which the Soviets might use as a pretext to clamp down, or which provided the Soviets with evidence of Western involvement would be dangerously counterproductive. Nothing, Barker reiterated sternly, could have a hint of Czechoslovak authorship or even inspiration.[11]

Like an errant schoolboy, Rayner duly protested his innocence. Of course, no operation would frame the Czechoslovaks; and of course, there was no question of MI6 posting anything from Prague. Besides, he only ever intended to embarrass the festival organizers—not actually to incite violence. The veteran propagandist had been found out though; he knew full well that one of his plans involved soliciting help from the CIA to post a forged International Union of Students document from Prague.[12] Barker was correct that this would have been hugely risky: the KGB was busy fabricating evidence of imperialist plots to justify the Soviet invasion of Prague, whilst East German propagandists published photographs of American tanks inside Czechoslovakia without admitting the material actually emanated from an American war film currently under production.[13] Uncovering a forged document would have been a propaganda gift.

Barker vetoed plot after plot. A World Federation of Democratic Youth forgery would have been too obviously of British origin;[14] another forgery was a straight smear of the Bulgarians, but was a stunt which Welser had pulled off once before—before the arrest of MI6 officer George Blake in 1961, who had been spying for the Soviets. The Soviets would know for sure it was the British this time.[15]

It was an uneasy relationship. Welser and Rayner, natural outsiders already feeling detached from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, relied on Barker for political approval and for background material on dirt or exploitable schisms; Barker was consistently worried that their schemes would end up creating difficulties for those tasked with proper diplomacy.[16]

As Rayner and Welser battled their own bureaucracy, across the continent in an office in Sofia, Grigor Shopov was making preparations of his own. After false starts in Algiers and Accra, the Bulgarians knew the festival had to be a success. Shopov, the deputy chairman of the State Security Committee, instructed the authorities to detect foreign spies and disrupt their subversive activity. They watched the British cultural attaché particularly closely, convinced he was MI6. At the same time, Bulgarian intelligence would conduct covert operations—or active measures, as they called it—of their own to ensure positive coverage of the festival.[17]

Sofia would be busy with the hubbub of unfamiliar people, with their strange music, clothing, and even drinks. One child at the festival later remembered hearing the hissing of bubbles from a strange drink called Coca-Cola for the first time.[18] The Soviet press talked up the risk of subversion and the need to prepare for ‘bitter ideological struggle’ taking place at the festival.[19]

Bulgarian and Russian spies were on high alert; in Sofia and Moscow, their political masters protested about US, UK, and West German plots to undermine the festival and sow division. Far from being put off, Rayner channelled this nervousness into a propaganda opportunity. ‘We should make the organisers think, through unattributable ploys, that many participants booked in as individuals are in fact “organised” and that many more counter-activities are planned than is in fact the case.’[20] Or, he mocked, we could induce some ‘European groupuscules gauchistes’ to attend.[21]

In June, a month before the start of the festival, Rayner launched his multi-pronged attack. It was not everything he had wanted to attempt, Barker had vetoed at least three operations, but it did showcase the range of fronts and forgeries at his disposal and his ability to attack the Soviets from multiple angles. Their collective aim was simple: to disrupt and discredit the festival.

The first was a manifesto purporting to be from a violent—if fictitious—student group, the Committee for European Syndicalist Action.[22] It played on the leftist, anti-war, counterculture student protests sweeping Western Europe and the United States. Barker winced. Rather than embarrassing the organizers, it might encourage student violence in a way which would end up more damaging to the West. Do not worry, Rayner insisted, 'we do not think it would be as effective as that'. The aim was simply to air the idea that there were people willing to use the festival to make trouble. This would be enough to discredit it.[23]

'This is v. well done and sounds credible', Welser agreed. 'I don't think it will get people in trouble.'[24] John Peck backed the pair and even thought that it should be sent to British universities as well.[25]

Despite Rayner's earlier assurances, the final text was aggressive and did explicitly incite violence. It called upon anarchist students to express their grievances at the festival. 'We say that the time has come to answer violence with violence.'[26] For Rayner, it was not supposed to be interpreted by the other side at face value. He was, however, delighted when local newspapers did just that. One described the Committee for European Syndicalist Action as an 'ultra-left' group carrying out 'subversion on behalf of imperialist intelligence'. This was half right.[27]

The second prong was more familiar: the Loyal African Brothers. The Brothers emphasized failed attempts to hold the festival in Algiers and Accra, claiming that the Soviets were now forced to hold it in Bulgaria because everyone else saw through the charade and knew it was merely a poorly disguised attempt to spread Soviet ideology. The Brothers repeated claims of Bulgarian racism, even though some in the IRD thought this line was becoming a bit tired. The world had moved on, and the big issues of the day were the rise of student radicalism and the so-called New Left movement, preferring direct action to Soviet-style bureaucracy and

extending beyond class struggle to address multiple forms of oppression, from race to gender. What did the Brothers have to say about all of this?[28]

Welser insisted to nervous diplomats that the Brothers had been quite successful over the years and that neither readers nor African intelligence services had questioned the authenticity. ‘There is little risk that this will be laid at our door; if it is (most unlikely) proof will be impossible as these leaflets have only been issued for about four years, post Blake!’[29] George Blake’s name haunted the intelligence services, especially as he had since escaped from Wormwood Scrubs prison and fled to the Soviet Union. Welser’s fears of treachery may have been genuine, but his attempts at reassurance were less so—he knew that the operation had been going for almost a decade and had overlapped with Blake’s activity (although whether Blake knew about it is far from clear). A convenient lapse in memory, perhaps, to bypass Barker’s stamp of rejection.

The third operation complemented the Brothers’ message but for a very different audience. The International Committee for the Investigation of Communist Front Organizations returned with 550 copies of their latest research bulletin, issued in a new modern and colourful style. It emphasized KGB sponsorship, an unprecedented lack of interest in the festival, and the threat from European student extremism and anarchism.[30]

Figure 7. IX World Festival of Youth and Students for Solidarity, Peace and Friendship', poster, 1968, FCO 95/2170, The National Archives, UK.

'A beautiful job', gushed Welser.[31]

Rayner was in his element, playful, vivid, and wily, but Bulgarian intelligence barely seemed to notice it. Local authorities were more concerned about the Czechoslovak delegation distributing leaflets of their own, and successfully intercepted what they described as a truckload of propaganda material at the border.[32] They also noted another, very similar, pamphlet which they assumed was a joint operation between the CIA and Norway.[33] For its part, the CIA recognized the 'fermentative climate' in the region and emphasized how 'self-generated controversy might well be the order of the day'.[34] Poor Welser and Rayner were, as ever, two among many.

The fourth production was perhaps the most bizarre fake that Rayner had ever attempted. It targeted what he disdainfully called the Flower Power people. He and MI6 would create a poster, written in broken 'Bulgarian English inviting the Hippies of the world to go to Sofia for the biggest "love-in" of all time.' As with the anarchists, the aim was not actually to encourage hippies to go to Sofia but to give the impression that they might. In doing so, it would smear the festival and embarrass the organizers.

'I suggest', he told Welser, 'there that there would at least be no harm in this small pin prick operation.'[35]

'At first sight this seems facetious and improbable', Welser replied. This was a brave new world for a strait-laced middle-aged man with an avowed loathing of what he called commies and pinkos. 'However, if we can worry the organisers about the possible influx of long-haired oafs and their female companions moving in on the Festival, it would do no harm.'[36] He and Hubert Kós, who was rapidly becoming Welser's protégé, had already shared a good sneer at the comically bright colours featured in genuine adverts for the festival. Both men were traditional conservatives with little appreciation of bold prints and flower power.[37]

Barker huffed that it would achieve little, but begrudgingly conceded that neither would it do any harm.[38] Rayner pressed harder, claiming that hippies were now getting involved in the student demonstrations sweeping Europe,[39] and that they were clearly worrying the Russians. He told Welser that the chairman of the Soviet Committee of Youth Organizations had called them 'renegades and scum'.[40]

‘Should turn heads’, Welser smiled.[41] Ultimately, he needed little convincing.

Kenneth Crook, a future head of the IRD, thought that it was ‘such a lovely piece of work that it ought to be given a chance—perhaps we ought to permit ourselves a bit of fun now and again, when we are sure it can do us no harm!’[42]

‘Don’t we need more evidence than eins, zwei, drei that the flower power people are a serious component in student protest?’[43] Nigel Clive, the current head, was sceptical. Eventually, he approved it though; if nothing else, it was a bit of fun.[44] The ploy undoubtedly existed at the far end of the spectrum, but it neatly encapsulated the reality of propaganda and subversion. This was not about trying to overthrow governments, launch dramatic coups or generate huge policy changes; it was, as various British propagandists had put it with mixed metaphors, a firehose, the drawing of a bow, the shotgun principle. Propaganda and subversion, according to one MI6 vice-chief, were ‘a continual sapping process’.[45]

The end product, teetering on the edge of farce, was a handbill purporting to issue from a Bulgarian youth organization inviting the ‘switched on young generation’ to visit Sofia for the festival. It had a swirling red, green, and black heart-shaped design, mimicking genuine festival imagery, featuring a woman with long wavy hair and flowers in her eyes.

> Welcome to Bulgaria, the land of beautiful trips!
>
> No visas necessary to enjoy physical rebirth this summer in Bulgaria!
>
> You can get it in Sofia!
>
> Let yourself go in Bulgaria, the land without Fuzz!
>
> Remember friends—Tourism brings boys and girls together!
>
> You will be nearer the contemplative canabis [*sic*] culture of the East!
>
> Bulgaria invites the turned-on young generation of the world to drop-in on Sofia this summer.

Inside, it invited young people to ‘discuss the implications of the psychedelic revolution and the future of our creepy planet, and innumerable other groovey events’. Whitehall readers were unimpressed. ‘*UGH!*’[46]

MI5 found it hilarious. ‘You must have had great fun doing it; let us hope that it gives others as much pleasure as it did us!’[47]

MI6 posted 450 copies in July to the usual suspects of youth groups and newspapers, as well as some more unusual recipients, including ‘Gandalf the White Wizard, Stockholm.’[48]

His stiffer colleagues may have scoffed at the slapstick subversion, but Rayner did have a point. At almost the exact same time in Bulgaria, local authorities were worrying about this very threat. The Beatles were at the height of their global fame, and Czechoslovak protesters had adopted ‘Hey Jude’ as an unofficial anthem.[49] John Lennon and George Harrison in particular were key figures in the countercultural revolution, espousing LSD-inspired world views and bringing Indian fashions to the masses. Ann Elwell’s energetic, and perhaps overly zealous, husband heading domestic countersubversion at MI5 opened a file on Lennon.[50] Bulgarian authorities reacted with horror upon hearing stubborn rumours that the Beatles wanted to perform at the festival and worked hard behind the scenes to block the supposed request—and then to thwart the band from turning up uninvited.[51]

Adding to the chaotic picture of international relations, Bulgarian intelligence was certainly alive to the wider threat of sex and general debauchery among the turned-on generation. One report noted how a local man tried to pay a woman to take pictures of her having sex with a black student—he intended to sell the photographs as pornography during the festival. Another recorded how one ‘Pyotr Ivanov, who suffers from syphilis and other venereal diseases, refused treatment so that he could “set fire to the floor under foreigners and leave them a gift from Bulgaria” during the festival’.[52] Another still complained that the Norwegian delegation were coming for ‘10 days of eating, drinking and lovemaking’ rather than to participate in the festival.[53] Authorities hastily deported some 200 sex workers from Sofia to the Black Sea.[54]

As Rayner waited for reactions, Welser and Kós stepped up the press campaign against the festival. Their first port of call, as ever, was László Taubinger, the industrious Hungarian journalist in Vienna, a man to whom they would send material even when on holiday or in hospital. ‘I know you are never averse to work!’ Welser insisted, in his half-charming half-steely manner.[55] By this time, Welser’s star man was the Vienna correspondent for four British controlled agencies as well as various Central European papers.

Welser and Kós were relentless, a masterclass in steady and subtle subversion. They fed Taubinger a stream of incendiary material, carefully tailored for the Austrian press. Each piece was designed to unnerve the organizers, sow chaos in their ranks, and, as always, tie the festival to the shadow of Soviet influence. The results, this time, hit the mark.

By July, Taubinger had landed a journalistic bombshell. Fuelled by Welser's carefully curated leaks, he broke the story that Cuba had decided to boycott the festival. The news exploded across Europe among those circles who cared about these things, echoing far beyond the confines of Austria. West German intelligence sprang into action, tracing the tremors back to their source. For Taubinger, it was too much—too much exposure, too much pressure, too little sleep. He was jittery, uncomfortable in the heat and glare of the attention.

Welser, of course, remained impervious to Taubinger's nerves, as inscrutable as ever. When word of the West German interest reached him, he merely allowed himself a dry chuckle. 'I must say I was very much amused. László certainly has put the cat among the pigeons.'[56]

Welser had already been warned, though warning seldom deterred him. One of his black writers, Ronnie Preston, a wartime SOE operative and major in the intelligence corps, was a man of many pasts. In another previous incarnation he had been a seasoned *Times* correspondent in Vienna and even presided over the foreign press correspondents' association there. Vienna's press club, with its easy camaraderie and loose tongues, had been a fertile ground for gossip—a place where suspicions were aired with the same casual ease as cigarettes lit. Preston had told Kós what everyone else seemed to know: Taubinger was deemed very cosy with the British embassy.[57] Welser, resolute or reckless—it was sometimes hard to tell the difference—pushed forward regardless.

If Taubinger was producing results close to the wind, then Rayner's operations seemed altogether lost. Moscow radio eagerly amplified Dutch media reports about 'the intrigues of the American CIA in the youth movement'. Apparently, the CIA had met with various youth groups and plotted to send large numbers of agents disguised as delegates to Sofia, spread propaganda, and even set up a rival festival in the Netherlands. Moscow happily reminded listeners of the CIA's covert operations influencing youth movements which had been exposed the previous year.

Soviet propaganda kept up the pressure: Moscow pointed the finger at West Germany for 'fanning flames of propaganda'.[58] Days later, Tass and *Pravda* accused 'Israeli Zionist youth organization' of 'subversive activities' against the festival.[59] *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the tabloid, accused the CIA. Again.[60] On 19 July, *Pravda* published extracts from an alleged CIA plan for ideological sabotage against Czechoslovakia.[61] It had been forged by the KGB. Whenever the KGB thought about disinformation by their adversaries, it was always the US first and the West Germans second. The UK would come in third—or be relegated to 'other imperialistic states'.[62] Meanwhile, the Bulgarians accused West Germany and the Czechoslovaks of targeting the festival with propaganda.[63] The festival drove home the competitive nature of propaganda; how plenty of states were engaged in—or perceived to be engaged in—competitive interference.

At the same time, the CIA noted just how many problems the festival seemed to be facing regardless of any propaganda from the West.[64] Rayner had fought hard for these operations though and he wanted a win. He had one more trick up his sleeve.

Peter Roland was a young IRD officer in his early thirties excited about an upcoming mission behind the Iron Curtain. He was to visit Sofia to cover the festival, providing material back to London which Rayner and Welser could use. It was to be a secret mission in which Roland operated undercover as a regular diplomat, and he enjoyed the cloak and dagger of it all, playing out the life of a spy. The cover story was wafer thin: Roland was covering colleagues' annual leave; all perfectly normal for this time of year. It was just pure coincidence that it overlapped with the youth festival.

Before he left, Roland met Rayner and Kós. They asked him to send back reactions during the festival, particularly from any students asking awkward questions, any controversies arising, and general difficulties that cropped up. They whipped out a copy of their black Investigation Committee bulletin and briefed him about some of their other covert operations.[65]

Inside the regular Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Barker winced. Roland would need diplomatic immunity, he insisted, and his activities must in no way prejudice the foreign secretary's impending visit to Bulgaria

in September.[66] To be fair, Roland did need to be careful. The Russians had been asking questions about him at a reception in London the year before and knew he was a linguist, meaning that Bulgaria would assume he was a spy and would probably put him under surveillance; he might even be approached.[67]

Roland was enjoying a journey from Paris on the iconic Orient Express in late June when his strange encounter began. He was sharing a compartment with an overweight Bulgarian doctor who had struck up a friendship with another Bulgarian, Ivan Kozhuharov, in the neighbouring compartment. The pair beckoned Roland to join them and, partly to pass the time and partly to be polite, Roland engaged in conversation. It was all a bit awkward. Kozhuharov, who claimed to be an employee of the Bulgarian External Trade Bank, did not show much interest in Roland. 'I once cracked the mildest of ideological jokes at his expense', Roland later recalled, 'and he was distinctly unamused.'[68]

Roland sat quietly gazing out of the window, his mind pleasantly adrift, assuming that was the end of the matter. A few days after he arrived in Sofia, he was enjoying lunch when a familiar face approached his table, beaming and besuited. Ivan Kozhuharov was a compact man of fortyish years, with a swarthy complexion and notable nose. Roland thought he looked distinctly Turkish. The Bulgarian did not introduce his two female companions but handed over his telephone number and suggested going for a walk together soon.[69]

On a warm summer's evening a couple of weeks later, just days before the festival began, Roland met Kozhuharov for dinner at an elegant restaurant in the heart of Sofia. Roland's suspicions grew as the questions came thick and fast with the subtlety of a brick through a greenhouse.

What did you study at university? And why have you not served abroad given your knowledge of languages? How long have you served in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office? Roland ducked the last one easily, 'a few years'.[70]

'It *was* the "Ministry of External Affairs"', you worked in wasn't it?' Kozhuharov kept mentioning the name Stewart. Roland assumed he meant Michael Stewart, the foreign secretary, and wondered if Kozhuharov was testing his bona fides in the most extraordinarily primitive manner. He half

thought Kozhuharov expected him to blurt: ‘I’m not sure who the Foreign Secretary is now—you see I work in the Intelligence Service.’

Which department did you work in? Kozhuharov pressed, like an overeager host grilling a guest. There are a few dealing with Eastern Europe are there not?

‘We believe in amateurism and doing a little bit of everything.’

Did you have any trouble in seeing me? Does anyone know you are seeing me?

‘Good Lord no! I belong to a free country, you know. We can see anyone we like.’

Roland returned the question and asked if Kozhuharov had had any trouble in seeing him. The Bulgarian spread his arms and puffed his face out in the most exaggerated gesture of negation Roland had ever seen.

All the while, the alcohol flowed even faster than the questions. They started with plum brandy before moving on to two bottles of white wine. Roland kept pace with Kozhuharov, drink by drink. A waiter materialized every now and then to top up his glass, and in doing so further raised Roland’s growing suspicion that this was an intelligence job. Kozhuharov worked his way down the recruitment training manual: When the classic alcohol ploy failed, he tried appealing to Roland’s politics.

How much do you like Bulgaria? You should stay here longer and bring the family on holiday.

‘I found the hospital dirty though the streets were clean.’

Kozhuharov was most put out.

When that failed, he offered Roland money. Come straight to me, he insisted, if you have financial problems or need cash. It paid to have a friend who can arrange things directly. ‘We are friends, aren’t we?’

And when that failed, he made what Roland thought the most galling approach of all.

> Throughout the evening Kozhuharov grabbed my elbow to emphasise points he was making (I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt). It only occurred to me that this might be more than a punctuation mark in the closing stages of our session when he held my arm in a manner definitely calculated to elicit a response one way or another. It was then that I lost the remaining benefit of the doubt I had been giving him (it was still just possible for me to believe that he has only been put up to pumping me) and came to the conclusion that he had some experience as an intelligence agent.[71]

The bizarre dinner theatrics made for a rather clumsy but amusing spy at that.

There were other giveaways: ‘for a man who worked in the International Section of his Bank, he was curiously ignorant of English currency denominations’. But it was what Roland termed ‘the homosexual approach’ which was the final straw. Kozhuharov insisted on walking Roland back to his hotel room and asked one final question. Roland steeled himself.

‘Tell me seriously whether you enjoyed yourself this evening? It was friendly, wasn’t it?’

Of course, Roland lied. His dinner had descended into a semi-drunken farce—a Cold War caper of awkward questions far removed from his romanticized dreams of cloak and dagger intrigue. As he climbed into bed that night—alone—he rated Kozhuharov a clueless spy who had blown his own cover with very little to show for it.[72] Roland lay back, pleased to be the IRD’s man at the festival.

Roland did not yet know it, but he himself had been blown just forty-eight hours earlier. On 23 July, five days before the opening of the festival, the Bulgarians had held a press conference in which they denounced Roland —misspelt Rowland—as having come to Bulgaria ‘with the obvious aim to upset the preparation for the Festival’. The authorities claimed to have uncovered tens of thousands of propaganda pamphlets attacking the festival, although laid the blame more with the CIA and West German intelligence. They also pointed to growing activity among ‘the various “leftist” extremist movements’, including anarchists; perhaps Rayner’s work was gaining traction.[73]

As high farce moved to high stakes, the Bulgarians offered proof of subversion, claiming to have documents proving that MI6 had a top-secret special political action section tasked with frustrating international youth conferences. British spies had done this with the 1959 World Youth Festival in Vienna and were probably doing it again now.[74] Finally, Rayner’s work was gaining notice in a crowded field.

Fortunately for the IRD, no Western journalist had attended the press conference. Moscow and Sofia, however, were a different matter. The revelations splashed across headlines there and word soon rippled back to Roland and then Clive, Welser, and Rayner in London. They read the news with alarm. Roland’s cover story would never hold; they all knew that.

Worse, the documents brandished so theatrically by the Bulgarians were distressingly genuine.[75]

Fearful of stimulating further coverage, they played it cool. Stick to the script: Roland was in Sofia covering summer holiday absences among the staff; the alleged documents 'appear to have been produced as part of a propaganda campaign to blame alleged western "plots" for troubles which might arise during the Festival'.[76]

Hubert Kós, a fervent anti-Communist, never missed a chance to turn a problem into a propaganda opportunity. He urged László Taubinger to write an article about how the organizers, in their desperation, were regurgitating familiar old lines about Western intelligence, so as to cover up the embarrassing activities of Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Romanian, and various syndicalist student groups in Sofia.[77]

Barker was uneasy and wanted Roland pulled out of Sofia as quickly as possible. It risked turning into a scandal which imperilled the foreign secretary's forthcoming visit. Months of work would be wasted.[78] Desmond Crawley, the ambassador in Sofia, reassured him that Roland had been moved into a colleague's flat and no longer ate, drank, or moved about much on his own. He was doing a good job and, Crawley insisted, should stay on and complete the assignment.[79]

When Roland made it back safely at the end of the festival, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's security department cleared him of acting rashly, although it concluded with a smirk that he 'may well have pursued his task with vigour and perhaps a slight penchant for the cloak and dagger'. It had been a risky business, especially given the suspicious timing, and local staff had left Roland more exposed than colleagues back home would have liked. Overall, though, investigators cleared him of any blame in being outed and praised him for successfully extricating himself from a difficult situation.[80]

Crawley assessed that the festival had been a resounding failure for the Bulgarians—on every count apart from organizational skills. Cuba and China were notable absentees; Syria and others had boycotted for their own reasons. Celebrities failed to materialize. Authorities inflated attendance figures. The climate was neurotic; the event overpoliced; the discussions paralysed by competing factions.[81]

Bulgarian intelligence unsurprisingly drew different conclusions, although they did agree that their heavy-handed security was impeccably organized. Students from the New Left, a broad range of leftist activist movements challenging Communist orthodoxies, did cause trouble at the festival, just as the Rayner had hoped, through spontaneous demonstrations and general criticism of the state of international socialism. The French delegation was expelled following a fight between the New Left, involved in the Paris student protests in May 1968, and orthodox French Communists.[82] Whether Rayner's operations had any impact on this is another matter entirely.

Predictably, the authorities did struggle with hippies. The extravagant clothing, long jackets, tight trousers, and flowing hair did not impress the Bulgarian security officers and secret policemen hidden among the crowds; and as for the continuous banging of drums and howling of saxophones, the 'jumping, gyrating and grimacing', the authorities resorted to old-fashioned methods of pulling the plug on the speakers. It was unlikely that Rayner made much—if any—difference, especially as the Bulgarians singled out the Czechoslovaks as being particularly irritating.[83]

In addition to the Czechoslovak delegation, some of whom arrived at the opening ceremony wearing pictures of Aleksander Dubček, the Czechoslovak leader, and throwing beachballs around to disrupt the careful flag-waving choreography, Bulgarian intelligence focused on pro-Chinese propaganda coming in via the French, Italian, and West German delegates. One American tourist was deported for trying to distribute Mao's red book in Sofia.[84] Members of a British youth jazz orchestra did hurl plastic bags filled with water at late night pro-Ho Chi Minh protesters, but it came to nothing.[85]

Still, the international media made for pleasant reading. The Belgrade Home Service reported 'rude outbursts' and 'incorrect behaviour' by the hosts; the official Yugoslav news agency expressed indignation over obstruction and discrimination which the Yugoslav delegation had faced; Zagreb reported protesters smashing an American journalist's camera on the main street of Sofia.[86] The British press, including those briefed by the IRD, also reported the right lines.[87] And the CIA assessed that the humiliating, 'dinosaurian', festival would soon be extinct.[88]

Welser and Rayner wanted to play their part and, despite moments of absurdity, to leave their mark. In truth, they struggled to cut through—highlighting classic challenges of conducting propaganda. First, these were busy waters, an unruly sea of competing interests, and the British effort was just one of many seeking to muddy the tide of the festival. The Soviets were far more concerned about other states, bigger or closer to home than the British. Second, the festival was already listing under its own problems. Splits in international Communism, radical youth politics, and heavy-handed policing all took their toll. In some ways, external propaganda was superfluous, at best giving a nudge and exacerbating tensions. Its exact impact was impossible to measure, although Welser and Rayner would have claimed it had not done any harm and would only have helped.

One thing, however, was plain: the festival's faltering was a sign of the times. The world was shifting in ways that Rayner and Welser could not quite understand let alone influence.

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18

Out with the Old?

Welser, ever relentless, kept the material steadily flowing to his prized asset, the journalist, László Taubinger in Austria. Taubinger had been a long-standing conduit for Welser's lines, having fled his Hungarian homeland after the failed uprising back in 1956, and the journalist had stayed busy throughout the 1960s. Even when the team's attention had focused on Rhodesia, Egypt, or Indonesia, Communist subversion was never far from Welser's mind and he continually sent Taubinger material on front activity. He knew that poor Taubinger was prone to ill health and was feeling the strain of his covert role, but both men were addicted in their own ways, both lives consumed by the clandestine world. With a shared loathing of the Communists, Welser needed the channel and Taubinger needed the scoops.

Taubinger had spent the spring of 1968 propped up on a worn camp bed in his living room. He had suffered a small blood clot near his lungs, leaving him pale and breathless, staring at the ceiling.[1] He was a man weighed down by exile, by the need to support dependants and protect his family back home, and by the loss of his country to Communism. He was a man who increasingly seemed to live in the narrow rooms of his mind, a place of dark corners and echoing doubts. He was feeling depressed and his handlers in the British embassy warned Welser that he was liable to write accordingly. This would simply not do, and so, that September, Welser decided to travel to Vienna and take the dejected journalist for lunch.[2]

Taubinger had struggled with the unwanted attention generated by his scoop about Cuba boycotting the 1968 youth festival in Sofia, but this, he anxiously unloaded on Welser, was merely the latest in a growing list of incidents when his sources had attracted a bit too much scrutiny. The closer

he came to exposing Communist machinations, the closer he came to being exposed himself. Worse, he had a nagging fear for the safety of his relatives back in Hungary if the authorities mistakenly thought that they—rather than Welser—were his sources.[3]

Feeling sorry for himself, he worried that Welser might ditch him anyway. His scoops would dry up and he would be out of a job. And what then?, his mind raced. He grew paranoid and started to use different initials on his bylines. On one occasion the stress got the better of him and poor Taubinger crumpled under the weight of it all, convinced he was about to be abducted when covering a conference in Vienna.[4]

Things took a turn for the worse when he got dropped by Hamburg's *Die Welt* newspaper in November. He had only started working for them a few months earlier, writing on student syndicalism and its relationship with Communists, but he had not taken kindly to the newspaper criticizing his material and editing it too thoroughly. Amid bouts of ill health and neurosis, he had managed to fall out over the terms of his contract, had pestered editors about stories, and had taken offence at being questioned about his sources. Unsurprisingly, the relationship had completely broken down.

Welser, in response, was more anxious than sympathetic. He had already spoken to Taubinger about the importance of protecting sources when *Die Welt* had first signed him up. 'Care must be taken to source short news items to sources accessible to him in Vienna in the ordinary way.' Welser warned, 'he must on no account over play it'. *Die Welt* required particular caution; it had been under British control after the war, and its then editor, now a board member, even knew about the existence of the IRD. Welser paced up and down his office fretting that his name could never be mentioned or *Die Welt*, which was now independent, 'would immediately smell a rat'.[5]

The newspaper may have been particularly sensitive about sources, given that it was also a long-standing target of Stasi operations,[6] but it was not the only one now questioning Taubinger and the accuracy of his information. As scrutiny of his star man grew, Welser instantly, inevitably, turned to Cold War paranoia for an explanation. 'I thought then as you know that dirty work could be involved; I think this even more so now that the Welt have reacted similarly. However, we will I fear never find out the truth.' He promised to ponder the difficult question of how Taubinger

should explain the origin of his information to curious editors. Meanwhile, he told colleagues in Vienna, 'I am sure you will do your best to keep László on the rails and his spirits up. Not an easy task!'[7]

Taubinger, himself paranoid and tired, was furious about his treatment by editors. But, unlike Welser, he insisted this was just the sharp end of the journalism business—not the result of Russian dirty work. Not everything was a conspiracy.[8]

'I can quite understand László's reaction. Please give him my sympathies', Welser consoled colleagues in the Vienna embassy. 'I will try, after Christmas, to find him another outlet in Germany and will let you know in due course.'[9]

Early the following year, Taubinger's work really was starting to dry up and Welser feared that each headline could be his last. It put him in an awkward position. He was quite certain that Taubinger was about to lose his job as Regional News Service (ME) correspondent for Vienna, the controlled agency where he had worked since at least 1965, and which had paid him a retainer and expenses allowance.[10] Welser knew this because his wife, Adelaide, had recently transferred the agency over to Reuters and would have kept him updated on the comings and goings.

Welser squirmed awkwardly, asking colleagues in Vienna not to tell Taubinger the bad news yet. To ease his conscience, he promised to publish more of Taubinger's work through another of Adelaide's controlled agencies, NAFEN, to make up for the loss of income. But guilt has limits, and he drew the line at Taubinger's request to come to London to find new outlets. 'He won't, and we, for security reasons, cannot give him the introduction he would need.'[11] And so Taubinger was left forlornly touting his wares around West Germany, although this too caused Welser concern.[12] When he invited Welser to a cocktail party in Vienna, the British embassy thought it 'a little indiscreet'. Welser quietly agreed and met him for an unassuming lunch instead.[13]

Welser had to tread carefully to defend his man—and to protect himself. When Peter Joy, now the IRD's man in Beirut, seemed to be making too much use of obscure Swiss articles as a means of laundering secret information into Lebanese newspapers, Welser took fright. On one occasion no fewer than four Lebanese newspapers printed the same article written by Taubinger under a semi-cover name and based upon classified intelligence

gathered by an MI6 agent in Beirut.[14] Welser fussed. ‘Of course this is splendid’, he told Joy, trying to sound cool, ‘and I do not want to spoil your fun in the least. Are you, however, quite sure that you are not too successful and thereby exposing László too much?’ He worried about ‘some counter-action by the other side’.[15]

‘As you know, I am not at all given to taking fright. I am only as concerned with protecting László and his outlets as much as we possibly can.’ Welser protested too much, hammering home the point. ‘Again, I don’t want to spoil your fun in the least or curb your enthusiasm. All I want is to be reassured by you that you think this is all right, and that we are not going too far.’[16]

‘I quite understand your anxiety to protect the originator which I, of course, share,’ Joy responded, pointedly refusing to name László openly. ‘We will, however, take special care not to draw excessively on the Swiss items—although, in view of their repeated tendency to hit the nail on the head, it is very tempting to do so!’[17] They both knew the importance of restraint in their line of work. A channel’s brilliance could quickly be its own fatal flaw.

Taubinger wanted to come to London in December 1969. He hoped to see NAFEN—to whom he provided a lot of material—and the editor of *The Economist’s Foreign Report* who had blown hot and cold on him, despite the subscription-only bulletin also being a major conduit of IRD material.[18] Welser was cool on the idea himself. He rated Taubinger highly, but did not want him in London; he had been only eighteen months earlier, and that had been a complex operation requiring pseudonyms, cover stories, and meeting Adelaide in the Welsers’ own home to conceal her connection with the various news agencies.[19] He tried to persuade him to stay away but failed. Looking on the bright side, Welser knew the trip would bolster Taubinger’s flagging morale and so begrudgingly agreed to pay for him to come over—within strict financial limits, of course.[20]

He arrived on 7 December and was met off the plane and taken to dinner by Hubert Kós, his chief supplier of material and a kindred Hungarian spirit. Both men were ardent anti-Communists with a visceral hatred of the Hungarian government, were tall, austere, and bald, had thick accents, and wore almost identical three-piece suits. They looked quite the pair,

meticulous suits perhaps evoking a faded authority, as they spoke in low tones in the restaurant.

Taubinger did meet the editor of *The Economist's Foreign Report* and was delighted to come away under the impression that he had been offered accreditation for Vienna. Welser was pleased too, pulling strings in the background. It was 'a good thing that the two got together, and I hope there will be closer cooperation with greater benefits to us'.[21] Journalism can be a fickle trade though, and when Taubinger tried to follow up afterwards it quickly became clear that any promises made had been hollow. As Taubinger's letters went unanswered and his head dropped, Welser's mind again quickly turned to conspiracies. He would worry that his star contact was somehow being cheated out of getting credit for stories—but given the secrecy he could hardly prove it.[22] Taubinger also met the editor of NAFEN, and this arrangement seemed more fruitful. Welser was delighted that NAFEN 'seem to be taking all they can from László', even if the editor did not know László's position and László did not know that of the editor.[23]

It was a delicate game as the troubled Taubinger, driven by scoops but plagued by paranoia, risked becoming a ticking time bomb. Welser had to grapple with the core challenge of managing and protecting a prized operative, balancing success with restraint.

Across the office on the upper floors of Riverwalk House, John Rayner was worrying that another of their much-loved channels might have outlived its usefulness entirely.

Like Taubinger, the Loyal African Brothers had been going for years, with every further operation increasing the risk of exposure or slip-up. More than that, times had changed and, Rayner thought, their angry nationalist patter seemed more suited to the 1950s world of decolonization. Still, he had always maintained faith in the operation and insisted that it still claimed scalps. He had recently used the Brothers to attack two Tanzanian politicians supposedly plotting against the president.[24] Welser loved the plan; it was 'full of mischief'.[25]

One of those men was Oscar Kambona, widely disliked in the IRD and still blamed for his role in the 1965 forgeries when foreign minister.[26] Shortly after the Brothers' missive had landed, in July 1967, he had quietly driven from his house in Dar es Salaam and slipped over the border into Kenya. Out of favour and fearing arrest for subversion, as surveillance

teams fruitlessly watched the airports in Tanzania, Kambona boarded a plane in Nairobi and headed for Europe.[27] Rayner claimed credit.[28]

A follow-up letter addressed to the editor of the *Malawi Times* warned the Malawi government of Kambona's role in a plot against its prime minister, and the Tanzanian authorities swiftly arrested one of Kambona's implicated emissaries.[29] Rayner again claimed credit, although this was slightly dubious given that even Julius Nyerere himself referred to Dar es Salaam as Rumour-ville, full of local gossip, mischief, and 'deliberate rumour factories'. Rayner was one among many, and his efforts from afar were dwarfed by domestic power struggles.[30]

Rayner had claimed another win shortly afterwards when the Brothers repeated the trick against three Congolese politicians deemed too close to the Communists. More controversially, this time he had dug up old material to insinuate ongoing treachery.[31] One of those targeted was swiftly posted far away from Kinshasa where he could not do much damage. If he was being honest with himself, Rayner knew deep down that 'I am not sure whether, given so short an interval, we can claim that our piece made any contribution to his posting'.[32] He scrambled around though, hoping for some ammunition to take to Nigel Clive. It turned out that a priest at the Catholic Information Agency speculated that the Brothers might have had some effect. It was not much, but Rayner and Welser leapt on it slightly desperately.[33]

The pair knew that the truth did not actually matter all that much, telling Clive that even if the operation 'did not contribute to his removal it may well have been thought by recipients, in view of its timeliness, to have done so'.[34] In a world of smoke and mirrors, it was perceptions that truly mattered.

Miraculously, the Brothers had never attracted much suspicion. When the MI5 officer in Zambia had picked up some leaflets in 1968, he asked headquarters whether anyone had heard of this mysterious organization. No, came the reply.[35] When Kenyan Special Branch had intercepted a Brothers' leaflet attacking Chinese subversion, they described it vaguely as a 'specious anti-Chinese document'.[36] Months later, a weekly French-language magazine, *Jeune Afrique*, published an article on the Brothers, describing them as an anti-Soviet and pro-American group. Never one to

miss a trick or lose control of something he had created, Rayner used it to generate further publicity about his go-to fake group.[37]

'The Brothers' wrote a response to the editor, which doubled up as a list of their greatest hits. They were not anti-Soviet, but against all foreign interference in Africa. They had successfully exposed Oginga Odinga, Diallo Telli, and Oscar Kambona.

'And where is le frère Oscar Kambona now?'

They had successfully exposed CIA bribery of African leaders at the United Nations, although Rayner knew full well this was actually a Soviet operation imitating the Brothers to discredit the Americans, but it helped his cause if the Brothers now claimed authorship.[38] Even in Rayner's world of games within games, this was a quite remarkable situation. He was cleverly pretending that Soviet propaganda was actually British propaganda in order to provide cover and credibility. Nevertheless, his scheming practically gave MI6 officers a heart attack and they made him dial it down.[39]

The greatest hits became a valedictory; the political tides had shifted and the Brothers' days were numbered. The African market was saturated with similar attack leaflets, which Rayner inevitably took as a sign of the Brothers' impact, and, mirroring Welser's troubles with Taubinger, after almost ten years, doubts were now finally starting to be expressed about the authors' identity.[40] In March 1969, Rayner confided to MI6 that the Brothers had 'lost some of their usefulness, and we would like to bring ourselves up-to-date, so to speak, for this sort of thing'.[41] The world was changing: the Brothers were old-fashioned nationalists in a New Left era, characterized by radical student politics and splits inside the Communist movement that Rayner had once seen as monolithic. They were relics of a faded age struggling to adapt to a new world, a feeling to which Rayner and Welser, veterans of the Second World War, could perhaps relate.

One of his colleagues had suggested switching to a phantom group of African students instead, perhaps based in Europe. Rayner was interested and asked MI6 to raid its filing cabinets for examples 'of communiqués, letters or circulars sent by African students in Europe'. He wondered whether MI6 had any usable intelligence about the whereabouts of African students and, while they were at it, whether MI6 had 'any suggestions for new notional organisations in Africa itself'.[42]

MI6 came back with a litany of cautious advice that Rayner neither wanted nor heeded: that he would have to think carefully about this new group's basic stance before deciding on its identity; that it should not give the game away too easily whilst at the same time providing a platform from which to damage UK opponents; and that it could not be tied to a single African country, as this would be too risky.

Of course, Rayner thought. This was not his first fake group. MI6 recommended a militant student body 'proclaiming a plague on both houses from a radical New Left position'. New Left activists challenged both orthodox Communism and mainstream social democracy, opposing nuclear weapons and Cold War bifurcation. A radical New Left position would therefore be topical, relevant, and would generate a 'smokescreen of criticism against the home-side, which can easily disguise its real purpose'.[43]

Rayner duly ignored this, having already made up his mind: African students supposedly living in East Germany. Before MI6 had even replied, he had told Welser that the group had already come into existence and that he had put out their first production attempting to link a wave of assassinations in Africa to the Soviets. 'The Organization of African Students for African Power' was born.[44]

Before making way for the trendy New Left, the Loyal African Brothers, a remnant of the age of independence, had one last mission. On Saturday 31 May 1969, the BBC broadcast the latest instalment of its long running 'From Our Own Correspondent' series. Rayner's ears pricked up when, in clipped tones, it described Russian interference in Nigeria.

> Upper crust Africans on the diplomatic cocktail circuit are openly amused at the cold shouldering between the Russian and the Czechoslovaks. That's all on the surface, but leaflets signed 'The Movement for African Freedom' are circulating underground in Lagos and Western Nigeria, accusing the Soviet Ambassador, Alexander Romanoff, of leading a strong team of subversive agents. Though just one of several anti-Russian tracts, this is written with peculiar knowledge, at least, of the staff arrangements inside the secretive Russian Embassy.

The correspondent then quoted from the leaflet, which was the thirty-seventh—and final—in the Brothers' series. This was the Brothers' farewell: rather fittingly read out, at length, on the BBC.

'I asked a Government clerk, sporting a Lenin badge, what he thought of the leaflets', the programme continued. "Very well done", he said, "for the

Central Intelligence Agency”.’[45]

Rayner was delighted with the last hurrah. He eagerly told Nigel Clive that it was sourced directly from a Brothers leaflet and that the BBC had usefully repeated key points, bringing the message to a whole new audience.[46] He also told the Americans, adding cheekily, ‘Sorry about the last bit.’[47]

Another colleague told him that the operation had made an impact both in official and press circles in Lagos. Nigerian Special Branch was undertaking a forensic examination to identify the culprits. And with that, the Brothers vanished—even though they had never really existed at all.[48]

If there had been a sense of hubris behind their interventions from Egypt to Rhodesia, Indonesia to Kenya, it was driven by a flailing against decline, a challenge to their entire mindset, and an almost desperate attempt to prove their worth. As the decade drew to a close, neither Welser nor Rayner, both nearing retirement age, could escape the sense of change in the air. It felt ominous not just for their own personal work and legacies, but for the entire department. In fact, the presentiment felt bigger than even their department: their entire art form seemed on the line.

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PART IV

Diversification and Downfall

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19
Blunting Black Power

The Loyal African Brothers were dead, sacrificed on the altar of credibility. Not that they were ever really alive in the first place, but old-fashioned pan-African nationalists were anachronistic in a New Left world epitomized by student protests, counterculture, the Vietnam war, and civil rights movements. The International Committee for the Investigation of Communist Front Organizations, Welser's fake think-tank and vehicle of choice since the 1950s, followed suit. They too, as Welser explained to MI6, 'had out-lived their usefulness and needed a new look'. Besides, the Soviets had blown the operation at the World Youth Festival back in 1968.[1]

They refused to see it but Welser and Rayner were anachronistic in a New Left world themselves. Out of touch, they struggled to understand a younger generation whose motto seemed to be 'a plague on both your houses'. For them, it was black and white: audiences were either with us or were Communists, or maybe Communist stooges and enablers.[2] They prosecuted their wars with zeal—first against the Nazis and then against the Communists—unable or unwilling the adapt to the murkier landscape of détente. Hubert Kós rejected any apparent thawing in Cold War relations as a cynical Soviet ruse to make useful idiots of them all. He would roll his eyes at Western commentators getting caried away in what he called 'the atmosphere of euphoria generated by the current manifestation of so-called *détente*'. So-called, he mocked.[3] He and the rest of Welser's team were far more ardently anti-Communist than the rest of what was now the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, holding the line while others talked of thawing relations.

The Brothers had also felt anachronistic because, despite supposedly being black Africans, they had little to say about another movement rapidly discomfiting intelligence services on both sides of the Atlantic: Black Power.

Black Power had emerged in 1960s America as a movement emphasizing racial pride and, believing the civil rights movement did not go far enough, pushed the importance of creating political, cultural, and economic power of their own. In response, US intelligence, especially the FBI, aimed to expose, disrupt, discredit, and ultimately neutralize Black Power, and the wider radical fight for black rights. They saw it as subversive, extremist, and open to exploitation by Communists. J. Edgar Hoover, the powerful head of the FBI, even denounced one group, the Black Panthers, as 'the greatest threat to the internal security of the country'.[4]

In London, British intelligence was more sanguine. They did not see Black Power as a coherent international movement conspiring to overthrow the established order and initially assessed that it would have little impact even in Commonwealth Caribbean countries. However, assessments soon hardened as the issue became more prominent and MI5 worried about race being exploited by the Communists as a Cold War battleground, especially in post-imperial Africa. Black Power, British intelligence now insisted, had to be taken seriously.[5]

Neutralizing the supposed threat, both of black subversion and Communist exploitation thereof, would offer another opportunity for Welser and Rayner to diversify and prove their worth—but they would also have to adapt and learn quickly.

Roosevelt Brown was one among a new generation of voices, entirely unfamiliar to the ears of Welser, Rayner, and Kós. He was a well-regarded expert in environmental engineering who, inspired by the US civil rights movement, became a leading campaigner against segregation and then a member of the Bermudan parliament. Civil rights issues on a British self-governing colony three and a half thousand miles away in the sunny Caribbean felt unfamiliar territory indeed.

Towards the end of February 1969, Walter Allinson, overseeing Foreign and Commonwealth Office liaison with MI6 and GCHQ, received warning

that Roosevelt and others perceived as Black Power militants were planning some sort of conference to be held in Bermuda the following August.

Allinson was reasonably experienced; he had spent much of the decade in the Indian subcontinent pinging between Lahore, Karachi, Madras, and New Delhi. He was well versed in the challenges of nationalism, radicalism, and political violence. But he knew little of Black Power and, with Bermuda being a colony, his first instinct was to instruct the governor simply to ban it.

On second thoughts, he reflected, this would backfire. An outright ban would give the militants an open goal: free publicity, huge prominence, more followers, and a narrative of oppression they could easily exploit. It was a classic dilemma, and Allinson pondered his options carefully before calling on Hans Welser.[6]

Perhaps, Allinson suggested, the team might come up with a clever way to ‘discredit’ the conference. He asked Welser to provide a menu of options, before throwing in a suggestion of his own: disseminating some sort of misleading handout at the conference which would cause confusion among the delegates.[7] Of course, Welser responded excitedly, he would get straight onto it.

Welser assembled John Rayner and Rosemary Allott to brainstorm ideas. Allott was no stranger to such secret discussions. Born in colonial India at the end of the First World War, she had worked for the government since 1945 and was a founder member of the IRD’s small editorial section.[8] Dry, unmarried, and although looking every inch an auxiliary territorial service officer—straight-backed, composed, disciplined—she had plenty of experience in the murky realm of propaganda, including working closely with MI6 on covert political operations targeting Latin America in the early 1960s.[9] Now she was more involved in the research side of things, heading the Latin American and West European desk, but she still worked closely with those running the operations.

The three of them huddled together in the upper floors of Riverwalk House.[10] Here, away from prying eyes, they came up with a long list of what they called ‘possibilities for covert action in connexion with the Conference’. Scribbling away, they let their imaginations run wild and their moral compass spin freely, knowing that some of their ploys might be a

little ambitious. They suspected Allinson would recoil in horror when he saw them, but excitedly jotted them down regardless.

Option number one was a forgery. They would create a booklet on Black Power supposedly written by the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This was a genuine leftist movement, founded in Cuba, which fought Western imperialism and liberalism around the world. Welser's proposed forgery could have had multiple aims, depending on how bold Allinson was feeling. It could give the impression that Cuba was exploiting Black Power for its own ends, thus driving a wedge between the two. Or it could even call for violent action, thereby giving justification to clamp down on the conference.

A second option was a smear campaign. They could circulate pamphlets personally attacking individual Black Power leaders, including Roosevelt Brown, the organizer of the Bermuda conference. Welser, Rayner, and Allott wondered if MI5 had any dirt they could use. They knew little about each individual but, ideally, they could expose Brown and the others as 'self-interested and even possibly secret agents of imperialism'.[11]

A third option, very much back of the envelope planning, involved forging Black Power material. Perhaps they could write something inflammatory calling for the elimination of white people from Bermuda. Perhaps they could call for the confiscation of white people's property. Perhaps they could even outright call for violence across the island. They got carried away here, desperate for a win and losing sight of the endgame. Disrupting a conference by burning the island to the ground hardly seemed proportionate.

Finally, they fleshed out Allinson's comparatively quaint idea about circulating a misleading handout. It could give false information about local amenities and how to get around the island, thereby confusing delegates and generally perpetuating a sense of disorganization. Welser could not resist pushing the boundaries. Perhaps this misleading handout could encourage inter-island rivalry among Black Power movements. Rayner emphasized that this was all very rough.[12] All plans would be backed up by articles planted in the local press.[13]

As soon as he left the office, Welser asked Allinson for permission to get in touch with American intelligence. His US friends might have better dirt

on the leaders or might know more about exploitable divisions. After all, Black Power had been under FBI surveillance for a while.[14]

Allinson had no objections to tapping up the Americans, 'provided we gave no hint that we intended to make use of this material in covert operations'.

'The Americans were bound to find out afterwards.' Welser replied.

Allinson reluctantly agreed,[15] but his response might have been different had he been given the full menu of operations in advance. Still, Rayner wasted little time asking for 'information which may not otherwise come our way'.[16] He left it at that.

Meanwhile, Rayner also approached MI5. 'We have been asked to consider', he told them, 'whether there is anything we can do in the way of special operations to disrupt or discredit' the Black Power conference. 'We need background and intelligence about Black Power', about individual leaders and evidence of Soviet, Cuban, or Guianan connections. 'We would welcome any intelligence', he added 'which could be used to discredit them locally and in the eyes of the movement as a whole.'[17]

Rayner was coming up with little: Roosevelt Brown had a PhD in ecological engineering, specialized in renewable energy, and had successfully campaigned for universal suffrage in Bermuda. This was hardly damning. The CIA knew that he had attended a Black Power conference the previous year in Philadelphia, that he was in contact with leaders of the US movement, and apparently had received some assistance in organizing the Bermuda conference shortly afterwards.[18] Rayner sighed; he could not do much with that.

Meanwhile, the CIA privately assessed that 'Brown's relatively moderate public statements on the conference to date suggest that he hopes to stage a peaceful meeting but there is an obvious potential for spontaneous disorder.'[19]

Anything else on the location of the conference would also be helpful. Rayner knew that he would need details on things like accommodation and entertainment arrangements if he was going to send misleading information to delegates.[20]

Back in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Walter Allinson now balked. Anything that stoked racial tension was off limits, he barked; this

was a far cry from his idea of giving misleading directions to delegates. ‘The ploy ought not to conflict with any Race Legislation’. This, with classic diplomatic understatement, constituted a firm no. Allinson was keen on some of the other ideas, though. The forgery of the Cuban movement sounded promising, as did the personal attacks on Black Power leaders.[21]

In the background, Rayner and Welser plugged away with less controversial activity: laundering material in the foreign press. They had already planted one article criticizing Black Power in Forum World Features, a press agency covertly influenced by the Information Research Department. It was successfully picked up in Bermuda, as well as Jamaica and two African newspapers. They then worked with Adelaide Maturin to launder a second article through NAFEN; two Indian newspapers picked it up.

Next, Welser targeted the *Swiss Press Review*, which, despite its name, circulated material to approximately 100 newspapers in the Caribbean, including thirteen in Bermuda alone. It claimed the conference would be economically disastrous for the island, threatening the vital tourism industry. Steering well clear of racial tension, Welser simply noted that Cuba was exploiting Black Power for its own ends.[22]

As Welser planted articles, Rayner turned his attention to the forgery and the other more controversial ideas. He lacked knowledge of Black Power and needed political authority, so brought Len Price, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s West Indian desk, into the secret discussions.

Price lowered himself into the chair opposite Rosemary Allott, his expression fixed in the neutral disapproval perfected by career diplomats. He wearily reeled off his objections: the methods proposed were, in his view, both excessive and reckless. There were, he insisted, plenty of ways to handle this openly and conventionally. Covert operations were counterproductive and simply unnecessary.

Inciting racial tension was, he dismissed, a non-starter and far too dangerous. Misleading delegates was a ridiculous idea. And futile. Bermuda was too much of a tourist hotspot and far too small an island to confuse delegates about directions.

Allott, an experienced operative, sat there hearing how she, Welser, and Rayner had come up with a list of plots on the back of an envelope without

stopping to consider local conditions. ‘Irrelevant’, Price sniffed at the idea of inciting inter-island rivalry.

He did pause on one idea. Forgery, he admitted, had potential. But even there, his caution prevailed. Could you not ‘create more of a sense of warning against extreme militancy in Black Power’, he wondered condescendingly, ‘rather than exacerbating this aspect and so creating a security problem’? Either way, it would need to be cleared with the Americans first.[23]

‘I might remind all concerned’, interjected James Morgan, a senior bureaucrat in the department overseeing all British dependent territories, ‘that the point of the exercise is not so much to prevent the activities of Black Power as such in Bermuda but to fend off the extremely adverse consequences which those activities are about to have in frightening off tourists from Bermuda and this ruining its economy.’[24]

This was news to Welser, Rayner, and Allott. As far as they were concerned, the brief was to disrupt the conference. ‘No counter-measures we take should be such as in themselves to frighten tourists’, Morgan insisted.[25]

He was, of course, absolutely correct, and put the team firmly in their place. In the end, the political masters agreed to a forgery and a smear campaign but instructed Welser not to scare off the tourists under any circumstances. Otherwise he might as well be doing Black Power’s work for them.

Heulyn Dunlop, at only 30 years old, sat at her typewriter overlooking the Thames to draft the forgery. By this time, she spent over half of her working week directly on special operations: 60.4 per cent by her calculations. And 10 per cent on non-Communist targets. And one hour, she added cheekily to Rayner, spent listing these activities in response to his irritating bureaucratic request for a breakdown of her work.[26]

Following Rayner’s lead, she pushed the boundaries of the brief to breaking point. ‘It is a fact that mealy-mouthed Caribbean governments’, the forgery ranted, ‘who think only of the spell-binding proximity of Uncle Sam, his dollars, his pretended goodwill and military bases, have failed in the last twenty years to give Blacks their freedom. Yankee neo-colonialist fetters bite as deeply into the flesh as did those of their British colonialist predecessors.’ It continued: ‘Black Power will destroy the prevalent

misconceptions that Negroes must be grateful to their leaders for bringing them out of bondage.'[27]

Dunlop worked through the brief. Anti-Americanism, tick; pride and separatism underpinning Black Power, tick. Next, she sought to link the movement to Cuba in an attempt to discredit it. 'The Cuban revolution showed many blacks how total social change is accomplished with the elimination of poverty, corruption and large-scale economic exploitation.'[28]

Dunlop and Rayner could not help themselves. Ignoring the worries of their diplomatic colleagues, they played up the threat to tourism. 'Along with all other exploiters, the favourite God of the corrupt governments, the Almighty Tourist, is going to be toppled … There is no place for the bloated with dollars foreigner in the new life which ends the degradation of Caribbean blacks.'[29]

With a finishing flourish, they called for violence. 'Violence for its own sake is wrong, but at the same time, blacks must accept the need for organized retaliation against organised oppression, in the struggle to achieve full freedom.'[30]

Rosemary Allott, more sensible than the others, was unsure. 'Perhaps we should keep this by for the time being', she suggested. No, Rayner, responded impatiently. 'As you know, the production of such things as this involves secure printing and covert mailing', all of which took time. He insisted on pressing on. Against her better judgement, Allott held her breath and passed it over to the diplomats.

If Walter Allinson had balked at the original proposals, Len Price, already cautious, now practically fainted. His bosses were away overseas, leaving him holding the fort. 'Frankly, I find the draft all too bloodcurdling', he complained. It stoked far too much violence. 'I do not feel able to clear it even in principle without referring it higher.'[31]

Others, long sceptical of such covert operations, now grasped the chance to pile on. 'I must admit,' one diplomat added pompously but not necessarily incorrectly, 'that I see little value in this type of exercise anyway.' We are 'gratuitously adding fuel to the flames'.[32] It does not appeal to moderate opinion, another chipped in while questioning the validity of the entire exercise.[33] If they had to do something, could Welser's team not just attack individual leaders instead?

In the hunt for usable dirt, British authorities turned up the pressure on local Special Branches across the region, asking them to monitor Brown's movements carefully and identify his contacts. Jamaican detectives even managed to infiltrate a local Black Power group and obtain a copy of Brown's passport, which they promptly sent off to London. In Dominica, authorities noted that one of his contacts, wearing African dress according to the intelligence report, was plotting some sort of revolution after the conference. They got hold of his passport information too for good measure.[34] Whilst the surveillance was meticulous, it uncovered little with which to smear the organizers.

It was now the middle of May. The conference was supposedly due to be held at some point over the summer, but Rayner and Dunlop still knew little more than that. Colonial officials on the ground in Bermuda were preparing for the tourist season. The spring weather warmed the air and oceans; an influx of visitors would soon arrive to enjoy the white beaches and clear water. Local authorities worried this year's visitors might include militant activists looking for an altogether different experience. They demanded 'all means should be sought to improve intelligence' about Black Power visitors. The Canadians were helping where they could, but cooperation with the FBI remained 'imperfect'. The minister of state in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office tried to reassure them that 'propaganda and "spoiling" activity of IRD type would continue'.[35]

These were hollow words. Rayner and Dunlop, Welser and Allott lacked enough intelligence to land a blow against the organizers. With the conference approaching, Rayner decided to fly out to Bermuda himself. He hoped to speak to the governor, meet the local MI5 representative, and see what operations might still be conducted.

The governor, Lord Martonmere, shared the scepticism of his colleagues back in London. He half-heartedly agreed to Rayner's visit but insisted that any publicity given to Black Power would be counterproductive. It would succeed only in drawing attention to the movement. Rather than covertly discrediting the conference, now happening in just five weeks, he wanted a media blackout.[36]

Just a fortnight or so later, Rayner—not to be dissuaded—found himself wedged into an aircraft seat, bound for Bermuda. The trip had got off to an inauspicious start. Two days before he was due to leave, the Bermudan

administration insisted that he delay his departure because the Queen's birthday was coming up and everyone would be on holiday. It rather set the tone.

When Monday 16 June finally came Rayner said goodbye to his wife—and to Dunlop—and braved high winds and driving rain to reach the airport. The crossing was uneventful, the arrival in Hamilton deceptively sunny, but the storm awaited him nonetheless.

The trip was a disaster. Rayner was largely ignored once he landed on the island, feeling more intruder than guest. Hamilton, with its postcard-perfect stone towers and lush greenery, proved to be an indifferent host. At Government House, the governor was a ghost, his presence felt only in the form of polite evasions. Officials were uniformly 'busy' or conveniently unavailable, and when Rayner pressed for introductions to local leaders or a visit to the Bermuda Government Information Office, he was quietly but firmly warned off. Even Len Price, flown in from London, was in the same building as Rayner yet refused to meet. Rayner felt desperately unwelcome.

Adrift, he resorted to wandering the streets, a solitary observer of the relationships between the local communities. His own, admittedly 'superficial impression', was that 'the blacks and whites were going about their business apparently normally'. They did not interact much, and Rayner thought the black communities seemed 'aloof', unfriendly, and kept themselves to themselves. He did admit to having 'no experience of blacks' though, so acknowledged his observations might have had no great significance. For a man who cut his teeth fighting the Nazis and then developed decades of experience countering the Communists, Rayner was well out of his depth.[37]

Fortunately for everyone involved, the local MI5 representative flew in from Washington, DC, to meet him. He put Rayner in touch with the Commissioner of Police, the Head of Special Branch, and the local intelligence committee. At last, Rayner had something resembling a foothold.

When Rayner did finally talk to the governor, the message was clear: no propaganda. He wanted to protect the tourism industry at all costs. And this, he firmly repeated, meant no funny business.

Martonmere told Rayner that whenever Roosevelt Brown got any publicity—no matter how negative—he always managed to turn it to his

advantage. Even articles about him secretly visiting Cuba made him appear credible rather than duplicitous. Clearly Welser's pieces laundered through the *Swiss Press Review* had failed. It was an important and timeless lesson: sometimes there really is no such thing as bad publicity. And with that, Martonmere unceremoniously flew off to London, leaving Rayner alone to plot his next move.

The island was against him, and Rayner succumbed to the inevitability: IRD activity would be kept to a minimum before the conference. He would, however, prepare supporting material to be used during the conference. Just in case.[38] Rayner flew home on 20 June, four days after arriving. John Peck, assistant under-secretary of state at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and long-time champion of the IRD, conceded that it would be futile to send Rayner—or indeed anyone else from the IRD—back out to Bermuda: 'they clearly don't want him'.[39]

Ever the optimist, Rayner quickly bounced back. He was sure his specialist 'techniques' could be applied to Black Power in the longer term, although it would not be easy and ran the risk of being counterproductive 'by adding fuel to the fire we are trying to damp!' Black Power should not be met head on, he conceded, but more duplicitously: 'the lines on which we should be thinking seem to be to appear to go along with it in attempts to broaden and thereby soften its impact'. He wanted to point to Cuba exploiting Black Power—but had little evidence this was true.[40]

Rayner fought particularly hard because he knew that in the background diplomats continued to attack the IRD, leaving its future in doubt. Both supporters and detractors named Black Power respectively either as an example of propaganda's continued relevance and an example of how far the IRD had strayed from its original brief. The Bermudan conference had become almost a test case of whether Rayner, the Welsers, Dunlop, and the rest could—and should—counter complex modern perceived political threats.[41]

After months of anticipation, the conference took place between 10 and 13 July 1969. Fifteen hundred delegates arrived from across the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa and made their way to Hamilton's City Hall. With its walls adorned by grand portraits of Queen Elizabeth and a parade of former mayors, it was an obvious symbol of colonialism, but for Roosevelt Brown it was the only place on the island big enough to handle registration.

To keep colonial authorities and the likes of Rayner guessing, he had asked a female friend to book it—and other venues—in her name.[42]

Soviet media eagerly reported how the islands were ‘flooded with agents of the British intelligence organisation MI-15’. There was of course no such organization. Meanwhile, Roosevelt Brown dramatically claimed ‘that the airport was crawling with secret agents’, screening delegates, searching baggage, and expelling anyone deemed suspicious.[43] To be fair to him, the CIA did spot ‘comprehensive controls imposed by the British. Known or suspected agitators were prohibited entry to Bermuda just prior to and during the conference.’[44]

Delegates—who survived the screening—then dispersed across the island to take part in workshops on technology, politics, religion, economics, and education. The conference passed off smoothly with no violence, confounding the expectations of many. Roosevelt Brown explicitly did not call for militarism. There was no need, he pointed out, because black communities formed the majority on the island. They had the numbers. They did need to be radical though.[45] Looking in from the outside, British authorities found the event rather mysterious. Several news organizations from around the world tried to cover it but were rebuffed: it was none of their business, stay away. To make matters worse, Brown also forbade participants from giving interviews.[46]

Back in London, Rayner scrambled to know what was going on. Fortunately, MI5 finally came up with something useful: a source inside the conference. Rayner read the report with interest: there was no evidence of dodgy funds; nothing to suggest Soviet or Cuban manipulation; and, besides, the concept of Black Power was extremely amorphous. The informant explained how it ranged from the militancy associated with the Black Panthers all the way through to a woman called Queen Mother Moore who had created her own religion in New York. ‘Violence as a policy was hardly discussed’; there was no appetite for revolution or Marxism: ‘colour in fact is infinitely more important than ideology’.[47]

Rayner read on, perhaps questioning why he had spent the last few months working on this and thinking back to his humiliating trip to Bermuda in June. Internal dissension ‘was of the same order and kind as that which occurs at the annual conferences of the Labour and Tory parties in Britain—that is sharply divided opinion as to the type of policy and the

methods to be used to make it effective'.[48] The CIA assessed that 90 per cent of the delegates came from Bermuda itself. The conference was hardly some international conspiracy.[49] It sounded like a damp squib from a security point of view, hardly worth disrupting or discrediting at all.

There was one thing MI5—and Rayner—missed though. The conference's biggest impact was the emergence in Bermuda of the Black Beret Cadre. The vanguard of Black Power on the island, the Berets did talk of revolution against the colonial government. Through rallies, protests, boycotts, and even some low-level urban violence, they soon clashed with security forces.[50] Partly because of the Berets and partly to demonstrate the continued relevance of his work, Rayner persisted. He was pleased to see some of Welser's handiwork paying off when local black leaders hit out at the *Swiss Press Review*. A newssheet, *FIRE*, perceptively opened with the line, 'Have you noticed that whenever any of the three papers have any news on any part of the Third World the sources are Swiss (SPR), or US or English?' They were on to something.[51]

Then, suddenly, Rayner received a surprise invitation to return to the island in spring 1970, almost a year after his first trip. The governor, fearful of the Black Beret Cadre mounting a campaign of subversion and sabotage, now requested his assistance.[52] The Berets had clearly spooked the Bermudan government into a remarkable turnaround.

Panicking that this could be the start of something more, local officials elevated Rayner into some sort of magical figure, a fixer with the power to snuff out their apparently burgeoning crisis.[53] Rosemary Allott had to archly remind them that it was not the IRD's job—publicly at least—to 'mount a propaganda campaign'.[54] Rayner's grey eyes would have glinted; he made sure to solemnly point out the limitations of propaganda, but beneath the practised restraint he would have been quietly delighted, even if the authorities were falling into an old and predictable trap in now seeing covert operations as a silver bullet, a panacea to a problem they barely understood. Rayner, experienced enough to see the folly in this, might have cautioned them—but only just enough to ensure his own usefulness remained.

Back in Bermuda and this time enjoying a more receptive audience, Rayner offered a spirited pitch which would not have dispelled local illusions about the mystical powers of propaganda. He could influence the

news media; expose the enemy; spread bad news (after all, he told the governor, good news was 'uninteresting, disasters made headlines').[55]

He stayed on for a while to assess the situation at 'grass roots level',[56] concluding that the Black Beret Cadre were motivated by hatred and violence, impervious to reason, and out to destroy the white population. When diplomats suggested that plenty of black people actually disagreed with the Cadre and some in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office even acknowledged legitimate grievances, Rayner confidently brushed it off.[57] Ed Wynne, the veteran of propaganda against Sukarno and old sparring partner of Rayner, chipped in with a particularly racist assessment: there was 'something in the ethos of Black people', he opined, that accounted for the 'laziness, lack of efficiency and disgruntled attitudes' of Bermuda's black youth.[58] Predictably, Rayner recommended an urgent long-term propaganda campaign, combining both open and covert activity, to tackle them.[59]

Allott drafted an article about Black Power leaders targeting nearby Trinidad, where tens of thousands of protesters had taken to the streets. Despite having little evidence, she strongly suggested that Communists were behind Black Power aspirations on the island, and that outside powers operated 'with the collusion of ambitious locals seeking their own ends'. It was classic Allott: clever and careful. The piece contained no outright falsehoods, just lots of insinuation and innuendo. She intended to place the article in a newspaper in Guyana, in the hopes that it would then be picked up and read in Trinidad to quell what looked like the beginnings of a Black Power revolution.[60]

To bolster what was burgeoning into a campaign, Rayner and Welser arranged a discreet meeting with Gordon Brook-Shepherd. A patrician figure, sometimes called Fred behind his back by disrespectful younger colleagues, Brook-Shepherd was a one-time military intelligence officer specializing in European resistance movements who became the *Daily Telegraph*'s Vienna correspondent after the Second World War. Vienna was a den of spies at the time, and Brook-Shepherd was regularly tailed and tapped by Soviet intelligence assuming he was a journalist in name only and up to his old tricks. By 1970 he had risen to become assistant editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*,[61] but clearly stayed on good terms with his former world and had been an IRD contact since at least the early 1960s.

Brook-Shepherd was writing a light-hearted puff piece on the island commissioned by the Bermudan tourism office when the IRD got involved. Rayner and Welser met him as soon as he had returned to London to have one of their cosy chats, likely over a drink or three. Rayner had earlier moaned how a meeting with him would take over an entire Friday. Together, they shaped how he would present Black Power as 'woolly, emotional and irrational', and the Berets as a mere 'handful of people' comfortably kept in check by 'a level-headed and determined administration' and a 'small but well-trained police force'. This would be slipped into the article which was ostensibly about travel, and which talked up the beauty and history of the island.[62] Brook-Shepherd's piece appeared later that summer.

Lord Martonmere, worrying about the impact of the Berets on summer visitor numbers, was clearly warming to IRD work. In June 1970 he wrote to Rayner, the man whom he had shunned just a year earlier, urgently demanding a *Swiss Press Review* piece about the damage Black Power was doing to tourism. 'We were already in fact working on something along these lines, and we are putting this in hand,' responded Rayner. The story went off to the *Swiss Press Review* twelve days later.[63]

Rayner was thrilled that his work was finally gaining some recognition in Bermuda. But now he worried that their enthusiasm had begun to veer into a perilous excess. They spoke of the IRD too freely and Rayner took pleasure in chastising their loose-lipped ways in fabulously understated tones. 'I get a slight impression that you must have reached the maximum number of people to whom dark things should be mentioned.'[64]

It had been quite a journey, fraught with the balance of earning trust and demonstrating value without overstepping and doing more harm than good. Rayner had learnt, sometimes painfully, the value of local knowledge and buy-in. He now felt vindicated. He had not achieved all that much, but the validation, however modest, was a comfort against the encroaching doubts that had begun to stalk his department—a creeping, existential uncertainty among the higher-ups about the purpose of it all. For now, at least, he hoped it would be enough.

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An Existential Crisis

Welser and Rayner sat in the shadow of the looming axe. Ted Heath's Conservative government came to power in 1970 amid a turbulent and anxious political atmosphere, as the country grappled with profound economic and social challenges. The postwar consensus that had dominated British politics began to fragment against a backdrop of rising unemployment and industrial change. Promising to turn around the nation's gloomy fortunes, Heath set about cutting taxes, taking on the unions, imposing pay restraints, and vowing to reduce the size of the public sector. He hoped to slash the civil service by half a million. Cuts loomed.

To prove their worth, the IRD had tried diversifying, first with Gibraltar and then Black Power, but they also clung to their core business. Ministers and mandarins were sceptical and insisted that the Soviet menace was nothing like that of the 1950s. Besides, they added, enough people knew enough about the realities of life behind the Iron Curtain to make IRD-style briefings quaint and redundant.

But the Soviets were not following the same script. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office thought that Soviet disinformation was back on the rise.[1] Welser and Rayner wanted to lead the charge against it, but others wondered whether their tricks were still fit for purpose—whether they should even exist at all? The KGB seemed to think so, and that was a validation of sorts.

At a secret meeting with the Stasi in late 1969, one KGB officer had accused the intelligence services of 'England', alongside those of the US, France, West Germany, and Austria, of having plotted and failed to overthrow the Czechoslovak government. He leaned closer to his East German hosts. In England, 'there exists a state organisation' reporting

directly to the Prime Minister charged with ‘ideological operations’. If he meant the IRD, he was horribly ill-informed—but Welser and Rayner would happily have taken the compliment.[2]

The KGB insisted that imperialist powers were out to undermine the Soviet bloc, sow tension with China, and discredit the Kremlin in the eyes of the developing world. Its officers warned of the need for ‘constant vigilance’ against ‘disinformation’, as well as the need for professionally trained and well-resourced intelligence officers to detect it. Their latest training manual reminded recruits to compare the form, tone, and style of suspicious documents against genuine examples. Check stamps and envelopes against samples collected from around the world and held in KGB archives. What is the message? And who benefits? First impressions, the KGB warned, could well be misleading.[3]

As the Soviets watched the British, Rayner watched back. At the start of 1970, he took responsibility for research into Soviet and other enemy disinformation activities and eagerly began collating a list of ‘putative agents of influence known to have the position and opportunity to spread disinformation’. He and the team would study their writings to see if a pattern emerged which could make it easier to spot future disinformation activities.[4] It would prove difficult though; as Leslie Glass reminded new recruits to the national defence college, ‘however much we may disagree with what we see on the box, not every long-haired commentator is an extremist’.[5]

First, though, they needed a definition. MI6 told Rayner the latest Russian thinking: *Dezinformatsiya* involved activities to ‘mislead or disrupt another Clandestine Service or government, and to induce them to take action favourable to the instigators’. It spanned a broad range of dirty tricks, including feeding false, partially false, or true but incomplete or embarrassing information; disruption by any means; and diverting attention to matters of little importance in order to occupy resources.[6]

Denis Greenhill, the head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, asked diplomats round the world to keep an eye out for such activity. The Soviets, he explained, particularly liked planting news items in obscure non-Communist publications in the hope that they would be replayed globally—something, incidentally, which the KGB astutely believed the UK was also doing.[7] This was a long-standing tactic, designed to

undermine alliances and neutralize opposition to Soviet designs. And, Greenhill explained, it was on the rise. He told them about a recent successful Soviet operation which had used forged documents to claim that NATO forces were being diverted to Italy to deal with internal political troubles.

'How much does disinformation matter?' he asked. 'And if, as we think, it does matter, what can we do about it?' There was no easy answer but, he warned, 'one thing is certain, that the Russians think it valuable and are giving it greater priority now than ever before. With the blurring of the clear-cut distinctions of the cold war, disinformation is less easy to detect, easier to spread and more likely to be believed.'

He asked all colleagues posted abroad to report to the IRD any examples, however slight and seemingly insignificant, of strange Soviet briefings. He hoped to build a worldwide database to uncover disinformation operations in real time. But, and this was especially important, he reminded them 'not to become so suspicious that we no longer believe anything we hear. If we get into such a frame of mind, we are doing part of the disinformer's job for him. At its lowest level an important purpose of disinformation is simply to cause confusion and the mere existence of a quantity of false information calls into question the authenticity of other information.'[8]

This was a vitally important lesson, not always heeded.

A couple of months later, in December 1970, a Methodist minister in the quiet, rain-drizzled Home Counties stumbled upon an alarming pamphlet that left him shaken. The title alone unnerved him: 'Psychopolitics'. He read it once. And then, shocked and appalled, read it again. And again. It was nothing less than a diabolical blueprint detailing a Communist conspiracy to brainwash the public and unravel the fabric of the nation. They would drive the wives of political elites to suicide, push alcohol, drugs, and 'sex literature' into the hands of children. Their weapons would be madness and moral ruin; their ends the 'unarmed conquest of a nation'. They would sever faith and loyalty, cutting down the old order like timber. It read like something torn from bad spy fiction, a villain's monologue dripping with menace. The Communists would sever 'loyalties to leaders and old social orders, the maximum weapon is insanity'.

It was all too much for the good reverend. ‘Their system is anti-God, anti-Christian and does nothing but destroy’. His voice trembled as he told Lord Lothian, the parliamentary under-secretary of state in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whom he half-knew.[9]

‘I am having this matter looked into right away.’ Lothian insisted MI5 investigate.[10]

John Hutson, a Soviet specialist in the IRD, was a more sophisticated reader, better able to spot fakes. He was an experienced diplomat, having served in Prague, Berlin, Saigon, and Sofia, but who now spent most of his time writing defensive papers justifying the IRD’s existence.[11] ‘Rubbish’, he muttered. ‘Or some not very skilful forgery.’[12] Suspicious and confused, MI5 was less sophisticated: Was there some new International Federation for Victory of Communism?

Rayner had to step in and reassure MI5 that it was a crude fabrication, perhaps neo-fascist, designed to attack Communism. ‘While it is of course true that the various current varieties of Communism are still generally militant and provide ample evidence of worldwide subversion, it would be doing the Russians too much credit to suspect their hand at work everywhere.’

Rayner, who lived a colourful private life himself, raised an eyebrow. ‘Pornography and other features of the “permissive society” are hardly new Soviet inventions. The instigators of “permissiveness” are many and varied and the phenomenon itself is part of the price paid for living in a pluralistic democracy. It is the totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Mao’s China which are marked by rigid censorship and a lack of public “permissiveness”.’[13]

He heeded Greenhill’s words to be cautious about seeing Russian disinformation behind every gooseberry bush. Yet for the good reverend, for men like him, old certainties felt gone to be replaced only by chaos and depravity and fear.

As Rayner grappled with supposed brainwashing and suicide, Hans Welser had been proving his worth by developing a new, but familiar, weapon to expose such Soviet disinformation: another phantom think-tank. The Centre d’Etudes Micro-Analytiques was by implication a French-speaking West European research organization with offices in various European capitals. Its publication was called *Microscope*, unapologetically,

as Welser explained, ‘a rather serious and continental one, which could be expected to be given a long-windedness’.[14] Its first issue, posted from Brussels and Paris in late 1968, had quickly drawn the ire of the UK-based socialist magazine *Tribune*: ‘A mad-house anti-communist journal called Microscope, published in Brussels’. Rayner was delighted, not least because in attacking it *Tribune* had repeated its arguments to the very readers he most wanted to reach.[15]

Other editions attacked Romesh Chandra, the president of the World Peace Council; the World Federation of Trade Unions’ drive into the Middle East and Africa; and various other Soviet front activities.[16] They made little headway though, and Rayner received another rebuke for not getting proper political clearance.[17] Perhaps it was all a bit subtle. When, in December 1970, *Microscope* exposed Soviet penetration of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, better known as UNESCO, the head of the IRD, Kenneth Crook, pulled Rayner aside.

‘What’s the difference between a Microscope and a Research Assessment?’[18]

‘Your query…is most reassuring! We do our best in the Microscopes to give the impression that they are serious research assessments; but of course they present only selected facts slanted for propaganda purposes, and they include secret material cleared for covert publicity use. They therefore do not have the dispassionate analytical approach of pure research—though we do our best to give the impression that they do.’[19]

It was certainly subtle enough for a colleague in the international development wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to fall for it. And he was not impressed. ‘On the evidence of this particular edition they do not seem to be a very efficient bunch.’[20]

Rayner thought it hilarious. He added that, even if this mysterious *Microscope* team did not seem especially efficient, at least someone was taking a robust line about UNESCO. That someone was, of course, himself. Afterwards, Welser scurried away behind the scenes with MI6 trying to inspire a much stronger article in the *Sunday Telegraph* about Russian intelligence activities in the UN more widely.[21]

Russian subversion and disinformation designed to manipulate or paralyse the United Nations was especially difficult to spot. The IRD was

not always as sophisticated in spotting disinformation without, as Greenhill had put it, doing the disinformer's job for him, as they liked to think. Sheila Harden, the IRD's woman in New York, told of how the Soviets had been whipping up anti-semitism against a candidate for secretary-general, smearing a senior UN correspondent at the *Washington Post*, and planting disinformation among academic circles.[22]

George Walden, a senior diplomat on the Soviet desk in London, snapped back at Harden's inability to differentiate between disinformation operations and a disingenuous diplomatic line fed out by Soviet officials in the normal course of their business.[23] This, of course, was the point: to blur the legitimate and illegitimate, making counteraction more difficult. It also made the Soviets seem more powerful than they actually were: masters of dark arts. Ascribing power imbues power. Seeing disinformation makes the disinformer powerful—and this was the case in the febrile atmosphere of 1970 as propaganda, fact, and fiction blurred to create confusion in what might be termed a 'post-truth' world.

Between *Microscopes*, the odd forgery, and disinformation-spotting, Welser, Rayner, and the team were particularly busy; perhaps they knew what was coming. It was not a happy ship. As Tommy Tucker, Welser's long-serving counterpart on the editorial section, remembered: 'beady eyes came to be focussed on both the size and cost of IRD'.[24] Most agreed it did need trimming, but the department was under huge pressure to become more regular, better integrated with the rest of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This meant cuts. Regular diplomats, under pressures of their own, thought the IRD bloated, unnecessary, and unable to contribute anything close to being commensurate to its size.

Oliver Wright, who had briefly served in the department a decade earlier, stuck in the knife. He had risen to chief clerk in the Foreign and Commonweath Office, administering the service and its staff, a job he did not want and one which made him increasingly grumpy. 'It is as if people tip their bile on top of you', he later recalled.[25] Wright now tipped his own bile on the IRD, reeling off a list of 'major defects' for the permanent under-secretary. It was a waste of resources and brainpower. Output was relatively tiny. Everyone knew what the Soviets were up to anyway. Kremlinology was a bustling cottage industry in academia and elsewhere. In short, the IRD was no longer necessary.[26]

‘No’, Ken Crook, the IRD head, silently screamed into the margins. ‘It’s been scathed like mad!’ Wright was peddling all sorts of misconceptions. Just ‘no’.[27]

The IRD was the most inspected department around, and the most recent round of inspections had raised the age-old problem: ‘there is no accurate measure of the effectiveness of information work generally and measuring the effectiveness of IRD work in its present form would present even greater difficulty. We can make no useful contribution to such an assessment.’[28] Crook—like Welser and Rayner beneath him—struggled to prove his worth; it was horribly demoralizing.

By now, Norman Reddaway was no longer the upstart troubleshooter in Singapore but had risen to oversee all information work in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was in charge of the entire IRD and a fair bit else, and he agreed with Wright that normalization and integration would deliver better value for money; it would dispel the notion that the IRD was somehow separate, with, as he put it, ‘mumbo-jumbo and ritual dances of its own’.[29]

He eyed the IRD’s newish and expensive headquarters at Riverwalk House,[30] which had quickly gained a reputation as a little empire; a law unto itself where all sorts of shenanigans, personal as well as professional, went on. Moving staff out of Riverwalk House and into the main Foreign and Commonwealth Office building on Great George Street would help to normalize things.[31] The physical separation, Reddaway explained, was a great cause of trouble. ‘The distance is daunting and you have to start your journey to FCO from Vauxhall Bridge by heading for Slough!’[32]

It was hideously complicated though. There was nowhere near enough space to house everyone, and the secrecy involved in Wesler’s work in particular made integration difficult.

Despite a background in the Commonwealth Relations Office, Ken Crook had been won over by the value of the IRD since becoming head a year earlier.[33] But he was the wrong man at the wrong time and, although protective of his team, struggled to go down without a fight. Tall, gaunt, and kindly, he gained a reputation as a bit of a wimp. He accepted the need for better integration; languishing in Riverwalk House had undoubtedly left the IRD underused and underappreciated, but he was ‘hopping mad’ at any suggestions that he or his predecessor Nigel Clive had mismanaged the

department by tinkering around the edges and not taking a bolder look at its functions. The IRD, he insisted, had undergone inspection after inspection. It had been made nimbler. More agile. Tailored. It had diversified, as Rayner's campaign against Black Power demonstrated. Leave it be. If the IRD was to be massacred, as he dramatically put it, then around 120 officials, some who had served for twenty years, would 'have to be thrown on to the street. Many of them have detailed knowledge of highly secret information.' This had significant security implications, neglected by mid-ranking meddlers in the Foreign and Commonealth Office. Crook himself threatened to resign in protest.[34]

Reddaway was only half sympathetic. He thought the IRD a miserable place, set in its ways and little respected among wider diplomats. Good people did not want to be posted there. For a place which increasingly needed to be responsive, speedy, and dynamic—euphemisms for smaller—it was a shame that 'most of the drive and enterprise in the Department comes now from the best of the "permanent temporaries", Mr Tucker, Mr Budd, Mr Welser and Mrs Elwell. It is not a happy Department.'

He continued, 'IRD now faces a rather horrible two years, during which many people who thought they were there for life will perforce move out into the cold. Mr Crook is a competent and kindly father figure well suited to cope with a period of imposed redundancy.'[35]

Important people met in important rooms; people bound by inner-circle syndrome and a shared sense of virtue in being unafraid to take tough decisions. They were the grownups in the room. And thought this was what leadership is all about.

Others just felt depressed. At one point, Margaret Bryan of the IRD's Africa Desk sat among trade unionists when they were negotiating with management about cuts and redundancies. Even the trade unionists were hostile, saying 'you're married, you should go!' She refused.[36] It all made for a nasty atmosphere.

The machinations were all well above Rayner's paygrade, but the unpleasantness and petty office politics were perfectly detectable. He carried on doing what he did best: a forged World Peace Council circular attacking Chinese expansionism in the Indian Ocean,[37] followed by a forged Chinese bulletin attacking Russia for attacking Chinese involvement in a railway line running from Zambia to Tanzania. He sought to stir

tensions between Russia and China, whilst also publicizing unpleasant consequences of allowing the Chinese to build the railway.[38]

Wesler was overseeing a team of twenty-eight in the Special Operations Section and an annual budget of £81,000 (almost £1.5 million in today's terms); he was horrified when he got wind that this could be slashed by half.[39]

'It is already much below its strength compared with two years ago', he protested to Crook, by 'probably 25% or even 30%'. Something would have to give; he could no longer go on placing articles with trusted contacts, *and* maintaining controlled publications abroad, *and* issuing leaflets in the name of notional organizations, *and* doing 'the occasional forgery'.

'All this needs staff which we hardly have.' Welser, always a straight talker, laid out the implications starkly. 'If we are to work on a staff of 15 we would have to shed forgeries and cut down notional publications. If we are to work on a staff of 10 we would have to cut out notional publications —frequently valuable and the only possible outlets for libellous exposure— and restrict ourselves to the feeding of outlets.' It would become a death spiral: 'we would probably find that with the diminishing output our journalist contacts, who in return for the fulfilment of their requests take our own stuff even when it is not perhaps particularly newsworthy, will become less cooperative'.[40]

Adelaide Maturin's network of controlled agencies was becoming expensive; unsurprisingly, they too were caught in the firing line and she and Welser had already begun quietly running them down. Adelaide had seemingly transferred to the IRD proper, as head of its News Features Section, in her own right, and, for a brief spell, the industrious Mrs Welser was briefing Mr Welser on various successes, [41] but in reality she oversaw the demise of various agencies.

Star News Agency was liquidated at the end of 1968.[42] She was perhaps glad to be rid of this one, though, following numerous run-ins with its local director Jack Coles, a veteran of UK covertly controlled agencies in the region, who took a liberal—what she once called 'spontaneous'[43]— interpretation of his contract when it came to annual leave, charging his wife's medical bills to the company, and claiming expenses to fly his daughters out to Pakistan.[44] Like her husband, Maturin did not suffer fools gladly, also giving plenty of dressing downs over the years to another local

director, John Collier of Africa Features. He had ignored her instructions, claimed faulty memory to misinterpret his contract, and maxed out his overdraft.[45] Worst, he tried to act beyond his authority. Maturin, raising a thin, arched, eyebrow, was more than a match: ‘he clearly needs pulling up’.[46]

In the late 1960s, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had paid Reuters to take over RNS (Mid East) operations, largely to cut costs. It was a bad deal, but Maturin would have been closely, perhaps reluctantly, involved.[47] One colleague facing redundancy pleaded: ‘I am still paying for two daughters at school.’[48]

She and Welser plotted how to keep another controlled agency, INRAR, going, even if in name only.[49] Meanwhile, NAFEN was proving particularly expensive, with offices in Delhi, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. By 1967 it had amassed subscribers in India and across the region from Burma to New Zealand, enjoying an output of 12,500 items a month. It too was under pressure, again struggling to demonstrate impact. Hans Welser and even the high commissioner to India put up a spirited defence, but the writing was on the wall.[50]

Now aged 60 and having devoted her career to running controlled agencies which were fading away, Adelaide Maturin retired on 31 January 1970. Welser promptly and personally ordered the destruction of boxes of files tied to her tenure: a bonfire of secrets, consigned to oblivion.[51] NAFEN limped on for another year before ceasing operations in March 1971—although a small new features agency, Forum World Features, swooped in to continue the work from London and New Delhi. This time its local staff would be Indian with no knowledge of the UK government’s role.[52]

Welser had no intention of following his wife into retirement, refusing to contemplate a life of gardening or idle reflection. He kept up the pressure on his kind but flailing boss, reminding Crook that wheels would not turn without grease. ‘Operational money will continue to be essential so as to keep the machine going: without it we will gradually be losing our outlets and should all go home.’[53]

Even Hans Welser, that seasoned survivor of bureaucratic battles, found his optimism faltering. The old confidence was proving harder to muster as

the walls closed in.

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Courtroom Dramas

The air inside Courtroom One at the Old Bailey was heavy with anticipation, as Hans Welser stepped reluctantly into unfamiliar territory. The polished wooden benches, the judge's imposing perch, and the weight of history etched into the walls—all of it was a far cry from the shadows where he usually operated. It was early 1971, and Welser had been summoned as a witness in what Fleet Street had already dubbed the 'Secrets Trial'. He was not a man accustomed to public scrutiny, much less the glare of a courtroom.

Inside sat three unlikely co-defendants: The editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Brian Roberts; a young, relatively unknown journalist named Jonathan Aitken; and Colonel Douglas Cairns. The charges against them were serious—violations of the Official Secrets Act. Cairns had leaked a classified report to Aitken detailing the British government's supply of arms to the Nigerian government over the past three years as it fought a brutal civil war with the breakaway region of Biafra. The explosive report revealed that the Nigerian government had misused this aid and that the British Prime Minister and foreign secretary had both misled the House of Commons on the issue. This was heaven-sent ammunition for a newspaper which had supported the rebels' cause; Brian Roberts ran it in the paper.[1]

All three—Roberts, Aitken, and Cairns—steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, and the case had gone to trial.

Welser was not there by choice. His name had surfaced in ways that made his superiors uneasy. Behind closed doors, they had muttered about the risks of exposure; they quickly warned about sensitivities and scrambled to come up with a cover story about why his name did not appear on the

standard diplomatic service list.[2] Norman Reddaway reminded all involved that Welser's work was 'very private' and, if exposed, 'his useful continental contacts in the publicity field would take fright'.[3]

Welser grew more nervous when he found out that a notable left-wing activist—he thought her a 'bad egg indeed'—was aiding the defence. She had been making uncomfortable noises about unattributable propaganda for a while. Welser insisted that 'Crown Counsel be warned of this aspect and that all steps are taken to rule any such questions out of order and irrelevant …'[4]

'We should be on very dubious ground in trying to influence the course of justice', Kenneth Crook responded. But they could try to head off awkward and malicious questioning.[5] This was dangerous and unfamiliar territory; the team squirmed awkwardly.

Efforts to keep him out of court had failed. The prosecution's case hinged on a supposed warning he had given not to publish and, in the end, Welser took to the stand as a witness for the prosecution well-briefed: he could say, if pushed, that he was a member of one of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's research departments. If really pushed, he could go as far as saying it was the Information Research Department. But nothing more. Beyond that, his bosses deemed coaching of the witness to be improper and relied on the pragmatism of the prosecution and the good sense of the defence. Crook naïvely noted that 'If asked any questions which appear too delicate (or irrelevant) to answer, HW can only raise his eyebrows to the Prosecuting Counsel and hope that he will take the responsibility of objectivity.'[6]

Aitken was more nervous than Welser. For him, it felt like a life-or-death experience. He looked around the notorious courtroom but could not help being reminded of a run-down municipal swimming bath.[7]

From the dock, he watched Welser, this mysterious man from the Foreign Office with a Germanic accent, begin to give evidence.

The drama had begun almost a year earlier, on 9 January 1970, with a telephone call from Gordon Brook-Shepherd. Welser kept their professional relationship quiet in court. He was merely 'a friend'. Brook-Shepherd had phoned Welser asking for advice about a classified report he had seen, and which suggested there must have been a leak somewhere. His newspaper was thinking of buying it.

Welser told the court how he had hurriedly arranged to meet Brook-Shepherd at a nearby restaurant, Wheeler's, for lunch. It was a fashionable bohemian oyster place, more often frequented by artists than Whitehall officials—Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud were regulars—but now Welser and his wife, Adelaide (he naturally omitted that detail in court), had sat at a checked tablecloth and waited. Brook-Shepherd arrived slightly late, hair swept back, clutching a blue folder in his arms. He handed it over to the Welsers.

'The pieces of paper', Welser told the court, 'said the attached documents had been taken from the secret highly guarded annexe of the defence adviser to the British High Commission in Lagos, flown to Lisbon, from where it eventually reached Biafran circles in London.'

John Mathew was prosecuting. He was a heavyweight, having prosecuted notorious gangsters the Krays and now had the editor of a national newspaper in the dock.

'What was your immediate reaction on seeing it?'

'I was somewhat horrified. I told Brook-Shepherd it was possibly a forgery, but I would try to find out. I told him that if it were genuine it would be better if it were not published.'

Welser recalled how he had hurried back to his office, out of the way on the upper floors of Riverwalk House, to check. Brook-Shepherd was impatient and had phoned him several times that afternoon, demanding an answer. The document would be offered to other Sunday newspapers unless the *Telegraph* bought it by 5 pm.

By 6 pm, Welser was in a high-level meeting with some of the most senior diplomats around.

By 7 pm, Welser, sounding slightly distressed, finally phoned Brook-Shepherd to tell him the document was almost certainly a copy of genuine diplomatic material. It should not be published; doing so would, in his words, cause a 'rumpus'.[8]

By 8.30 pm, Brook-Shepherd was over at the Welsers' house in Hasker Street in what the couple saw as a damage limitation dinner exercise. Brook-Shepherd explained that his newspaper thought it was OK to publish on the grounds that copies were already in the hands of an MP.

Which MP?, Welser had asked.

Brook-Shepherd had declined to answer and said the paper would publish.

‘Be it on you’, Welser told the court he had replied, ‘it cannot be helped. I am very sorry.’

Welser was a key witness, with a lot resting on his testimony. Mathew’s opening speech had played up the importance of Wesler clearly and unambiguously warning that publication might breach the Official Secrets Act. But he was underwhelmed by Welser’s evidence so far. He threw a volley of softball questions to get something more out of him.

‘Did you detail any reasons as to why it should not be published?’

‘No’.

‘Was there anything more said in this telephone conversation?’

‘No’.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes, I think so.’

‘Why did you think it was wrong to publish the report?’

Before he could answer, a wrangle broke out among the legal teams as to the admissibility of the questions. The jury withdrew for thirty minutes as counsel debated how Wesler’s original police statement claimed he had warned specifically about the Official Secrets Act but that Welser had now seemingly forgotten this.

Mathew was an experienced professional and was growing frustrated with Welser. Deep down he was distinctly unimpressed with the whole case. ‘Bloody weak’, he thought to himself. ‘Had anyone asked me’, he later recalled, ‘I’d have tried to find a sufficient reason to advise no prosecution’ of any of the three defendants on trial.

When the jury returned, the barrister defending the *Sunday Telegraph*, Jeremy Hutchinson, stepped up for cross-examination. He had a reputation for being one of the best silks in the land, experienced in battle with the security services. He had already defended Christine Keeler, the young woman embroiled in the infamous Profumo sex and spy scandal, and the Soviet spy George Blake. He was now questioning another member of the secret state.

Under two and a half hours of questioning, Welser fumbled and stumbled. He was way out of his depth as a makeshift expert on obscure problems of classification.

Welser awkwardly agreed that a person involved in producing a government document could mark it ‘confidential’ if he thought it necessary. Welser then, even more awkwardly, agreed that facts which did not affect security, but which could be embarrassing might also be marked ‘confidential’. ‘It is no business of any official to try to allow the Government to be embarrassed. That is what we are working for.’[9]

‘Embarrassment and security are not really two different things’, Welser had blurted. Aitken watched on, hopes rising, knowing that this line of questioning was embarrassing the Crown’s lawyers.[10]

Hutchinson shrewdly worked the witness: ‘And they might be embarrassing because a minister in the Government had publicly said one thing and the facts showed another. Would you agree with me as far as the press is concerned, that they would have to be satisfied when asked not to publish that they were not being asked to suppress something merely because it could be embarrassing or inconvenient?’

The judge intervened. ‘That would be virtually censorship’.

Welser replied, ‘in this case it was a classified document which no-one was prepared to declassify’.

Hutchinson tried again. ‘Once facts are given to the Press they cease to be classified?’

Yes.

Hutchinson asked if Welser knew the phrase ‘unattributable leak’.

Yes.

‘This’, Hutchinson continued theatrically for the jury, ‘is when the Government leaks certain information which may have been classified for some purpose of their own.’

The judge intervened again. ‘Something that is going to be broadcast does not really deserve the title “confidential”.’

‘It depends on the timing’, Welser shot back.

The judge scowled. ‘For your experience at the Foreign Office, if a member of the British High Commission in Lagos considered, in his wisdom and responsibility, that he could release a document as such to Col Cairns [the source of the leak], who was not a member of the High Commission why should not somebody else, who is also not a member of the Commission, see it?’

‘I would expect Col Cairns to respect the classification of the document.’

‘Suppose Col Cairns in his wisdom and discretion showed the document to a very loyal subject of the realm who was himself particularly interested in that subject, what would you expect that person to do?’

‘To treat it as confidential’.

‘Supposing this same gentleman, in his wisdom and discretion, released the same document to a very trusted friend who is a potential MP, what do you expect the potential MP to do?’

‘The same thing’.

‘Supposing the very respected and potential MP shows it to a very respected literary agency, what is he to do? From your experience do you expect him not to release it?’

‘Being a literary agent, I would expect him to sell it.’

‘Where is this aspect of confidentially going to stop, if at all? In other words, when are ordinary people going to get to know about it?’

Welser stuck to his guns. ‘In the purest sense, only when it is declassified’.

James Comyn, barrister for Cairns, stepped up. ‘Would it be right to say that nowhere can we find in writing any rules about classification?’

‘Quite wrong’, Welser replied.

‘You say there are written rules?’

‘Yes. But they are probably classified in themselves’, Welser smirked uncomfortably. Loud and prolonged laughter broke out in court.

‘They are secret to me’, Comyn noted. ‘We can all end up here in an Alice in Wonderland situation. It might be suggested that when you scanned the Scott report over lunch you were breaking the Official Secrets Act?’

The smile faded from Welser’s face. ‘I did not break it at all.’

A few days later Brook-Shepherd took the stand himself and, under questioning from Hutchinson, threw Welser under the bus. He told the jury that Welser had operated in a purely private capacity and ‘had even an under-secretary telephoned and spoken on behalf of the Foreign Office, it would have put a totally different complexion on the matter. What we have had was the “old boy” unofficial network all the time.’ Brook-Shepherd continued: at no point did Welser ‘put on his bowler hat and brandish his

umbrella and say “I am telling you officially”.’ He claimed to have been surprised by Welser’s initial impression that this was a forgery.

Back in the office, Welser’s colleagues followed developments closely. They worried that Brook-Shepherd’s evidence conflicted with Welser’s and that the journalist was coming across far too reasonably.

In his summing up, the judge, whose sympathies clearly lay with the accused, practically told the jury to dismiss his evidence. ‘A Foreign Office official is saying to the jury this document ought not to have been published. This witness is not the judge. The jury are the judges.’[11]

All defendants were acquitted. Aitken and his barrister, Mathew, later agreed that the judge was hugely biased, others thought the whole trial had been politically motivated. The government had to pay costs. Roberts, the editor, turned himself into a champion against press censorship and for those who wanted to reform the Official Secrets Act. ‘It has not been funny’, he wrote in his own newspaper, for a ‘sixty-four-year-old editor to sit for nearly a month in the dock at the Central Criminal Court on a kitchen chair once occupied by one of the Kray brothers’. The Act should ‘never again be used as a back-door method of attempting to impose press censorship’.[12]

As for Welser, the senior propagandist had briefly stepped out of the shadows. His name—and that of his department—was now in the press. He had been partially exposed. And for what?

He had been quite happy to teach Fleet Street a lesson,[13] but perhaps Welser pondered at the irony as he made his way back home that night. He had given evidence to stop the publication of classified material, when his entire job involved the publication of classified material.

Welser might have hoped to have seen the end of courtroom dramas. It was not to be, for less than a month after his appearance in the witness box, he found himself drawn into proceedings at the Court of Appeal where a young historian sat, head in hands, having lost his libel case. Law lords did not hold back in their judgement: he was ‘grasping, conceited and foolish’, desperately courting controversy to generate sales.[14] His name was David Irving.

Welser had read with interest how Captain John Broome, a veteran of the Second World War, had sued Irving for libel over the book, *The Destruction of Convoy PQ17*. In 1942, Broome had commanded an escort

of naval ships to protect a convoy of thirty-eight heavily laden merchant vessels as it made its way on a dangerous voyage across Arctic seas—in perpetual summer daylight—to Russia. After receiving faulty intelligence, Broome was ordered to ‘scatter’. Then 153 seamen died as wolf packs of U-boats and droves of enemy planes picked off their isolated ships. Men were machine-gunned in the water. Those who survived later suffered frostbite, maiming them for life; others went mad.

Irving painted Broome as the villain—a man who had disobeyed orders, deliberately withdrawn the escorts, and had left the convoy to its fate. The jury had disagreed and awarded the captain £40,000 in damages. Irving was, according to the judge, ‘not altogether an attractive young man’.

‘I still believe what I wrote was true’, Irving hit back. He faced huge legal bills, and the publisher recalled all hardback copies. ‘My advice to any young author is never to write a book which says anything critical of the Royal Navy.’[15]

‘He doesn’t come very well out of it’, Rayner gossiped to Welser, ‘but it’s all publicity.’[16]

Irving had lost his appeal. The financial consequences were severe and his writings felt consistently anti-British; the combination was volatile enough to set Welser on edge. When the Soviet defence ministry announced plans to publish a Russian translation of Irving’s work, the accompanying press release bristled with provocation. It promised a historical study which exposed ‘the shameful policy of the men in charge of the British Admiralty who tried by every means to disorganise the delivery of war material from Britain to the Soviet Union’.[17]

Welser, naturally suspicious, couldn’t help but dwell on the announcement. ‘The Russian decision is curious’, he mused, rolling the thought over in his mind, ‘especially as they must know that it is likely to irritate the British public. It is also curious that the Russians will publish a book by an author who is alleged to have Fascist leanings, and who in the Court of Appeal was said to be “grasping, conceited and foolish”, and the whole book had been “outrageous and shocking”.’

Perhaps he was giving too much credit to Russian interest in British public opinion, but he had a theory. ‘One wonders whether this is not an attempt to assist Mr Irving in his known financial predicament. We know from secret sources that, following a payment into Court, prior to the

Appeal of a substantial sum, some £15,000, if I remember correctly, Mr Irving is in serious financial difficulties.'

He turned to MI5. 'What fruit has come from the Security Service's effort to watch Irving? Or have they not exerted themselves?'[18] His own sources told him of Irving receiving Nazi money. Welser thought it must be Russian. But he wanted intelligence on the case. Irving simply must—must—be a 'stooge' supported by some sort of cut out. He just had to prove it.[19]

Was Irving an agent of disinformation? Or was Welser's paranoia and confusion doing the disinformer's job for him?

Welser sprang into action, urging colleagues to execute a letter-writing campaign to the *Daily Telegraph* voicing surprise and disgust,[20] only for diplomats to swiftly stifle his enthusiasm: the Russians would see straight through letters to the *Telegraph* and would overcome any remaining shred of doubt about whether to publish.[21]

Kenneth Crook, the head of the IRD, was inevitably cautious. The department was under scrutiny, its margins for error dangerously slim, and Crook had no appetite for bold leaps without a solid footing. He pressed Welser to dig deeper, to coordinate with MI5 or MI6 and uncover whether Irving was being paid, 'either in convertible currency or by clandestine means'. And what were the connections, if any, between Irving and the Soviets?[22]

Crook was less of a true believer than Welser; he was a pragmatist, wary of seeing shadows where there were none. Falsely linking a young historian, even a controversial and conceited one, to the Soviets was a bold move and crying disinformation could do more harm than good. The Russians, he warned, might retaliate by drawing attention to books published in the West which had been denounced by the Soviets, such as Svetlana Stalin's memoirs—or worse, to those secretly sponsored by Western intelligence.

'I fear we may have to ask ourselves the old American question "Can you win a spitting match with a skunk?"'[23]

Welser was unmoved. 'There is no direct evidence' that Irving was a 'Russian disinformation agent', he acknowledged, but it so happened that his work was 'on the whole beneficial to the Russians'. Where Crook saw caution as a shield, Welser saw it as an impediment. In his mind, the

absence of evidence was no barrier to a response. His instinct, his default reaction, was simple and unrelenting: to act.[24]

He liked the idea of planting a story about how the sinking was actually the Russians' fault: evidence from an Special Operations Executive old hand suggested Russian laxity in cypher security was responsible for the Germans obtaining advance operational details of PQ17 in the first place. It all checked out with GCHQ and MI6.[25]

Crook blocked it, warning Welser's biases were getting the better of him. This old hand had 'sought to cash in on the present relevancy of the topic by blowing up a minimal amount of fact into a journalistic fantasy'. Welser suggested inspiring a parliamentary question instead, and then tipping off one or two journalists to report it. This one was blocked by Julian Bullard, on the East European and Soviet desk of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.[26]

Welser would not let it lie and was out to disrupt Irving—to bring down his career. Perhaps the combination of the historian's pro-Nazism, exploitation by Russia, and general obnoxiousness made it personal. He sent various clippings about Irving and the Russians to one of the more colourful characters in his secretive network.

Carlos Thompson was a retired Argentine actor of Swiss and German descent who had starred in 1950s Hollywood, typically playing the part of a European womanizer, including the composer Franz Liszt. He was now living in Malaga and spent his days refuting works by Irving and by his collaborator, the German playwright, Rolf Hochhuth.

'You have no idea how very much you both have been in my thoughts lately!', Thomspon gushed upon receipt of the press clippings. 'And that bloomin' [Post Office] strike made it impossible to [write] Hallo, love you, you love me too?'[27] Thompson was effusive. 'Here I am still, wondering what it used to be like, when I was a retired film-actor, writing novels atop my Swiss hill, until a child named Rolf [Hochhuth] came along and my life became his … Olive trees grow straight, compared with the twists of life's humour.'[28]

Thompson, who had once idolized Hochhuth, had been doing a lot of Welser's work independently and with the messianic vigour of the betrayed—and Welser was only too keen to support him. On one occasion, he had told Hans and Adelaide about a covert operation of his own in which he had

forged an introductory letter from Irving to the SS officer who had carried Hitler's dead body out of the bunker and burnt it, in the hopes of trying to prove that surviving Nazis were pulling Irving's strings. Neither Hans nor Adelaide, no strangers to an elaborate ploy, could make head or tail of it. It was all, in Hans's words, 'slightly crazy'.[29]

Under attack from the likes of Thompson, Hochhuth would lash out at what he saw as British disinformation against Irving.[30] In response, Welser was only too happy to assist Thompson's new life's work, anything to nobble Irving, and the feeling was mutual. 'You are großzügig', Thompson waxed, praising Welser's generosity in a combination of English and German. 'My gain.'[31]

Welser duly passed the personal letter straight on to Norman Reddaway and another colleague with links to MI6. These friendships were always more business than pleasure, underpinned by transactional camaraderie.[32]

The Russian edition of *PQ17* surfaced in June, the timing taking Welser by surprise. For a man so eager to bury it, he had not bothered to read the text—not the English version nor a translation of its Russian counterpart. Peter Roland, the IRD colleague who had survived his own brush with Soviet intelligence during the youth festival in Sofia, flicked through a copy of the original and found it underwhelming. Yes, it showed the allies in a poor light, but it spared no criticism of the Russians either. The Germans, by contrast, emerged as efficient, courageous, and humane—a portrayal that, to Roland's mind, raised as many questions as it answered. 'Could he be one of those people, authoritarian by nature, who can go from one political extreme to another without incurring noticeable traumas en route? Perhaps he finds the disciplined atmosphere of the GDR as congenial as he might once have found the thousand-year Reich?'[33]

Wesler and a colleague on the IRD Soviet Desk, Noel Marshall—who had not read it either—were unconvinced. 'The features of the work which emerged in the court case, and the light which they throw on the author, are only part of a more complex picture.'[34]

Roland then read the Russian version and spotted a long list of distortions and omissions of nearly every passage derogatory to the Russians. 'There is more than sufficient ammunition to embarrass the Russians here, I would have thought.'[35]

Conspiratorial as ever, Welser was still trying to follow the money. A friend of a friend whispered that the publisher had not seen a ruble for the Russian version—and Irving, it seemed, was unlikely to fare any better; the Russians were notoriously mean about payments to authors. Frustrated by dead ends, Welser quietly reached out to MI5 and MI6, again wondering if their secret sources might yield better results.[36]

In the end, the IRD went for grey, rather than black, propaganda. It was easier this way. Tommy Tucker, Welser's counterpart in the less sensitive editorial department, sent an unattributable briefing to the BBC, *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Times*, and elsewhere. It exposed Soviet exploitation of David Irving's work, highlighting censorship, omissions, and distortions. It was a precooked article for the lazy journalist, playing up Soviet readiness to rewrite history.[37]

At the heart of Welser's dogged pursual of Irving was a debate about what was and was not appropriate game. Was this disinformation? Or was this simply bad history? Where should the IRD draw the line? John Tyrer, a senior colleague, insisted that Irving was no Communist. He was 'unfortunately, a very able historian', albeit one who could not resist any opportunity to denigrate the wartime allies, especially Churchill, from a pro-Nazi position. 'Disinformation does not, I think, come into it'.[38]

Still, Tyrer thought Welser could have done more. 'The Russians were, and are, vulnerable to the charge that they have published a book by a fascist author.' Why haven't we exploited 'this aspect of the whole curious business? We might kill two birds with one stone by making the Russians look silly and embarrassing Irving who, whilst still pro-fascist is I think mildly ashamed of his early career as founder of the British National Movement and later as a member of Sir Oswald Moseley's Union Movement. This is fact; looking for Irving's Soviet connexions is a wild goose chase.'[39]

'We have missed a trick', Noel Marshall apologized.[40]

Welser was characteristically more bullish. 'We just have to agree to differ. Whatever D. Irving may have been or is, I will not, on present information, believe that he is not working in the Communist interest as well, consciously or not.'[41]

For all his personal animosity and paranoia about the Soviet hand, Welser's efforts failed. Irving, egotistical and unrepentant, continued to

publish increasingly inflammatory and ideologically driven books on Nazi Germany, culminating in Holocaust denial. Welser, who had personally fought Nazi propaganda during the Second World War, could only look on helplessly from the sidelines and have quiet words with publisher friends to scupper future serialization rights.

Still the cuts came. Norman Reddaway struggled with the question of what to do with what he called ‘elite irregulars’, like Welser and Rayner, with strange skills unsuited to normal diplomatic contracts.[42] Crook agreed that people of Rayner’s grade were already bumping against their pay ceilings or had broken through them. Pension expectations made it impossible to follow the old Leslie Sheridan route of simply hiring them as contractors or advisers.[43]

Across the Atlantic, counterparts in the United States Information Agency were impressed. ‘As we heard again in the recent Anglo-American talks’, one official told its director, ‘the British make a good thing out of their Information Research Department. While we can’t hope to duplicate their efforts, it does strike me that we could be doing more in the direction of inspiring articles by carefully calculated placement of certain “sanitized” classified documents with selected journalists around the world.’[44] The Director of the US Information Agency, keen to avoid turf wars, dismissed the suggestion outright. That sort of thing belonged to the CIA.[45]

What the Americans could not know was that the IRD itself was on borrowed time. Flexibility was the order of the day—a hollow promise wrapped in the language of modern management. The IRD would be nimble, agile, sharper, and all the other euphemisms for slow death.

For the likes of Welser, Rayner, and their team, it was survival now, as much as strategy. They hoped they could find salvation for their beleaguered department in the strangest of places: the troubles brewing in Northern Ireland presented an opportunity, a last-ditch gamble to justify their existence by countering Republican violence and helping to restore order to the streets. It was dangerous terrain—unforgiving, morally murky, and much closer to home than they would have liked. Yet the stakes were high, and they took the challenge knowing it would push them to their very limits.

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The Poisoned Chalice

John Rayner had first set off for Belfast on a damp afternoon back in October 1970—a far cry from his trip to the sun-drenched Caribbean Island of Bermuda the previous year. This was closer to home, yet in many ways even less familiar. It was fraught and it was unpredictable. Violence on the streets of the United Kingdom was anything but routine.

From the upper floors of Riverwalk House, he had followed the rising sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland with the exactitude of a man accustomed to briefings and dossiers, but this felt different. He had read about the riots and then the fighting in the summer of 1969, and about how the British army had deployed to the streets that August; how the official line was to restore order and keep the peace, but the reality was murkier—to the nationalist community they were occupiers in all but name.[1] He had known instantly that the information dimension would be paramount—although it was disquieting to plot it so close to home. Countering Nazism, Communism, even the occasional nationalist despot like Nasser and Sukarno, was familiar territory. But Belfast? Belfast was another beast entirely. Yet he packed his bags, again said his goodbyes to Miranda—and Dunlop—and adjusted his collar against the chill, wondering what, if anything, his little team could do to help.

The weather may have been ugly but there was to be no repeat of the frosty reception Rayner had received in Bermuda. This time, he had met all the top players on the British side: the Prime Minister, directors of information and intelligence, and the army's top brass. He also met at least one leading Republican figure, whom he described to Welser as someone influential in the Hills Road area.[2]

He listened carefully as one by one they complained about the IRA's superior propaganda work. Everyone on the British side agreed that some sort of counterpropaganda, over and above normal information work, needed to take place. Rayner sympathized but warned that the security and political considerations would make such delicate work considerably more difficult than elsewhere. Something could be done from Belfast, albeit under cover, and perhaps something else, though not a great deal, could be done from London.

Rayner agreed that the IRA was a subversive organization and a legitimate target for his brand of propaganda—although he warned against inadvertently building them up through overzealous smears. He was more concerned about extremist views emanating from wider Unionist and Republican circles. Where was the line between a legitimate—if unsavoury—view, and a view which had to be countered? More complicated still, what if the holder of that view was a member of parliament? James Chichester-Clark, the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, promptly vetoed any propaganda operations, however covert, against politicians.

Rayner frowned. Aside from moral and constitutional conundrums, other obvious problems included the risk that attacking either side would provide propaganda ammunition for the other and also the general lack of security in Belfast. One minister had cheerfully told Rayner how, in an extreme case, it might be possible for a secret to be kept for a week—but not more. If Rayner's team were to get involved, even discreetly, people would soon be asking awkward questions, and whatever role they held would quickly be embellished in the nearby messes and pubs. Even rumours of IRD activity would be a propaganda own goal.[3]

Still, the precarious future of the IRD focused his mind. Salvation, if it existed at all, perhaps lay in the violent streets of Ulster. It would be difficult—perhaps impossible—but Rayner was an experienced propagandist, confident, and up for the challenge. He recommended sending an IRD man to Belfast—but insisted that he would have to be under 'deep cover'. Despite the hideous complications, Rayner drew up a classic IRD brief which suddenly felt familiar yet unfamiliar, standard yet unsettling: in Northern Ireland, the IRD aimed first to persuade the moderate population of the uselessness of violence; second to expose and isolate extremists; and third to exploit any disagreements and rivalries,

which should have been an open goal given the competing factions within the IRA.[4] This was the plan, anyway.

Six months later, Rayner returned to Belfast. By now the first British soldiers had been killed and unrest was mounting in response to the army's deployment. Chichester-Clark had declared war on the Provisionals. Major General Anthony Farrar-Hockley, Commander Land Forces, just wanted somebody from the IRD to improve the image of British soldiers—and quickly. Himself the son of a journalist, Farrar-Hockley vented to Rayner about the increasing number of stories appearing in Belfast and Irish papers which were exaggerated, tendentious, and, in some cases, fabricated. It amounted, he moaned conspiratorially, to what appeared to be a deliberate campaign of misrepresentation.

Farrar-Hockley wanted action. Could Rayner not come up with an article exposing these lies? If so, Farrar-Hockley could find a way of getting it into the *Belfast Telegraph* at the very least.

Howard Smith, Whitehall's man on the spot and a future head of MI5, suggested planting an article in the *Irish Times*—something suitably subtle about how journalists' misrepresentation was counterproductive to the Irish cause.

Rayner was perhaps the most experienced black propagandist in the country and knew the rules of the game far better than his two more senior colleagues. 'The first suggestion would not be an easy one to carry out,' he advised. 'Apart from anything else there was the standard rule that you do not give further currency to fabrications by directly denying them. There is also the consideration that you do not want to build up the enemy by suggesting that he has a large and efficient propaganda organisation.' Still, he promised to do his best.[5]

Rayner had just the man in mind.

Hugh Mooney was intrigued by an advert in the press: 'specialist writer under 50'. It was just before Christmas 1968, long before Rayner's flight to Belfast, and for the past year or so Mooney had been working for the BBC's world service in Bush House—the same building, coincidentally, where Hans Welser had had a wartime office.[6] The 32-year-old journalist, fluent in Italian and French, applied for the mysterious position and, shortly afterwards, found himself the newest recruit in Rayner's unit.[7]

After graduating from Trinity College Dublin in 1963, Mooney had become a sub-editor for the *Irish Times* before moving to the *Egyptian Gazette*, the English-language daily newspaper in Cairo, whilst also racking up bylines in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. He had first come to Adelaide Welser's attention when, in December 1965, he landed a position as Middle East Correspondent for the Regional News Services (Mid-East) Limited—covertly controlled by the British. From Beirut, he had covered the Yemeni civil war, Egyptian subversion in Aden, and the war between Israel and neighbouring Arab states—and somehow found time to get married.[8]

On 1 April 1969, Mooney had arrived at Riverwalk House with little fanfare. Bearded and bespectacled, he looked more like a geography teacher than a propagandist and spent the first few weeks pushing paper across the Indonesia desk, his role deliberately mundane while his security clearance made its way slowly through the system. He had then moved to Rayner's unit, where the real work began. He drafted articles to order, supposedly neutral, yet based on classified intelligence material 'wrapped up', as he later put it, 'in a form suitable for publication'. His first proper assignment was a trip to Bermuda in 1970, following his boss's footsteps advising on countering Black Power propaganda.[9]

Now firmly embedded in the team, Mooney became the obvious choice to lead the propaganda fight in Northern Ireland. He was, after all, a journalist, with Irish contacts and relatives, with experience reporting on political violence, with some experience countering anti-British propaganda, and even of writing black articles. He had also recently attended the military's introductory psyops course, even if it was poorly regarded by the IRD. Combined with an outgoing and garrulous personality, Hugh Mooney was the perfect fit for Belfast.

In 1971, Rayner despatched Mooney north and south of the border to scope out the types of operations which might be mounted. In Dublin, Mooney became convinced that 'the Government of the Irish Republic had financed pro-republican propaganda'.[10] He was confident that he could counter it immediately through the Dublin press, passing on material—absolutely accurate material, he insisted—to journalists. It probably helped that the new ambassador, John Peck, was himself a one-time head of the IRD and that MI6 had a man on the ground operating under cover as an information officer forging contacts with journalists.[11]

In Belfast, he found eagerness for action snuffed out by a suffocating bureaucratic tension between military and civilian authorities, with each petty department jealously guarding its own fiefdom.[12]

Mooney was junior but astute enough to know the particular difficulties of operating in Northern Ireland and, despite being a relatively new recruit, could not have failed to pick up on the nasty and nervous atmosphere inside the IRD. He would later claim that the department saw Northern Ireland as a poisoned chalice: it promised possible salvation but would probably end in disaster.[13]

'It seemed to us', he complained, 'that you could not to anything right, you could not ever please everybody as you could perhaps in an embassy, people knew exactly what you were doing, what you had to do.'[14] Cliff Hill, deputy head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's neighbouring Guidance and Information Policy Department, tried to offer reassurance. Personnel files, he explained, would carry a note making it clear that people's careers should not be blighted by anything done in Northern Ireland. It was a thankless posting, and Mooney, who would increasingly develop a gung-ho attitude, appreciated the charity.[15]

'I am not myself fully convinced of the desirability of stimulating publicity designed to discredit the IRA', said Ken Crook, the head of department, sharing the feeling of ominousness. He confided in Welser that he did not really want anyone stationed out there at all. Was publicity for the troops not the army's job? And could the wider department not just influence moderate opinion from London as and when required? 'But', he sighed, 'if this is laid as a requirement on IRD, we must presumably, unless we can show that it is not *feasible*, accept it.'[16]

Welser was more worried about the impact of cuts. 'We cannot continue to spare people such as Mr Mooney or Mr Rayner off on fire brigade work without the strain telling here.' He had told Crook that 'there is also the very real security problem: we cannot afford mistakes but if we go on as we have had to do of late we will be making them because of lack of staff'.[17] This was certainly the case in the goldfish bowl of Belfast.

Still, Welser was naturally more sympathetic about this activity and, in the face of swingeing cuts, bullishly talked it up. He told the Cabinet Office in summer 1971 that Mooney was up and running, fulfilling the classic brief developed earlier by Rayner—albeit technically seconded to the Home

Office, which had responsibility for Northern Ireland.[18] Crook was happy enough; ‘We’re not sending you there to pull the Army’s chestnuts out of the fire,’ Mooney was told.[19]

In the background, the IRD remained a tumultuous place as restructuring continued apace. Mooney was better off out of it.

Welser would lose fourteen members of staff: a brutal cut of half of his team. He would head a new Special Activities Section. Hubert Kós, his protégé thirteen years his junior, would be second in command overseeing eight production specialists and four clerical staff. The Welsers had developed an almost parental relationship with Kós, an eccentric, upright, devout Catholic of Hungarian blood. Although self-deprecating, especially around those who had served in the early IRD, he liked to portray an air of aristocracy, and there was certainly a touch of a Hungarian count about him or perhaps that of a military officer. Tall and broad, as if straight out of a P. G. Wodehouse novel, Kós sported a bowler hat, an umbrella, and a visceral hatred of Communism. He tried to out-British the British. The punctilious Welser could perhaps relate.

Dunlop was still there of course; as were Hugh Mooney, voluble as ever, and Ronnie Preston, the SOE operative turned journalist and now soon to inherit a baronetcy. Enid Hoghton and Joy Aston stayed on, both having served for at least the best part of a decade. Controlled press agencies would be wound down, but otherwise Welser was expected to carry on as before and take on a more formal role in countering ‘disinformation’.[20]

One name was missing. John Rayner was gone.

Now in his early sixties, Rayner was an obvious choice to be retired off into quiet irrelevance, to a life of society dinner parties with poets and writers alongside his long-suffering wife, Miranda, and sometimes his second wife, Joan. He would still see Dunlop too, of course: she would remain more than just a connection to the world he would leave behind. He had a reputation for being a touch unserious, a hard-drinking concupiscent figure of fun. With his childish wordplay and affected Elizabethan calligraphy, people sometimes sniggered behind his back. He was charming company, but he and Welser had never entirely got on; the straight-talking Austrian did not suffer fools gladly—and Rayner could play the fool. Welser was always more likely to choose the younger, sharper Kós to help him lead the new team.

Still, Rayner's retirement, for all its inevitability, marked the loss of something irreplaceable: experience and an encyclopedic knowledge of black propaganda in war and peace. It was cruelly ironic in a way. The IRD was supposed to operate as a rump Political Warfare Executive in which Rayner himself had once served. But the world, and Rayner, had moved on.

Johnny Kanitz, Marie Routh, and Ena Bailey, all black propaganda stalwarts, all vastly experienced conjurers and great deceivers, followed Rayner out of the door. So too did George Wye, the one-time office boy who had organized many a print job.[21] Ann Elwell retired in 1971, joining her MI5 husband in their large house in the Buckinghamshire countryside.[22] Shortly afterwards, Ken Crook, the kindly, if wet, father figure who had reluctantly managed the redundancies, was shipped off to the sunshine of the Cayman Islands to become governor.

Careers were dislocated or ended; expertise lost. Tommy Tucker knew the department needed to be trimmed but later lamented how information work was treated as a marginal activity to be turned on or off like a factory production line. 'You can't stop it and start again three months later where you left off', he complained. The punishing cuts were the beginning of the end.[23] It was, in the words of one IRD contact, 'an administrative massacre'.[24]

Norman Reddaway, now senior management, unsurprisingly survived all of the chaos.

Despite the turmoil in London, Hugh Mooney had quickly found his feet in Belfast. He may have been technically seconded, but he kept in close contact with Welser in what would swiftly become the biggest challenge of his short career.

Mooney very quickly grew frustrated by the poor state of the information sphere. He winced as army spokesmen struggled to discuss basic facts without being dragged, blustering and stuttering, into political questioning by what he saw as performative journalists intent on putting across IRA lines rather than eliciting information.[25] He took a deep breath and got to work, quickly developing a reputation for pushing the boundaries and even acting recklessly. He allowed himself to be photographed firing a semi-automatic pistol, presumably under the tenuous justification that he wanted to familiarize himself with various weapons used in the conflict.[26]

Mooney's early activity included helping the army to use information on one faction of the IRA to incriminate the other. 'Army PR', he reported back, 'now loses few opportunities to widen the split between the two main factions of the IRA and to alienate them from the civil population.' And he smiled when he read local press coverage about connections between the IRA and Communism, knowing that much of this was playback of material that his own department had already managed to print abroad. He then worked with contacts at the *Belfast Telegraph* to keep up the pressure by exposing Communist links of key IRA members. His pessimism quickly gave way to enthusiasm. 'There is tremendous scope for much more of this work.'[27]

'I hold frequent discussions', Mooney proudly told Welser, 'with senior MoD PR officers on how to react to events so as to present the army in the best possible light and damage the IRA.' This was right up Welser's street.

> For example, recently the IRA have started to use heavier weapons, including bazookas. We played down the significance of the weapons, stressing that they were obsolete. We were helped by the fact that the bazooka shells did not explode, because the safety cap was not removed. This latter fact was concealed. Instead, a dummy army order was prepared which said such shells should be tested electrically. This would have the effect of exploding the shell in the tester's hands. Clearance is being sought for this scheme.[28]

Another scheme exposed IRA use of dum-dums, bullets which expanded upon impact creating a bigger wound. Mooney eagerly told Welser how 'when two young terrorists were killed whilst making a bomb, the story was put around that gelignite reacts to changes in temperature. We pointed out that the explosion took place on the coldest night of the year. Subsequently, there were some very large explosions against soft targets, which led army experts to believe that the terrorists were getting rid of suspected stocks of gelignite.'[29]

'The darker side has not been neglected', Mooney added ominously. But, just as Rayner had predicted, he was finding it difficult. First and foremost, he struggled to actually deliver any of the products. Posters and leaflets had to be distributed by soldiers, but, in the fraught yet intimate streets of Belfast, this was too risky. He later claimed that the army psychological operations team had dressed Northern Irish servicemen in Beatles wigs to distribute leaflets; the psyops lead insisted that he had only used the Beatles wigs on one graffiti operation when undercover soldiers

spray-painted ‘give peace a chance’ somewhere in Belfast, and that the operation was quickly aborted when a police patrol turned up.[30]

In September 1971, Mooney saw some success in distributing posters replaying damaging quotes by one Provisional IRA leader and some leaflets portraying the Official IRA as anti-Catholic. But he had no idea what effect they may have had, later insisting that the army was in fact responsible, and it was all rather ‘ill-conceived and ineffectual’ regardless.[31]

Mooney hoped that sending material by post, the classic Rayner method, would present fewer problems than using undercover soldiers to do so by hand. Unfortunately, in a sad indictment of his budget, he could not afford to do it at the scale required.[32] The army did, however, coordinate letters sent to various newspapers—perhaps extending to the UK mainland.[33] And he did manage a small operation involving a Mass card, a greeting card given to let someone know that they, or a loved one, will be prayed for at Mass. This particular card celebrated a man who was hijacked from a Belfast hospital and it was sent to his relatives, friends, both wings of the IRA, and some newspapers, presumably in an attempt to expose his terrorist connections and unsettle his peers. It was not enough though, and Mooney complained about how the absence of suitably secure premises for printing and recording hampered operations.[34]

Despite the setbacks, Mooney was growing into his role. He asked for his own office, with his name on the door, moaning to Welser how sharing with the army’s psyops specialist had cast a cloud over his activities. He asked to be the channel for considering all covert special political action projects. And he also pressed for additional staff, including someone with bookkeeping experience to manage an operational fund.[35]

Mooney provided discreet briefings designed to widen the split in the IRA and alienate the ordinary local residents from the terrorists. He outlined an example to Wesler:

> The Official IRA is getting increasingly concerned at the success of Provisional violence. The Officials are therefore seriously considering assassinating the dozen or so leading Provisionals in Belfast. The line taken is that the Officials will not allow a few fanatics to take over Ulster, thus thwarting the Officials’ own plans for a communist takeover of democratic institutions and a working economy. Implanted in the article will be an observation that the Provisional leaders are getting very young people to do the dirty work and are running no risks themselves.[36]

‘Another line I am stressing’, Mooney continued, ‘is that the violence is sickening ordinary people, who are reporting IRA members to the authorities.’ He needed to do something to counter the disastrous publicity surrounding the mass arrest of people without trial—many of whom were entirely innocent. ‘To help justify internment and boost army intelligence, I am suggesting that some of the people released are leading the authorities to other IRA members, implying that the Provisionals are betraying the Officials and *vice versa*.’[37] It was cunning; it was devious; Welser would have smiled.

It made no noticeable impact.

Mooney briefed Welser on one final scheme under way. ‘On the political side, I have, as you know, had some success with promoting the Petition for Sanity, which now has more than 20,000 signatures and plans to hold peaceful demonstrations.’[38] The petition—a genuine one—had been launched by the New Ulster Movement, a local organization supporting moderate and non-sectarian policies. The petition invited people to register their determination to work for community reconciliation, and the Movement’s chairman was absolutely thrilled when some 27,000 people had signed up within just three weeks. ‘Once again’, he waxed to supporters, we have ‘shown that the potential for reconciliation and cooperation in Ulster is there to be tapped and exploited’.[39]

From the shadows, Mooney nodded along in satisfaction for he had quietly tapped and exploited it himself. ‘The petition’, he boasted to Welser, ‘has allowed many opportunities to put across the lines that the extremists cannot possibly be in the majority. It is a valuable exercise if only it shows many moderates that they are not alone. Until now the extremists have held the limelight with a mixture of bluff, blackmail and intimidation, which has cowed the majority’.[40]

This type of activity formed Mooney’s primary role: discreetly promoting certain causes combined with covertly influencing media coverage of the conflict to widen splits, discredit terrorists, and mobilize the moderate majority. It was a work which demanded finesse and a certain moral elasticity—a role Mooney played with growing confidence, even a touch of flair.

Yet back in London, his home department was in turmoil. Rayner was gone, budgets were slashed, and Welser, dogged but diminished, was

missing Mooney. His absence away on the Irish assignment only tightened the strain on an already depleted team. For all Welser's bullishness, the thought must have crossed his mind that this posting might yet become a poisoned chalice for Mooney, and, by extension, for them all.

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23

All Eyes on Ulster

Hugh Mooney sat hunched in his shared office, staring at grainy footage of Belfast and Derry. The streets were alive with chaos—riots, barricades, boots pounding the pavements—and Mooney watched it all with an experienced eye, hunting for an angle.

He was far from alone; on the other side of Europe, Soviet spies watched carefully too, their eyes trained on the same unrest, their instincts no less sharp, hunting for an angle of their own which they could spin and package for a hungry global audience.

At the end of 1971, a journalist from the Novosti Press Agency telephoned a Foreign and Commonwealth Office official to ask about recent reports of Soviet support for Irish Republicanism, some of which had been stirred by Hugh Mooney himself.

'Are you acquainted with what is being said by the British press on this subject?'

'Yes', replied the official.

'Are there many of their agents in Northern Ireland?'

'They go there for a fixed time. The largest group of Russian agents went to Belfast under the semblance of a selected Russian football team', the British official answered. 'It is possible that there were among them genuine football players. But the team was mostly made up of agents. I have an impression of the presence of other Russian agents.' He dropped a bombshell. 'I am afraid that the personality of Rev. Paisley conceals also a Russian agent. Does this startle you?' Look a little more closely: 'Whatever the Reverend says pours oil on the fire. Why?'

The journalist ignored this revelation that Ian Paisley, a senior Unionist politician, was a suspected Soviet asset.

‘How did Soviet agents succeed in sowing discord in Northern Ireland?’, the journalist asked.

‘By brainwashing.’

The journalist pushed further. ‘Couldn’t you give me more details?’

‘With pleasure’, the British official answered, before explaining how Soviet agents had planted progressive ideas among the backwards Northern Irish people, including enlightening them about the right to vote. ‘Just tell me: would they have been able to stumble upon this very idea for their right, had it not been inculcated upon them by Soviet agents?’

‘In other words’, the journalist pressed, ‘you are quite sure that had it not been for the aid of Soviet agents, the Irish would have never uncovered this?’

‘Of course not’, came the reply. Another bombshell. ‘But we were caught unawares and this is the result. A movement for civil rights, demonstrations and marches of protests. We have been forced to take certain measures. We have dispatched some forces. We have started to escalate, after the pattern of our allies. First tear-gas; then rubber bullets, then real bullets. We have wiped off many quarters in Belfast. At present we are preparing fresh operations.’

The interviewer thanked the official and then reached for his final—gotcha—question. ‘If Soviet agents were the cause of all that happened in Northern Ireland, who was the cause in 1916 of the national Irish uprising against British domination? Soviet Russia had not come into being then, but the uprising had set a record for the beginning of a movement that led to the establishment of an independent Irish state, which is the Republic of Ireland.’

There was a long pause.

‘We really know nothing about this.’ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office official replied. ‘Do you by any chance know?’[1]

The conversation of course never happened. There was no Foreign and Commonwealth Office official, no accusation of Ian Paisley being a Soviet spy, no admission of suppressing Catholics’ right to vote. However, the Soviet propagandists who had invented it relayed the fictitious transcript across the Middle East, where it was picked up by Peter Joy in Beirut.

Clearly the Soviets were trying to expose British violence; drive a wedge between Britain and the region, discrediting Britain in the process; and undermine Mooney's claims of Soviet involvement. It felt familiar, if ridiculously over the top.

Welser shrugged. 'I doubt that anyone will use such a blatant piece of propaganda', he reassured his new boss, Tom Barker. There was no need to do anything. It was, if anything, positive, he insisted. His and Mooney's stories of Communist involvement in Ireland had clearly hit a nerve.[2]

'Yes', Barker smiled. 'It's always nice to know what has stung.'[3]

Welser was experienced enough to know that propaganda was a competitive game with multiple players and many more audiences. He may have laughed off the latest Soviet attempt to discredit London over Northern Ireland, but the real threat, the one that kept him awake at night, came from somewhere worryingly familiar.

In early December 1971, Welser learnt that the Irish government had signed a contract with Markpress, a Geneva-based public relations agency notorious in his circles for having handled the account of the former Biafran government in the Nigerian civil war. Now Dublin was paying them to provide public relations services abroad.[4] Markpress had a reputation, according to nervous diplomats, for exaggerating and distorting facts; they hoped that this meant it lacked credibility amongst journalists but still asked colleagues to keep an eye out for material.[5]

'It would appear that Markpress certainly mean business', Welser realized with some foreboding.[6]

Markpress promised the Irish government that it could generate favourable coverage of the conflict by using tactics straight out of the Welser playbook. '"Planted" stories', its salesmen explained to Dublin, 'are those which have been fully prepared, documented and which are then made available to a reliable journalist, who is given carte blanche to place it with his own publication or, as in the case of news agencies, with his network. In these instances, Markpress is not identified with the news feature in any way; it becomes the property of the journalist.'[7] It was little wonder that Welser felt nervous; Markpress was playing him at his own game.

Markpress promised to 'assist in outmoding the image of Irishmen so frequently portrayed on the stage as comical, shiftless, sometimes hard-

drinking but lovable characters'. Its writers were not afraid of a hard truth and, perhaps awkwardly, offered to help the Irish government escape what they called a 'heavy degree of self-absorption'. Every country has history of oppression and injustice in some form, its advisers claimed: 'Ireland, however, to an outsider gives the impression of being a prisoner of its past to an excessive degree. It is Ireland's very promising future which should be given all this thought and energy.'[8]

Within weeks of Markpress becoming involved, a propaganda mystery began to unfold which left even Welser stumped. This 'Ulster Guide for Tourists' was a peculiar booklet, surfacing around Christmas 1971, that seemingly showcased the charm and modernity of Northern Ireland. Its pleasant imagery—complete with tranquil riversides, ancient castles, vibrant community scenes, and modern infrastructure—offered a compelling vision of peace and progress. The Queen's portrait smiled inside.

Tourists need not worry about violence: the British army was in the midst of what the booklet's authors called 'the heroic trouble' to bring peace. Reassuring photos followed. A stern soldier in riot gear, with baton poised to strike—'British soldier upholds law and order in Northern Ireland.' Three soldiers smothered in helmets and visors dragging an unarmed and bloodied man off the street—'a dangerous Catholic troublemaker is taken into custody'. A soldier waving his gun in the face of an unarmed middle-aged man—'Member of Parliament Ivan Cooper being arrested by the military in Londonderry because [*sic*] his inflammatory propaganda'. An armed soldier standing in the middle of the street surrounded by onlookers—'British troops quickly move in to control a crowd of subversive Irish Catholics.' And so it went on. There was no need to be afraid. Visit Ulster.[9]

Heroic soldiers. Subversive Catholic troublemakers. Politicians arrested at gunpoint. It may have been professionally produced, but Welser sensed something strange about this supposedly official tourism booklet.

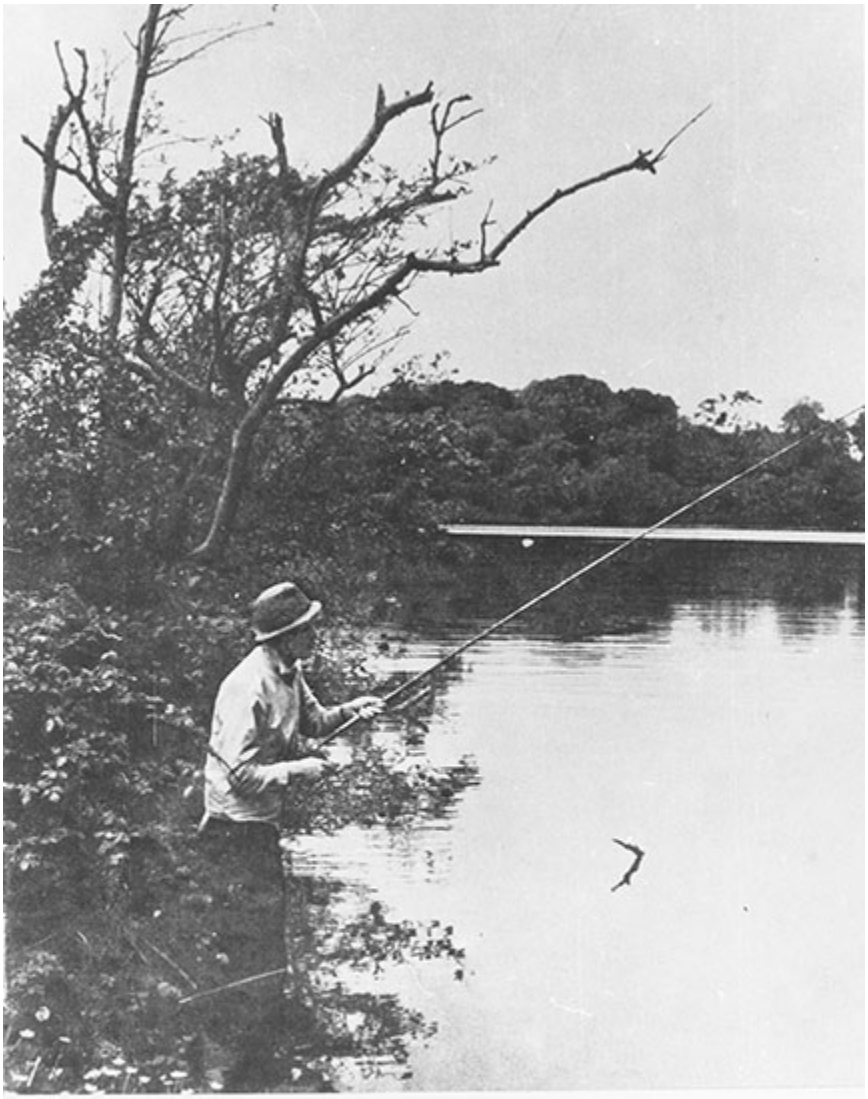
Soviet and Swiss eyes, among others, were on Ulster in the hopes of generating global publicity unfavourable to the British. This particular booklet had a strange journey, seemingly targeting the Commonwealth. It had first surfaced in Australia, then Canada, and shortly afterwards New

Zealand where somebody had posted copies to various newspapers with a return address of the British Tourism Association in London.[10]

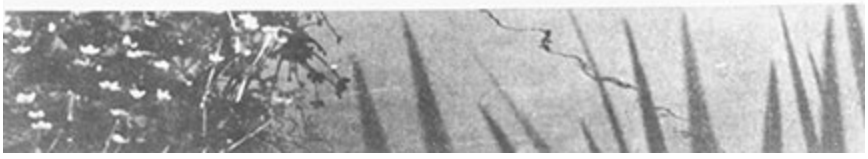
With local officials wanting guidance about how to respond, Mooney telephoned the print company in Belfast. As expected, they had no idea what he was talking about. They did offer one small clue though: whoever had forged it had lifted the imprint and reference number from one of their earlier leaflets for added authenticity.[11]

Mooney's first instinct was to leak it to the press, but Welser was unsure. 'This is a sophisticated job, for various technical reasons which I need not go into, and it may well be that the Communists, the East German forgery factory in East Berlin, or the underground press here, has had a hand in this.'[12] Could it be the Soviets? The IRA? Markpress even?

As Welser slowly worked through his list of suspects to determine the provenance, newspapers in Canada began publishing it. Alarmingly, some journalists seemed to have taken it at face value and began criticizing the British government.[13]



ULSTER GUIDE FOR TOURISTS



Member of Parliament Ivan Cooper being arrested by the military in Londonderry because his inflammatory propaganda

Figure 8 and 9. 'Ulster Guide for Tourists', attached to Dunlop to Duff (OP35/6/71), 18 Feb. 72, FCO 168/4596, The National Archives, UK.

Hubert Kós, now Welser's number two, sprang into action, implementing the forgery response protocol developed by Welser and Leslie Sheridan a decade earlier.[14] It may have been professionally executed, but he was unimpressed by the content. How could Canadian newspapers be

taken in by this? It was nothing more, he sniffed, than a ‘clumsy attempt to blacken the Army’s image and to discredit HMG policy as partisan’.[15]

As Kós continued his investigations, more newspapers ran with the story. The British high commission in Wellington publicly denounced the booklet as ‘completely spurious and denied any involvement’. The local representative of the British tourist authority claimed there was no such thing as the Northern Ireland Information Service anyway. This was not true—and would hardly have helped Welser, Kós, and Mooney’s cause if the forgery reached the UK. Somebody else claimed that the printing firm did not appear in any phone directory. This was also not true; Mooney had been in touch with them.[16] Drawing attention to the forgery was bad enough; spreading misinformation as part of the denial was worse.

Anxious diplomats demanded more clues to identify the culprit. Who had sent the envelopes? Could recipients hunt through bins to find them?[17] They received one from Canberra for forensic analysis. It had been posted from Djakarta.[18] It yielded little satisfaction. ‘In the view of the experts’, Kós observed, ‘this is a fairly sophisticated forgery, and has been produced by someone with good resources.’[19] It was all very vague and did little to narrow the list of suspects.

The investigation stalled where bureaucracy often did, over the absurd minutiae. MI6’s so-called ‘paper contact’ was indisposed on sick leave. Time dragged before MI6 eventually delivered its verdict: the forgery bore scant resemblance to known KGB material, though they could rule out British or Scandinavian paper.[20] Neither could MI6 identify the source of the staples, of all things: mundane yet impenetrable.[21] Welser sat in silence, his brow furrowed.

As Welser, Kós, and Mooney burrowed into staples and pontificated over paper, events in Derry suddenly raised the stakes higher and sent all sides—the Brits, the Russians, the Swiss and Irish—into overdrive.

On Sunday 30 January 1972, a large march made its way through the Bogside area of Derry protesting against internment without trial. It was an illegal march and, following prolonged skirmishes, British paratroopers moved in to arrest protesters, beating them and chasing them through the streets in armoured cars. Two people were knocked down. Soldiers began to open fire shortly after 4 pm, shooting into the crowd. At least fifteen demonstrators were injured; thirteen were shot dead. Many of the victims

were trying to flee; others were helping the wounded. Many more sustained injuries from batons and rubber bullets. It was devastating—first and foremost a human tragedy—and, following the disastrous internment policy, it was also another huge propaganda own goal for the British, soon known around the world as Bloody Sunday.

The killings led to an increase in support for Irish nationalism and would remain an acute source of controversy for decades to come, subject to competing accounts of how events unfolded. The British needed to get ahead of the game.

Hugh Mooney sat in a drab army office in Lisburn, manning the phone. The first call came from the army's PR branch: there had been some shooting on the march. He rose at once, hurrying up to the operations room in search of clarity. Journalists were complaining, their frustrations palpable at the lack of information coming from the army. Mooney agreed to put someone up for a local BBC breakfast radio show to give its side of events: 'a last-minute, improvised, damage-limitation exercise', he insisted. No plan was in place because the violence had not been foreseen.[22]

Neither Mooney nor the army had spread false information as part of their plans to manage the march, with the exception of a possible rumour that the army might invade the Creggan area of Derry on 30 January.[23] He did, however, try to shape the narrative afterwards. In addition to arranging interviews, he wrote an anonymous critique of a stinging article by the *Sunday Times* on Bloody Sunday, accusing the investigative journalists of bias and errors—especially when it came to claims that the soldiers fired on the IRA first.[24] He, or more likely a colleague on the IRD's editorial team back in London, also spread unattributable briefings on IRA tactics to journalists. Briefings made no mention of Bloody Sunday but did point out how the IRA used crowds as cover increasing the risk of civilian casualties. The implication was obvious.[25]

Mooney later invited a *Daily Telegraph* journalist, Peter Utley, to write a book about both the killings and the initial tribunal, which was widely perceived as a whitewash after concluding that the soldiers had been fired on first. The more publicity given to the army's case the better, he thought; Welser and Barker were fully on board, although discreet briefings for the book came from the military, not the IRD. It came out as *Lessons of Ulster* in 1975, emphasizing that IRA gunmen had fired on soldiers.[26]

Meanwhile, the IRA of course launched propaganda of its own: the Brits were locking people up without trial; torture and brutality were rife; and the British state was the terrorist, not the rebels. Bloody Sunday provided huge impetus for the state violence theme, although they defined it widely to include not only military action but, according to one Catholic priest, the 'creation of unemployment'.[27]

And Markpress was busy on behalf of the Irish government. In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, the agency issued material for use by foreign correspondents in Geneva attacking British paratroopers for their part in what it called the 'Derry massacre'. Someone in Welser's team winced and drew an exclamation mark next to the word 'massacre'. Another Markpress briefing provocatively framed it as murder.[28]

Welser knew exactly what Markpress was up to; after all, he had made a career out of laundering provocative material through the Central European press. Although generally underwhelmed by Markpress, and characteristically dismissive of its tradecraft, he was worried enough to do some digging.[29] He put feelers out amongst his own contacts in the Swiss press.[30] The agency, it turned out, was owned by a California-based parent company, and Welser, ever suspicious, thought there may be an Irish American connection designed to attack British policy, especially given that Markpress was offering big discounts below commercial rates. Paranoia was getting the better of him; American intelligence reassured him that this was not the case.[31]

Shortly afterwards a story appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* smearing both Markpress and the Irish Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, who had hired them: 'Lynch pays for more propaganda'. It highlighted the company's 'controversial role' in Biafra, the provocative nature of its Bloody Sunday reporting, how coverage was not properly attributable, and, intriguingly, how it had a man—with a secret identity—working in Washington. Welser kept a cutting; after all, the hit job was his handiwork.[32] Other stories soon emerged about how Markpress was suffering financial difficulties, was on the verge of bankruptcy even. Welser lapped them up, still looking down his nose at the rival propagandists, until the Irish eventually cancelled the contract a year later.[33]

As Welser took on Markpress, Mooney and Dunlop returned to the mysterious Ulster pamphlet with a renewed sense of urgency. There was

something nagging away at Mooney. He reread one of the captions: ‘Member of Parliament Ivan Cooper being arrested by the military in Londonderry because [*sic*] his inflammatory propaganda.’ Why had the authors, so meticulous elsewhere, dropped the word ‘of’? ‘Any significance?’, he asked Dunlop.[34] He had also noticed that one picture showed a policeman carrying tear gas but the caption referred to the army. ‘A deliberate mistake or ignorance? No Irishman would have made it.’[35]

Dunlop peered over her steel-rimmed, half-moon glasses. We ‘were also puzzled by the description of the policeman in a gas mask as a “member of HM’s army”. It could be that the authors liked the idea of using this rather terrifying photograph and assumed that the recipients would not be able to distinguish between a soldier and a policeman.’[36]

MI6 examined every page, ink, and mark, hoping it would give up its secrets. Despite using microscopes, chemical tests, bouncing different lights at different angles off the samples in the lab, and comparison with an ever-growing database, MI6’s forensic paper analyst still could not identify the origin of the paper used. They had thought it might have come from Yugoslavia but now were less sure.[37]

The provenance—so key in forgery hunting—remained a mystery. Welser did not like to be beaten.

After the debacles of internment and Bloody Sunday, Welser and Mooney feared they were losing the propaganda war. And this feeling went right to the very top of government.

Ted Heath, the Conservative Prime Minister, was a firm believer in the power of intelligence. He thought that secret statecraft could play an invaluable role in his growing battle with domestic enemies, whether industrial subversion or, in this case, political violence in Northern Ireland.[38] He demanded a propaganda counterattack against the IRA; he wanted Northern Ireland flooded with staff experienced in psychological warfare. He wanted them not only to refute IRA allegations, but to thoroughly discredit both wings of the IRA. This would involve, in the words of his principal private secretary, ‘using money freely’ to gain information, win friends, and influence people. Welser would have rubbed his hands with glee, for such instructions looked very much like a licence to influence and bribe, handed down from Number 10 itself.[39] With his department under pressure, the timing could not have been better.

Amid the swirl of enthusiasm, Stewart Crawford, a senior diplomat, floated a proposition of his own. It was high time, he said, for an operation exposing IRA disinformation techniques in the press.[40] This time the professionals winced; support from above was one thing; interference from amateurs in what they considered a fine art something else entirely. With a practised patience, they explained the problems of labelling it disinformation, a specific activity associated with the Soviets. 'The danger in publicising what we consider to be IRA disinformation is that we may bestow upon the IRA propaganda machine an accolade it has not hitherto possessed. Moreover, in attempting to expose this disinformation we should have to repeat the IRA version in order to discredit it and, thereby, give it further publicity.'[41] This was basic stuff.

But there was a deeper snag, one that even the boldest minister avoided. John Tyrer, an experienced IRD section head who had overseen its domestic operations for the best part of a decade, spoke up. It would be difficult to 'find enough striking cases of blatant IRA lies to warrant restricting the paper to that theme alone'.[42] He had seen enough to know when a road was best not travelled. It was, he added, 'difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in all this'.[43] What is truth anyway? It was a fair, nuanced point. His words hung in the air, heavy and unanswerable. Tyrer instead suggested that the army take on a bigger role contradicting specific items of disinformation as quickly as possible.[44]

Hugh Mooney came away from this post-Bloody Sunday burst of enthusiasm with the help of a brand-new researcher and a personal assistant.[45] By the summer, he was allegedly working to smear John Hume, an Irish nationalist politician and leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. The British feared that Hume's regular trips to Washington would pull the State Department away from its anti-interventionist line and undermine British policy. Some of Hume's visits took place in his capacity as chairman of a charity in Belfast, and so Mooney, ever the opportunist, claimed that Hume had diverted money raised to the IRA and had carved off a slice for himself. He and MI6 then allegedly forged a bank account to show that Hume had stolen money from various US charities; an unattributable briefing paper accompanied it. The smear ended up in the *Christian Science Monitor*, an outlet regularly used by Welser—and, suspiciously, another briefing about aid money being diverted into

Provisionals' pockets just happened to quote none other than the *Christian Science Monitor*.[46]

Mooney, working closely with MI6, allegedly targeted a second Irish politician, this time in the south. Charles Haughey was a rising star who had recently been acquitted of gun-running charges. Thinking two, or even three, steps ahead, their minds racing, Mooney and his superiors feared Haughey had ties to the Provisional IRA and, if he rose to become Taoiseach and if Harold Wilson, then leader of the Labour opposition, returned to power in London, Irish reunification would be on the cards. He had to be stopped. Mooney allegedly drip-fed unattributable smears to journalists, exploiting rumours already in circulation locally about his womanizing and his IRA links.

One outlandish alleged operation involved reprinting—and doctoring—a pamphlet originally issued by the leftist Official Sinn Fein on the relationship between Fianna Fail, Haughey's party, and the IRA. Mooney's forged version supposedly subtly reinforced rumours of connections between Haughey and the Provisionals. It also again accused Haughey of rampant womanizing and of siphoning off money sent from the US to support victims. Attempts to discredit whilst also driving a wedge was classic IRD fare—so too was the type of forgery allegedly created here. Whatever the truth, it had limited effect among local audiences, and any wider smear campaign cannot have had any more than a delaying impact: Haughey became a four-time Taoiseach in the 1980s.[47]

Back in London, Hans Welser and Hubert Kós remained busy enough too, with Kós in particular on the lookout for photographs depicting IRA atrocities, preferably kangaroo courts and executions. The more brutal the better.[48] Their mission, as they saw it, was to 'expose terrorist tactics in Northern Ireland and Communist propaganda for the IRA'.[49] To achieve it, they turned to a tried and trusted, if fading, operator: László Taubinger in Vienna.

Kós sent over material on Soviet front infiltration of republican youth movements, on World Peace Council interference in Irish affairs, and on Communism in Ireland. It was slow going, but they did manage to generate a few hits which were replayed across European newspapers.[50] They worked poor Taubinger hard, even as he underwent operations on a hand and eye in quick succession. They also managed to place some material on

IRA arms smuggling in the *Christian Science Monitor*.[51] The aim, as Kós had put it, 'was not to preach to the converted in Switzerland, but to quote these publications back as neutral Swiss content'.[52] It was classic information laundering, practised over decades. Whether it made any difference or not, they never knew. Still, they happily claimed the win.

Mooney pushed similar themes to link the Soviet Union to Northern Ireland and portray the province as Britain's potential Cuba. In December 1972, he and his psychological operations counterpart in the British army passed a story about 'Russian submarines landing KGB-trained subversives off the coast of Ireland' to an agency journalist in Northern Ireland. Having checked the facts of the story with a senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office official—seemingly none other than Hugh Mooney—the northern editor of the *News of the World* ran it as a front-page story under a dramatic headline: 'Russia in IRA Plot Sensation'.[53] The aim was to make people think that there was more to Bloody Sunday than that of which the public were aware.[54]

For all of Heath's enthusiasm, Welser's brand of covert propaganda quietly fizzled out. Mooney's directive to conduct, where necessary, 'covert propaganda' was renewed following direct rule in 1972, although he transferred to the Northern Ireland Office.[55] Welser and Kós managed to land the odd article on Soviet infiltration of Northern Irish civil rights movements in the Austrian press.[56] It was a minor success, albeit one measured in column inches over influence. And together with the IRD's larger Editorial Department, they did write that unattributable briefing on IRA propaganda. It went further than most, highlighting the role of Catholic priests, and, more controversially, naming and shaming journalists whose articles they deemed to be IRA-inspired, including their old nemeses in the *Sunday Times*.[57] Welser feared it was libellous—and did not want to relive his experience in court.[58]

IRD work on Ireland was wound down to a care and maintain basis in the summer of 1973,[59] although other parts of the secret state could certainly have then conducted similar operations, and IRD officials did continue to keep an eye out for Soviet propaganda portraying British brutality, death squads, and colonialism.[60] Mooney was withdrawn later that year, partly because of a falling out with the Ministry of Defence and partly

because MI5 took over the role of coordinating intelligence and propaganda.[61]

A later review which helped bring about the end of the IRD altogether lambasted Mooney's work for losing touch with both reality and political control. In a cutting epitaph, Mooney's unit was 'very secret, full of enthusiastic young officers, got out of control, and did some very foolish things. It had to be abolished.'[62]

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24
Fading Ink

The world of deception was a crowded one, and no amount of cuts—however dramatic—could wish away an inconvenient truth: fakes and forgeries still thrived. And now, far beyond Ireland, there was more confusion than ever before. Even Hans Welser, who fancied himself adept at sorting lies from half-truths, struggled to keep up with who was pulling which strings—and why.

In early 1971, the Swiss ambassador in Peking had received a mundane package of catalogues posted from a bookseller in the Netherlands. Tucked neatly inside, he found what purported to be an official Chinese booklet—but was actually a forgery designed to raise questions about the Chinese constitution. Welser's first instinct was to blame the Americans. Closer analysis—combined with American denials—suggested it might have been the Russians; after all, the package had travelled across Russian territory in the open post. Or perhaps it was nationalist Chinese hitting back against Communist rule. No one really knew.[1]

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communists launched mailing operations of their own, as part of their attempts to influence the Third World and present China as an alternative to both the US and the Soviets. China lacked the economic or military resources of the superpowers and so covert propaganda became important in complementing their open efforts to build relations with newly independent states, with pamphlets being picked up in Lebanon and a noticeable uptick in propaganda conducted by China being sent from West Berlin—much to the confusion of British intelligence.[2] The Americans were intercepting about 500 lbs of it, the equivalent weight of a piano, every single week.[3]

Despite being armed with depleted resources, Welser entered the fray and added further to the confusion by targeting the Chinese with operations of his own. One ploy aimed to sow doubts about Chinese medical aid in the developing world, specifically Chinese blood transfusions, whilst stirring trouble between the Chinese and the Soviets for good measure. He and Kós pretended to be a Soviet front organization, the International Medical Association, and forged a pamphlet: 'Some Problems of Matching Blood Transfusions'. Almost 500 copies went out to medical research centres, hospitals, and the press across Africa.[4]

Picking up the theme, another—more elaborate—ploy involved forging an item supposedly from a well-known Chinese magazine, *China Pictorial*, published out of Beijing, and then circulating it across English-speaking African countries. It would announce a forthcoming, but entirely fictional, ballet about Chinese medical aid to Africa—tinged with enough racism to upset local readers.

This fraudulent theatre was not as odd as it sounded. Welser knew that China had been using large-scale music and dance productions to engage with audiences in Africa and Latin America for at least half a decade. Back in 1965, for example, a dance drama called *The Congo River Is Roaring* had commemorated the Congolese independence movement.[5] And a genuine edition of *China Pictorial* from the time included selected songs and a synopsis of what it called a 'modern revolutionary Peking Opera': *The Red Lantern*.[6]

As ever, Welser was tapping into something already taking place.

The long-serving head of the IRD's Africa Desk, Michael Biggin, was not so keen on the plan. 'Most Africans, particularly those who read *China Pictorial*, would not see anything amiss: in fact, if they could see the ballet-drama concerned they would think it a marvellous fairy-tale.' He continued, the proposed forgery 'seems to be so near to what one might expect from the Chinese as to question the effort involved'. It was a classic trap of being too convincing, too close to the truth, and hence counterproductive.[7]

Biggin had a point. Genuine editions of *China Pictorial* included synopses of bizarre operas told in the most fantastical language. One, raging against the Japanese, told the story of the hero's 'death-defying revolutionary spirit of a proletarian fighter'. Stirring arias included 'No

Difficulty in the World can Daunt a Communist', 'Hate and Rage Sprout in my Heart', and the heart-warming 'A Debt of Blood Must be Paid with Blood.'[8]

How would Welser top this? Fine, he responded defensively. 'We shall have to toughen it up a bit as we intended to do anyway.'[9]

He set straight to work, delivering his own diagnosis, in typical Welserian fashion, as a sermon. The whole thing was not 'sufficiently vigorous in its condemnation of African tribal practices or sufficiently patronising about African backwardness generally'. First and throughout, 'it would help if derogatory terms were used to describe the Africans'.

Second, it needed something 'hard-hitting to suggest that after all these years of freedom the Africans have continued in their old uncivilised ways'.

Third, the character of the 'witchdoctor should surely be made into more of a figure of fun and not described as "terrifying" which is after all what he still is to many Africans'.

Finally, 'it would be more impressive' to have Nadaga, the young girl character in need of medical attention, 'suffering some condition requiring complex treatment'. This, Welser suggested, 'could be written in such a way as to terrorise the reader'.[10]

His writers and MI6 dutifully obliged. The Africans in the fake play now became 'enslaved by the mumbo-jumbo demanded by the gods of their barbaric ancestors'. The witchdoctor became an 'ignorant old man, a ridiculous figure in his barbaric costume' who 'prances about, tripping over his grotesque trappings and brandishing a repulsive monkey-skull in a futile superstitious rite'. [11]

The girl, Nadaga, now suffered a horrifying ordeal recounted with sneering delight. 'At a sign from the doctor a box is opened—a comrade lovingly takes out the Red Book and for a silent moment the dedicated team joyfully draw inspiration from it. Two of them move to grip Nadaga's outstretched hands. The doctor's knives flash in the firelight and blood streams from the suffering girl's face and forms in dark pools on the earth. The fear-ridden onlookers cringe in terror as her eyeballs are removed, carefully repaired and returned to the black, empty sockets.' Once cured she thanked Chairman Mao.[12]

Welser loved it, and, for good measure, included a photograph supposedly of the ballet. It showed scowling Chinese dancers in blackface

beating a drum; the caption read: ‘learning the alien rhythms and frenzied movements, blackening their skins and covering their hair with ugly wigs’.[13]

He duly secured political authority to post 600 copies from Nigeria.[14] He and Kós hoped to convey ‘Chinese contempt for African backwardness and to draw attention to the strings attached to Chinese aid’.[15] They saw some success: the *Rhodesian Herald* reported the story as genuine, gleefully reporting the grizzly details and the blatant mocking of African cultures.[16]

Welser was determined to carry on, despite having such limited resources. Increasingly desperate for a win, he knew morale among the writers was low and even pushed one hopeless operation so as, in his words, ‘not to ruin their fun’.[17]

SECRET

Photo Cha Ching

". . . . . learning the alien rhythms and frenzied movements, blackening their skins and covering their hair with ugly wigs . . . . ."

SECRET

Figure 10. Photograph of ‘China Pictorial No.3, 1972’, attached to ‘China Pictorial Inset’ (OP369/1/71), 13 Apr. 72, FCO 95/2174, The National Archives, UK.

Deep down, he accepted that he had to take a more carefully targeted approach; the days of shooting from the hip and hoping for the best were over. Celebrations marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Federation of Trade Unions, a long-standing target going back at least a decade, provided him with an opportunity. The WFTU was long aligned to the Communists and prominent in trade union movements in countries sympathetic to the Kremlin. Welser therefore hoped a new forgery would—once again—expose the WFTU’s association with the Soviet Union and disrupt its activities.[18] Back in the trenches now that Rayner had left, Welser took a more hands-on approach directing the size of headings and positioning of pictures in conjunction with the latest samples of genuine material provided by MI6’s technical experts.[19]

‘A beautiful job’. Welser was enjoying himself.[20]

He and Kós were equally pleased with the reactions. A formal WFTU denial succeeded only in drawing attention to the pamphlet circulated by ‘parties unknown’. It got better. In France, *Le Figaro* reported it as genuine and, the next day, the French Communist daily newspaper, *L’Humanité*, hit back by attacking *Le Figaro*’s sloppy journalistic standards. The spat continued over the next few days. Similar coverage followed in Italy.[21]

Welser sat back and watched, a broad smile forming on his lips. Kós found it amusing too.[22] He told the Americans that *L’Humanité* was the loser but, either way, it was ‘a very useful reaction to this operation’.[23]

‘A very healthy splash indeed!’, the Americans cheered. ‘The success of convincing both *Messagero* and *Figaro*, as well as a number of individual trade unionists, makes me wonder if it might not be worth an effort to rebut the WFTU denial.’[24] Without Rayner and with fewer resources, Welser could still cut it with the big players. Just about.

Elsewhere, he enjoyed less luck. He had wanted to forge a news bulletin by Novosti, the Soviet press agency, about the role of Islam in modern society. He hoped that it would expose Soviet repression of Islam and ‘arouse the indignation of the recipients’.[25]

The path was rarely clear in this line of work, and unfortunately he soon ran into obstacles. Julian Bullard, a senior diplomat in the East European

and Soviet Department, objected on the grounds that such forgeries risked unforeseen but serious political consequences—especially in the current climate. The government's expulsion of 105 Soviet intelligence officers the previous year still hung in their air, heightening tensions with the Soviets.[26]

Tom Barker, who had replaced Ken Crook as head of the IRD, found himself on the end of a blunt warning. The Russians, Bullard said, might expose just such a British forgery at some delicate juncture—the eve of a tense diplomatic conference, perhaps, where the UK might be particularly embarrassed. Bullard had only begrudgingly approved earlier forgeries and now demanded reassurances. Real ones.[27]

Welser gave Barker a quiet word of encouragement.[28] And Barker needed it; after all, he had once been the anxious diplomat vetoing many an IRD scheme himself, especially around the youth conference in Sofia. But here he was now offering reassurance to Bullard. 'The cardinal principle', Barker explained, 'on which we worked was that we should not resort to such methods ourselves if any other method would secure the desired result as effectively.' Forgery was a weapon of last resort, to be used sparingly.[29]

'The second principle', Barker continued, 'was that wherever possible, if a bogus document were to be tried, it should say not merely the truth, but the truth in words actually used, e.g. by direct quotation from Soviet or other hostile sources. The authenticity of such documents could not be denied by the opposition without giving greater publicity to their contents.' The proposed Novosti bulletin on Islam was an example.[30]

'Over the past 20 years or so, with the knowledge and approval of successive Heads of Northern and East European and Soviet Departments, bogus documents had on occasion been found particularly effective and indeed necessary in helping to undermine the *bona fides* of the Soviet-controlled front organisations. … It would be very difficult for the Soviet Union to protest such operations, since the front organisations were ostensibly no concern of theirs. The IRD regarded their continued exposure by all appropriate means as a continuing and important responsibility.'

This could sometimes be done through what Barker called 'very simple technical operations', over which diplomats probably 'did not wish to be consulted'. 'We would of course consult political departments in advance if particularly sensitive anti-front operations were liable to cause political embarrassment, but on the whole thought such cases would be few. In this

connexion I left with you copies of a recent spurious WFTU booklet and a Novosti booklet about Soviet education for foreign students. You thought that this kind of operation was justified in principle and might have a useful effect provided that the market was not saturated.'[31]

Bullard was still worried about exposure and so stressed the need for political clearance.[32]

Barker promised.[33]

Bullard was nonplussed but polite. 'I was very much reassured by our talk and I think we reached a satisfactory understanding.'[34]

With lukewarm approval, the forged bulletin on Islam finally went out in December 1972. As promised, it stitched together bits of genuine Soviet material intended for a domestic Russian audience in order to expose the repression of Islam.[35] It described Islam as reactionary and involving 'the celebration of wild fanatical rites'.[36]

Early the following year, the Soviets did expose a spate of anti-Islamic Novosti forgeries—just as Bullard had feared. The team, by contrast, were delighted: exposure drew international attention to the allegations. 'I was about to reach for the champagne bottle', Peter Joy, the IRD's man in Beirut, told Kós, 'but although there would appear to be many similarities, it looks, I fear, as if "some-one else" has beaten us to it!'[37]

Welser had no idea who the perpetrator could have been, and looked on enviously.[38] Kós knew the forgeries were hitting the mark, not least because of the shrill tone of Moscow's denials, but he also had no idea who was behind them.[39] 'It is', he mused to Joy, 'to say the least, curious that our own efforts which you and I discussed last year are not being given an airing'.[40]

'I am as disappointed as you are', Joy replied.[41]

Welser tried to put a brave face on things, insisting that the team's work was 'very encouraging and quite impressive'.[42] Barker offered some encouragement of his own, acknowledging the depleted resources.[43] In truth, they all knew that the shrunken department was struggling to cut through in an increasingly crowded information environment.

Welser grew frustrated: whilst he was battling his own side for money and political approval, new intelligence suggested that the Soviets were

increasing their own activities further. The source was a most intriguing character—a saboteur who had come in from the cold.

Oleg Lyalin was driving recklessly down Tottenham Court Road in the early hours of 31 August 1971. Weaving across the road with no headlights, his erratic driving drew the attention of the local police. Lyalin belligerently stumbled out of his Hillman saloon and, unsteady on his feet, was promptly arrested under suspicion of drink driving. He refused a breathalyser test and lay sprawled across the back seat of the police car, resting his feet on the constable's shoulders.

'What are you playing at?' he demanded over his shoulder. 'Take your feet off the back of my seat'.

'You cannot talk to me, you cannot beat me, I am a KGB officer.'

The constable, used to the ramblings of London's drunks, thought nothing of it, but this particular drunk was telling the truth and the arrest triggered the defection of Lyalin, codenamed GOLDFINCH.[44]

Lyalin had been recruited by MI5 a few months earlier, after being caught having an affair with his secretary. He had demanded safehouses in return for cooperation, which the pair could use as love nests. The plan was for them to eventually begin a new life together in Britain after ditching their respective spouses. Now, MI5's hand had been forced by his latest indiscretion and he formally defected—and the case against him discreetly went away.[45] Lyalin's specialism was sabotage, but if he could provide some insight into the latest Soviet disinformation techniques then Welser was all ears.

Lyalin recounted how all Soviet sources abroad collected whatever documents and letterheads they could get their hands on, such as houses of parliament notepaper, which might be useful for forgeries. He gave examples of operations used in KGB training. Welser learnt how at the start of the 1960s, the Soviets apparently planted material in Egyptian newspapers claiming that Coca-Cola was made from pig's fat in a crude attempt to stir anti-Americanism. He learnt how the KGB had planned to sabotage ships travelling between the UK and Israel in 1969 and blame Arab extremist organizations.

There was the time that the KGB had hoped to discredit MI5 by planting a bomb along Prince Charles's route during his Investiture as Prince of Wales. Or the time Soviet intelligence would cause panic about the presence

of nuclear submarines by contaminating Holy Loch, on the east coast of Scotland, with radioactive material. Or how about when they hoped to damage relations between British, Israeli, and Arab governments by planting a letter in the press suggesting that MI5 had recently burned down two Marks and Spencer's warehouses and blamed Arab extremists? Welser lapped it up, although only the Prince Charles and Holy Loch proposals had ever left the drawing board, with the latter discounted on grounds of both technical difficulties and the risk of killing people and livestock.[46] One of the more bizarre claims—according to long-time IRD contact Gordon Brook-Shepherd, at least—was Lyalin's plot to lay small glass balls containing nerve gas along the carpets and corridors of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to be crushed under the feet of British diplomats.[47]

Perhaps more important than the examples, Lyalin offered insight into just how broadly the Soviets approached disinformation. It encompassed three things: first, deception operations; second, 'disruptive false propaganda' and 'ideological sabotage', the type of thing, one official noted, that was 'up Mr Welser's street'; and third, sabotage designed to spread confusion, denigrate morale, and weaken alliances.[48] The breadth, and the fuzzy line between disinformation and highly biased interpretation of genuine events, made it inherently difficult for the British to spot and counter.[49]

Welser was delighted. It was 'fascinating', he waxed. 'Much of it rings very true, and some of it very familiar!' In the summer of 1972, he asked MI5 to press Lyalin for more about the proposed operations targeting London,[50] but to no avail.[51]

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25

Loose Ends

Hans Welser, now edging into his late fifties, had seen a lot of history's shadows and spent little time in the light. He had worked on fakes, forgeries, and phantom groups in the formative chaos of the 1950s, during crises in Suez and Hungary, and then in the more hubristic years of the 1960s. Those days felt like a lifetime ago. Now, in the twilight of his career, he found himself frustrated, as if working with one hand tied behind his back.

He had warned them of course. Back in 1970, as the cuts began carving through his resources, he had seen this coming: covert operations reduced to a faint trickle compared to what they had once been.

He wanted to smuggle a book into Lebanon at the start of 1973. It would have been a modest operation by past standards. The book provocatively told the story of Soviet agents secretly removing a military aircraft from the country; it had subsequently been banned by Lebanese authorities under pressure from Moscow. Welser saw an opportunity to stir the pot, turning Soviets against Arabs.

But options were scarce. He could not post copies in from France, as he had hoped, because security authorities there were on high alert for terrorism and would intercept them.[1] From Beirut, Peter Joy complained that 'the local security people are seeing spies, saboteurs, bombs and hostile propaganda brochures under every stone'.[2]

Could packages be disguised as advertisement catalogues? It was too expensive.

Could they send books to neighbouring countries instead, perhaps framing the Chinese? Also too expensive.[3]

Could they use a reliable local printer? No, no, and no.[4]

Eventually, 380 copies went off to addresses in the Middle East—but not Lebanon—targeting ‘individuals who might put this example of Soviet interference in the affairs of another country, to good account’.[5]

The number of black productions dwindled as Welser approached retirement. The largest, perhaps his swansong, involved yet another fake group: the Comitato Milanese per la Pace. In its name, Welser and Kós created a deliberately overzealous eulogy to the World Peace Council, a long-standing target, carefully calculated—as ever—to expose it as a decidedly unpeaceful instrument of Soviet policy. Drawing on information confidentially provided by another government, as well as the UK’s own sources,[6] it was known as the ‘Adult’s ABC of Peace’.

C was for China, obstructing the world-wide struggle for peace.

I was for Imperialism, refuting (and in doing so repeating) Chinese and Albanian accusations of Soviet neo-colonialism.

N, rather desperately, was for Negative Views, or any criticism of the Soviets.

T was for Terrorism, albeit that committed by Israeli security forces and not Palestinian freedom fighters.

Welser and Kós scratched their heads when they reached X, clumsily settling for ‘X – Unknown Quantity’: ‘in calculating the hopes for international peace, the future policies of the non-aligned countries constitute the unknown quantity’. Y was Youth, before ending with Zealous Struggle.[7]

The forgery aligned with the tight constraints imposed by anxious diplomats. Tom Barker insisted it would be ‘technically untraceable’: there would be no proof of the British hand. Better still, the text was based on genuine World Peace Council output, thereby making it difficult for the WPC to even denounce it as a forgery. It would antagonize peace organizations; help discredit the WPC, sold by Barker as ‘the most effective instrument of Soviet propaganda’; and undermine confidence in its energetic leader Romesh Chandra. To seal the deal, Barker pointed to the WPC’s recent expansion as evidence that the Russians recognized its effectiveness. He declined to mention that its value and expansion perhaps suggested that their countless attempts to discredit the WPC over at least a decade had failed.[8]

In late September, British operatives posted 770 copies from Milan to addresses worldwide. The forgery saw some impact. It reached the hands of Romesh Chandra himself, as well as those of Sean MacBride, then on the committee for the World Congress of Peace Forces, a large WPC event held in Moscow targeted by the booklet. MacBride, an Irish politician who went on to win both the Nobel and Lenin peace prizes, wrongly assumed it was the work of a venerable American pacifist, Homer Jack, and financed by the CIA.[9]

Welser claimed success and prepared to join Adelaide in retirement. ‘The booklet, described as “very well done”, had been credited with having effectively run down both Chandra and the World Peace Congress’. He did not provide evidence for either claim.[10]

Welser had a few loose ends to tie up before retirement, the loosest of which was László Taubinger.

Taubinger was still the troubled star agent. For years, Kós had been sending him material every Friday to be planted in various newspapers across Europe and beyond. The team rated him as virtually irreplaceable, even if this value could not be quantified in financial terms.[11]

Now, his star was flickering. Weak and hunched under the weight of his own thoughts, his health had again betrayed him, most recently botched stitches following an operation to remove some thirty gall stones;[12] his wife had undergone treatment for depression in a psychiatric ward;[13] and then there was the work now drying up like a stream abandoned by the clouds.

He complained to Welser, in a tone of injured pride, about being ousted from the *Basler Nachrichten*. Another journalist had manoeuvred deftly into his place. The sting of it was too much, and Taubinger threatened to make a scene, protesting against what he saw as a betrayal by the newspaper. Welser managed to talk him down. Just. But the episode left a bitter taste.

Welser’s suspicious mind, honed on decades of deception, whirred into overdrive once more. Could the Russians be behind it? Was there a larger game in play, some scheme under way to remove Taubinger from positions of influence? And worse, did the Russians know Taubinger’s real sources? *The Scotsman* had dropped him too—on the grounds that he was too obviously anti-Communist.[14] Welser was worried.

Unlike Welser, Taubinger was naturally prone to worry and, feeling poor and vulnerable, contemplated getting out of journalism altogether. He was

tired and his eyes distant as he even floated the idea of starting a tourism business, specializing in short breaks to the UK from Vienna. Welser tried to hide his horror at the thought. A non-starter, he advised.[15]

Behind the scenes, Welser plotted with a contact in MI6 over quiet drinks in London's clubland about how to protect Taubinger from being outmanoeuvred—whether innocently or not—from his positions.[16] Whatever the outcome of their scheming, someone got the Swiss Press Association involved in the dispute with the *Basler Nachrichten*; its judgement helpfully came down in favour of Taubinger. The latest László saga, as Welser wearily referred to it, came to nothing.[17]

Even so, Taubinger needed more reassurance—and work. He asked Welser to arrange a meeting with Gordon Brook-Shepherd at the *Sunday Telegraph*, presumably unaware that Brook-Shepherd was another important IRD conduit. Welser declined, explaining that the newspaper would not look kindly on what they saw as an intruder, but more likely wanting to keep his star players away from each other.

How about something on Northern Ireland?

Welser ignored him.[18]

It was health rather than wealth or nefarious Russian activity which ultimately threatened to take Taubinger out of action for good. He had already had cataracts extracted from both eyes, and now a retinal detachment was causing him to go slowly blind in his right eye. His left eye was also under serious strain and seemed poised to follow. Surgery in Vienna failed. Even as he recuperated half-blind in hospital, Kós continued to send him material, insisting poor Taubinger had a tough constitution.[19] Welser cheered him up with a flying visit and the promise of a night listening to 'gypsy' music together. For a time it almost worked, but by August 1973 the decline in Taubinger's sight was undeniable.[20] László Taubinger, the irreplaceable unrelenting journalist, was going blind.

The embassy officials who ran Taubinger on the ground pleaded for Welser to intervene. 'There is no other contact in Vienna with whom we have such a confidential and productive relationship and it is no exaggeration to say that the success of the IRD operation in this part of Europe hinges on Dr Taubinger's continuing activities on our behalf.'[21] Something had to be done. 'What is clearly at stake here is the continuity at

the existing level of a highly successful and productive activity to counter Communist propaganda activity and disinformation.'[22]

Welser did not need telling twice; after all, he had been cultivating Taubinger for decades and was determined, upon retirement, to hand him over to Kós in the best possible shape. He had been on many a morale-boosting mission to Vienna over the years, mockingly referring to them as love-ins with a wry grin,[23] and occasionally had even sent Taubinger some 'Welser wine' made by his own cousin.[24] Taubinger thought they were close friends, although Welser, cooler and more calculating, always put the mission first. He was effectively running Taubinger, carefully melding, like an intelligence officer would, camaraderie with cold pragmatism.

He knew not only the value of Taubinger as an outlet, but also as a source. Using fake identities, Taubinger had put himself on the distribution lists for multiple front organizations. This then allowed him to pass copies of material in various languages on to London. His various disguises provided not only intelligence on front activity but also specimens to help Welser and Kós with their forgeries. In a lighter moment, both thought it hilarious that the International Union of Students sent material to Taubinger, an ageing, bald, highly strung, and visceral anti-Communist, under the impression that he was an enthusiastic female activist for the cause.[25]

Unsurprisingly, Welser was keen to help Taubinger and wanted to fly him to London and pay for eye surgery there. He lobbied the boss.[26]

Taubinger was an 'important outlet', Tom Barker agreed. His 'usefulness to us cannot be over-emphasised', but that usefulness would quickly dwindle 'with his eyesight 70% impaired'. Barker fussed about costs but promised to consider it carefully and sympathetically—albeit without committing anything. Fortunately for Welser and Taubinger, he found some money tucked away in an underspent 'miscellaneous publicity' budget.[27] Even so, times were tight, and Barker, a senior British diplomat, was not above haggling with medics. 'It has been made clear to the surgeon that this is an entirely private matter and that Mr Taubinger is not a rich man.' He wanted it done as cheaply as possible. 'On the basis that Mr Taubinger, with his insurers' help, will in due course contribute what he can, Mr Welser is authorised to meet the hospital charge and the surgeon's fee for this operation in a manner which does not involve the FCO publicly.'[28]

Things moved quickly after that. On 9 August, after another relapse, Taubinger arrived in London and, using his middle name, was whisked off for a consultation at Moorfield eye hospital that same evening. He was in a sorry state and, according to Kós, 'pathetically grateful'.[29] 'Dear Hansi, a thousand thank yous for everything', gushed his wife, Maria.[30]

A week later, Taubinger underwent surgery—private patients' wing, top corridor—to reattach his retina. Kós waited anxiously for updates but could not help preparing the next batch of stories; his faith in Taubinger's resilience bordering on cruel.[31]

Two hours later, the surgeon emerged with good news. Welser was elated, quickly telephoning Maria himself.[32] He then interrupted Barker's summer holiday in rural Scotland to tell him the 'splendid' news. 'Much of his sight has been restored and should improve further as time goes on … It is quite wonderful news and we must all thank God for it.'[33] Welser now expected him to get back at work, apologizing to MI6 for a hold-up and insisting that their mutual friend would now send material on to his various outlets.[34]

'We are all immensely grateful', Wesler quipped, 'what excellent propaganda for British surgery'.[35]

After a slight scare when he temporarily went blind in recovery, Hans and Adelaide drove him to an expensive hotel in fashionable Knightsbridge to recuperate—before Kós moved him somewhere cheaper, further out in Richmond.[36]

Like a lot of propaganda, the success was short-lived. The operation ultimately failed, and Taubinger needed more surgery to save his eye. It would be touch and go. Barker was a diplomat of unimpeachable thrift, and his first thought was—perhaps inevitably—money. Welser insisted that he and Adelaide would look after him and would pay personally to cover the stay. It was not just out of the kindness of his heart. 'We must of course go on assuring proper medical care in the hope that his working capacity will yet be preserved.'[37]

Barker accepted Taubinger's 'critical value', but if Welser had naïvely hoped his boss would intervene and offer to pay using IRD funds, he was sorely mistaken. 'We will get back what we can', Barker replied shiftily.[38]

As Taubinger found himself once more stretched out under the surgeon's knife, Welser and Kós received a timely reminder of why the journalist remained utterly invaluable. Not long before, he had managed to squeeze out an article for *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* based almost entirely on material drafted by one of Welser's veteran researchers. It was about how Soviet deep-sea fishing was depriving local fishermen of their livelihood, whilst also managing to expose the espionage capabilities of Soviet trawlers.[39] Taubinger's article was picked up in a centre-left French newspaper which, in turn, was picked up by the New China News Agency which gleefully accused the Soviets of 'piracy and espionage caried out on the oceans of the world by Soviet trawlers'. The next day, the Soviets, like clockwork, attacked China for spreading falsehoods and fantasies, countering that it was in fact the Chinese who were guilty of illegal fishing. Kós and Welser sat back and smiled the satisfied smiles of men who had set a trap and watched it shut.[40]

Still Taubinger fought, even as his health failed, even as his gloom deepened and the darkness neared; they simply needed to save his eye.

Reports came in. Some were hopeful; most were grim. The surgeon updated Welser personally on his patient's health and prognosis. With scant regard for patient confidentiality, Kós then shared the news with Vienna: 'We still do not know what the prospects are for saving the eye, but the main thing is that his morale is now much better, and physically he is also in better shape.'[41] Welser still sent stories to Taubinger as he recuperated.[42]

On the surface, Welser was a polished veneer of sympathy but inside he grew exasperated. 'The László drama continues', he sighed. 'He can see a little, but says that as in the previous case the sight is deteriorating again. He thinks it will never be better and that he will have to work with his one eye which is in good condition. The surgeon, with whom I have spoken today, is not so gloomy, and says that only time can tell.'[43]

Taubinger required more treatment in October, and the prognosis was bad.[44] Poor Welser, who was due to retire in a matter of weeks, personally received the bill.[45] Kós continued to send material. When Taubinger finally returned home, Kós let out a sigh of relief. 'We have done our best and he is certainly leaving London in a better physical and psychological state than when he arrived. As to the eye, only time will tell, but it is a pity he did not have the job done here in the first instance.'[46] The local embassy reassured

Kós that there was a considerable amount of material waiting for Taubinger when he returned.[47]

Hans and Adelaide followed Taubinger out there as part of a mini-retirement tour full of farewell parties.[48] He brought his successor, Peter Joy, the nearest to being ordinary of the entire team, with him to meet Taubinger.[49] And with that, Hans Welser retired on 9 November 1973.[50]

He retired with a romantic view of his job and had long been a steadfast believer in the fight against Communism and the key role propaganda should play. Even so, weeks away from his fifty-eighth birthday, amid the speeches, gifts, and clinking of glasses, he must have questioned his legacy. He had climbed high in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office against all the odds, outlasted John Rayner, secured a successor, and mentored a protégé in Hubert Kós, but the department was a shell of its former self, and political enthusiasm in his special trade had dipped to a new low. Watching him grow older, some had even been waiting for his breed to retire, knowing, in the cold words of one departmental inspector, getting rid of the team 'would probably be more expensive than carrying on if only because of the high cost of severance payments'. Hans Welser had done his best to protect and promote these arts for decades, but deep down, in the company of a half-blind and often hysterical Hungarian journalist, perhaps he realized that the end of the department was approaching.

He would not have been wrong. Welser's remaining colleagues staggered on, issuing ever fewer fakes and forgeries until 1977, four years after Welser's retirement, when the Labour foreign secretary, David Owen, shut down the Information Research Department entirely. It was imperative, he later argued, to 'end the grey area, which for far too long escaped proper scrutiny, falling neither in the open area of our diplomacy nor in the closed area of spying'.[51] Senior diplomats hoped the closure would 'finally lay the image of IRD as a somewhat arcane, not to say sinister, relic of the Cold War'.[52]

And that was that. Or not quite.

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Postscript (or Epitaph)

Peter Joy took over the unit's work after Welser retired. He kept things ticking over with forgeries of the usual suspects, including the World Peace Council, and by targeting emerging issues such as violence in South Yemen. Despite ongoing uncertainty surrounding the wider IRD, an inspection in 1976 deemed Joy's position as head of the Special Producer Unit, as it was now known, as 'essential', not least because it maintained a shadow political warfare function.[1] Despite an uptick in articles sent to controlled outlets, Joy oversaw a dwindling number of fakes and forgeries until the IRD closed for good.

Intriguingly, however, the Special Producer Unit—and Welser's legacy—survived virtually unchanged as part of the new Overseas Information Department which replaced the IRD. Joy, still its head, described it as retaining 'residuary functions and capabilities of the wartime PWE'.[2] Joy continued to target international terrorism, as well as the IRA, and Cold War front organizations; he also moved onto newer targets such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[3] During his final year in charge, 1978, the Special Producer Unit produced over 500 pieces for covert and controlled outlets. Over 100 of them went to László Taubinger. Adelaide Welser's networks may have been no more, but other controlled outlets still existed or had since sprung up—albeit on a smaller scale. Other briefings ended up in the *Sunday Telegraph* and even the BBC's flagship *Panorama* programme. It sounded impressive, but Joy still had no idea of the impact any of this was having; cuts to monitoring made an already difficult job practically impossible. By this time, only one fictitious organization seemingly still existed: the African Union, which, echoing the Loyal African Brothers, Joy used to warn readers about Soviet interference in Africa.[4]

Joy left to become a counsellor in Malaysia in 1979, before retiring in 1986 to a life of fishing, long walks, and gardening. His wife owned a Hebridean island where they farmed sheep. He died on 16 December 2016, aged 90.[5]

Hubert Kós, Welser's protégé, wasted no time continuing his mentor's work. Within weeks of Welser's retirement, Kós found himself on a flying visit to Vienna to check in with Taubinger—he took over running Welser's star man who, despite poor health, limped on.[6] British archival files on Taubinger continue through until 1985—but remain classified.

Kós replaced Joy as head of the unit in 1979. He described himself as 'doing more or less what Hans used to do' back, rather nostalgically, in the 'old firm'.[7] Peter Carrington, Thatcher's foreign secretary, was impressed when touring the unit in December 1980,[8] but Kós complained about chronic staff shortages, especially after long-standing specialists had retired in an inevitable changing of the guard.[9] Kós continued the African Union fakes and even created a new notional Palestinian group in 1982 aiming to discredit both the Soviets and Libya's Gaddafi.[10] He was proud of what he called his increasingly 'autonomous secret agency',[11] but under strength and struggling to recruit younger people with the right expertise, Kós perhaps knew his team's days were numbered. Perhaps fittingly, 1984 was the year of the last full Special Producer Unit annual report.[12]

Kós received a CBE in 1989. In retirement, he became Lieutenant of the Grand Priory of England, part of the Order of Malta, an ancient Catholic religious order recently resurrected. He died unmarried in March 1998, a professed Knight of Justice, having made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.[13]

John Rayner married Heulyn Dunlop, his fourth and final wife, in spring 1983. By this point the ageing rogue had reached his mid-seventies; Dunlop was in her mid-forties and was still working as a specialist in Communist front organizations and KGB forgeries long after Rayner had retired. He did, however, occasionally return to the office, cutting a mysterious figure. It is not clear what he did in retirement. The pair lived together in upmarket Kensington, across the road from the palace, until he died in August 1990. Heulyn Rayner lives among almond blossoms and orange trees in a village in Spain.

Hans Welser was mistaken if he thought he could leave the world of propaganda behind. Just three years after his retirement, his old friend Tony Ashworth, with whom he had worked closely on operations in Yemen, got in touch. After leaving the IRD in 1975, Ashworth had become a public relations adviser to Sultan Qaboos, the leader of Oman, and hired Welser as a London-based associate. Welser's job was to select suitable names from the fields of politics, academia, and the arts for visits to Oman in the hopes of promoting greater appreciation for the oil-rich state, which incidentally was emerging from an insurgency Welser's erstwhile colleagues had recently been targeting.[14]

He and Adelaide saw out their days in a picturesque grade II listed cottage in the West Sussex countryside. Curiously, perhaps coincidentally, it was a stone's throw from Petworth House, the family estate of Macmillan's long-term private secretary John Wyndham and his wife Pamela, who had provided the doormen, lift operators, and housekeepers for the IRD back in the early 1960s, and their cousin Elizabeth who had worked alongside Welser.

After a remarkable career spanning the special operations executive, political warfare executive, MI6, and the Information Research Department, Adelaide died in March 1990. Among other sentimental personal effects, she left Hubert Kós two silver cigarette cases. The first bore the Austro-Hungarian coat of arms and was originally Kós's retirement gift to Hans; the second was simply inscribed 'László'.

Hans Welser died on 6 June 1996. He left £1,500 to Hubert Kós.

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List of Abbreviations

ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training's Oral History Collection (USA)
BDOHP	British Diplomatic Oral History Programme
BSI	Bloody Sunday Inquiry
CAIN	Conflict Archive on the Internet
CCC	Churchill College Cambridge
CDD	The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliate of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Service of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces (Bulgaria)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CO	Colonial Office
CREST	CIA Records Search Tool
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
DNSA	Digital National Security Archive, US
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (USA)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FO	Foreign Office (UK)
FOI	Freedom of Information
FRF	Free Russia Foundation, the Lubyanka Files
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GRRL	KGB Documents Online, Genocide and Resistance Research of Lithuania
IPT	International People's Tribunal
IRD	Information Research Department (UK)
IUS	International Union of Students
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Soviet Union)
KNA	Kenyan National Archives
MI5	UK Security Service
MI6	UK Secret Intelligence Service
MoD	Ministry of Defence (UK)
NAFEN	Near and Far East News Agency

NARA	National Archives and Records Administration (USA)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front (Aden)
NZZ	Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Swiss newspaper)
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party)
PRC FMA	People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry Archives
PWE	Political Warfare Executive (WWII)
RNS	Regional News Service (Mid-East)
SEAMU	South East Asia Monitoring Unit
SEU	Special Editorial Unit
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (Russian news agency)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UAR	United Arab Republic
USIA	United States Information Agency
WPC	World Peace Council
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions

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Endnotes

FM

1. Pettit to Biggin, 1 Feb. 1968, FCO168/3359, all references are from The National Archives, UK, unless otherwise stated.
2. Gowlland to Biggin, 26 Jan. 1968 FCO168/3359.
3. Welser note, 11 Jan. 1968, FCO168/3359.
4. Wilson to Smith, 28 Dec. 1967, FCO168/3359. Wilson was a former German regional director in PWE and was familiar with black propaganda.
5. Clive to Smith, 25 Jan. 1968, FCO168/3359.
6. Sample of card, Jan. 1968, FCO168/3359.
7. Clive, handwritten note, 2 Jan. 1967 on Wilson to Smith, 28 Dec. 1967, FCO168/3359.
8. Welser to Champion, 16 Jan. 1968, FCO168/3359.
9. Welser to Bayne and Clive, 'New Year's Card', 10 Jan. 1968, FCO168/3359.
10. Smith to Wilson, 2 Feb. 1968, FCO168/3359.
11. In doing so, it builds on C. Hubbard-Hall, *Her Secret Service: The Forgotten Women of British Intelligence* (2024). See also C. Moran and A. Hammond. 'Bringing the "Social" in from the Cold', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 34/5 (2021): 616–36.
12. BDOHP: Tucker (1996).
13. P. Lashmar and J. Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War: The Foreign Office and the Cold War, 1948–77* (1998), 176.
14. BSI: Mooney, oral evidence (30 Sept. 2022).
15. N. Rankin, *A Genius for Deception: How Cunning Helped the British Win Two World Wars* (2011), 185.
16. Quoted in P. Pomerantsev, *How to Win an Information War* (2024), 101.
17. Ibid. ch. 15; L. Richards, *The Black Art* (2010), 4, 157, 179, 236.
18. Pomerantsev, *How to Win an Information War*, ch. 10; S. Delmer, *Black Boomerang* (1962), ch. 1.
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20. K. R. Graham, *British Subversive Propaganda during the Second World War* (2021), ch. 7.
21. Glass, 'Psychological Operations', lecture given to the national defence college, 14 Mar. 1973, FCO168/5128.
22. See Graham, *British Subversive Propaganda.*
23. See O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005), for the agenda-setting account.
24. Unfortunately, most historical accounts of information operations suffer from distorted understandings. Some focus on Soviet activity (e.g. T. Rid, *Active Measures* (2020)), offering little insight into how Western actors countered this disinformation; others focus exclusively on the United States (e.g. R. Jeffery-Jones, *A Question of Standing* (2022)), inevitably overplaying

US agency and misperceiving targets in the Global South as passive recipients: something to which propaganda is done.

25. Rid, *Active Measures*.
26. L. Johnson, *America's Secret Power* (1989), 23–4.
27. Strang, 'A Report on the Unavowable Information Services of Her Majesty's Government Overseas', 1963, FCO168/8219.
28. Graham, *British Subversive Propaganda*, 232–3.
29. Delmer, *Black Boomerang*.
30. Rayner to Strong, 14 Feb. 1946, FO898/419.
31. Crowe, 'The Information Research Department', July 1976. FCO84/52.
32. Glass, 'Psychological Operations', 14 Mar. 1973, FCO168/5128.
33. See Vaughan, '"Cloak without Dagger"', *Cold War History*, 4/3 (2004): 56–84.
34. BDOHP: Bryan (2018).
35. Anon., 'IRD expenditure', n.d., FCO168/8257.
36. Anon., 'Total IRD Staff', n.d., FCO168/8257.

CHAPTER 1

1. Commonwealth Relations Office to Pretoria and Salisbury, 7 July 1960, FCO168/24.
2. For recent discussion see S. Radchenko, *To Run the World* (2024); V. Zubok, *The World of the Cold War* (2025).
3. Harry Hanak, 'Foreign Policy', in Martin McCauley (ed.), *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism* (1987), 182, 185.
4. C. Walton, *Spies* (2023), 309.
5. I. M. Pacepa, *Disinformation* (2013), 232–2.
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7. Ibid.
8. Thanks to Lee Richards for sharing this. IWM: DOCUMENTS.13346/1–Private Papers of A. D. C. Peterson OBE.
9. K. Philby, *My Silent War* (2002).
10. Quoted in Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, 77; see also L. Richards, *Whispers of War* (2010), 17–18.
11. Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, 31, 118; P. Lashmar, *Spies, Spin and the Fourth Estate* (2019), 89. On the founding of the IRD see W. S. Lucas and C. J. Morris, 'A Very British Crusade: The Information Research Department and the Origins of the Cold War', in R. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War* (1992): 85–110; Vaughan, 'Cloak without Dagger'; A. Defty, *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda* (2004).
12. See Rennie, 'Organisation for Political Warfare', 8 Aug. 1956, FO 1110/880; 'Minutes of a Meeting held in the Ministry of Defence on 4th September, 1956 to discuss Psychological Warfare Operations in Support of Operation Musketeer', DFP11/6, DEFE28/9; Sheridan to Vanrenel, 11/12/56 DEFE28/182.
13. Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, 31, 118; Lashmar, *Spies*, 89.
14. Sheridan to Wright and Hopson, 7 July 1960, FCO168/24; [Illegible] to Sheridan, 7 July 1960, FCO168/24.
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16. On British policy see M. Torrent, 'A "New" Commonwealth for Britain?', *International History Review*, 38/3 (2016): 573–613; on Nkrumah's Cold War see F. Gerits, '"When the Bull Elephants Fight"', *International History Review*, 37/5 (2015): 951–69.
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18. Ibid.
19. 'Comments on Mr Olver's Submission of 14/7/60', FCO168/26.
20. Olver, 'Forged UK Cabinet Paper', 14 July 1960, FCO168/26.

CHAPTER 2

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3. Matheson to Kell, 26 Sept. 1939; KV6/126; Martin, 'Note of Interview with [redacted]', 7 Nov. 1951, KV2/4726.
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5. R. Dove, 'Book Reviews: Die Welten des Paul Frischauer', *Journal of European Studies*, 29/2 (1999): 223–5.
6. Martin, 'Note of Interview with [redacted]', 7 Nov. 1951, KV2/4726; [Illegible] to Vivian, 13 Dec. 1940; GML to Leigh-Ashton, 15 July 1940, KV6/126.
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