

EVOLUTION OF IRD

In 1945 Stalin launched policy and propaganda attacks on the western world in accordance with his theory of inevitable struggle. British Ministers and policies were assailed as effete and reactionary; at the 1947 United Nations General Assembly Vishinsky surpassed himself. All Communist publicity media, including the front organisations, supported and amplified his abuse, which was itself the fruit of a massive research and propaganda machine.

2. After the General Assembly British Ministers decided that counter-action was necessary. The Ministry of Information and PWE had, however, been liquidated. New means of countering Communist propaganda had to be devised. In 1948 Bevin created IRD. To set it up fast, to allow for expansion and to permit it to act flexibly without public explanations, he put it mainly on the Secret Vote. Its first tasks were to prepare briefs on Soviet labour camps, deportations, bullying of small countries, denial of human rights etc., so that British Ministers could counter attack and discredit Communist propaganda and pretensions. The idea had merit. The Russians became more wary as Soviet imperialism, genocide and front organisations were systematically exposed.

3. Occasional Ministerial speeches about Communist intentions were not enough. To stand up to, and counter, Soviet and Communist propaganda British scholars, publicists, and professional men needed regular access to Foreign Office

research on Communist affairs. Leading British Sovietologists and diplomatic correspondents could not study, write and broadcast authoritatively without such access. Nor could trade unionists and professional men safely meet their Communist and fellow travelling colleagues at international meetings without briefing. IRD tried to meet these needs. To do so it needed a core of Foreign Office regulars, a staff of research workers and a journalistic and FWE element familiar with the needs and tempo of publicists and with political warfare techniques. IRD also became the peace-time shadow organisation for political warfare.

4. The number of IRD's clients increased steadily. MPs, friendly governments, the Vatican Information Service, CENTO's counter-subversionists, Radio Free Europe

TUC leaders, youth leaders and professional anti-Communists all sought to use Foreign Office research. Access to IRD had to be strictly controlled and the relationship kept confidential. IRD's existence was avowable but its size and vote were not. People wishing to use it had to be well-disposed, influential and discreet. IRD's publications, disseminated world-wide via diplomatic posts, were not enough for such people. Many needed to be able to draw on individual IRD officers for in-depth briefings, quickly and easily, for advice on how to have books published, for help to reach and be effective at meetings and conferences abroad. Thus IRD developed as a service, with many personal and confidential outlets for its products.

5. Throughout the Stalin era IRD's brief was strictly

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anti-Communist. It had no mandate to deal likewise with Indian, Indonesian and Arab nationalism except insofar as the Communists were using it against us. Suez changed this. Many of IRD's clients wanted and received briefing on Nasser and his policies in the Arab world. Ministers commissioned IRD to organise special broadcasts to the Arabs. From 1956 onwards IRD had more license to counter the hostility of non-Communist states, culminating in the anti-Sukarno campaign of 1965/66. It grew adept at exploiting secret information for publicity purposes.

6. The competitive co-existence era produced a more complex challenge. Khrushchev rejected ideological co-existence; there would be no warmaking, but each camp would demonstrate its prowess; the under-developed world would be umpire and prize.

7. Without ideological co-existence IRD was still in business. The Communists, Chinese and Russians, clearly intended to fill much of the influence-vacuum created by de-colonisation. Their motives and methods needed to be exposed. IRD's publications and briefing dealt with the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation as well as the older front organisations; with the training of Russian Arabists and Africanists; with the red-carpeting behind the Iron Curtain of student and other future leaders, with students' experiences in the USSR; with the use of the Trojan horses of Soviet aid and arms sales; with the dangers of supping with the devil.

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8. But now exposure and criticism were not enough. Counter-performance and the preservation of friendship and traditional ties in the developing countries were part and parcel of competitive co-existence. Policies to counter the subversion of our interests needed support from ODM, the British Council, the Visits Programme, VSO, Foundations, exhibitions, all the publicity media, the sale of books and the activities of the countless voluntary associations who seek contacts with their opposite numbers overseas. "Positive" activities of all these kinds have a long-term counter-subversionary, pre-emptive effect and are therefore of concern to IRD even though most of them are the primary responsibility of other bodies.

9. In the late fifties and early sixties, when IRD was becoming concerned also with hostile non-Communist countries, it gave them modest support either through its own specialist officers or through its parallel and closely linked body, the open-vote Counter Subversion Committee. Through the independent Ariel Foundation IRD also came to inspire visits, contacts and a variety of useful activities supplementing those for which other departments and ministries are mainly responsible; and to give modest help to a variety of independent "good" organisations whose activities support the efforts of HMG and supplement those of the other Information and Cultural Departments. IRD's officers, with their useful continuity, are particularly well-suited to this close-support rôle. In 1970, both for their traditional "anti" tasks and for their newer close-support

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tasks there is plenty for IRD to do; support for our Common Market endeavour, calling for editorial and "placing" skills, and for the discreet exploitation of links with "good" organisations, is the latest major call (though not the only one in the past year) on IRD.