

Dr. Ewelina Gdaniec, Assistant Professor

WSG University

e-mail: ewelina.gdaniec@icould.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2377-7878>

## British Anti-Soviet Media Operations in Poland (1947–1948)

BRYTYJSKIE MEDIALNE DZIAŁANIA ANTYSOWIECKIE W POLSCE (1947–1948)

### Summary

The escalating Cold War necessitated the intensification of Western efforts against the dissemination of the Soviet ideology in the USSR's satellite countries. Globally, significant changes in the media and cultural spheres, including the rising popularity of radio programs, meant that Cold War rivalry increasingly involved media. Propaganda became a critical weapon, a fact well understood by the newly established Information Research Department. All available channels were exploited to promote the Western way of life. This research aims to present the scope of British Cold War propaganda in Poland, focusing on the political actions of British Embassy in Warsaw and the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, and correlating them to measures undertaken by the British Council.

**Keywords:** countering the Communism; Polish-British relations; Cold War; media propaganda

### Streszczenie

Eskalacja zimnej wojny zmusiła Zachód do zintensyfikowania wysiłków, by powstrzymać szerzenie się radzieckiej ideologii w państwach satelickich ZSRR. W tym samym czasie znaczące przemiany w mediach i kulturze, w szczególności rosnąca popularność radia, sprawiły, że rywalizacja między blokami coraz wyraźniej toczyła się na polu informacyjnym. Propaganda stała się kluczowym narzędziem; nowo utworzony Departament Badań Informacyjnych doskonale rozumiał ten fakt i wykorzystywał wszystkie dostępne kanały, by promować zachodni styl życia. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest ukazanie zakresu brytyjskiej propagandy okresu zimnej wojny w Polsce, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem aktywności politycznej Ambasady Brytyjskiej w Warszawie oraz Departamentu Północnego Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, a także jej powiązań z działalnością British Council.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zwalczanie komunizmu; stosunki polsko-brytyjskie; zimna wojna; propaganda medialna

## Introduction

Poland's status was determined during the Yalta, Tehran, and Potsdam conferences, decisions that solidified its position on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, Polish-British relations experienced a brief revitalization after World War II. British diplomatic posts reopened in the rebuilding cities of Warsaw, Katowice, Łódź, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Szczecin. Mutual economic and cultural relations were also restored. However, the illusion of Poland's potential stabilization as a self-governing state quickly faded following the rigged election to the Legislative Sejm on January 19, 1947. The tightening grip of the Cold War necessitated the intensification of Western actions against the spread of the Soviet ideology in the USSR's satellite countries. Globally, due to major changes in the cultural sphere, such as increasing the popularity of radio programs and satellite television increased, Cold War rivalry had to incorporate the media. Everything could be a propaganda weapon. In the context of British informational activities in Poland, all possible channels were utilized to promote the Western lifestyle and counter Communism.

The aim of this research is to present the spectrum of British Cold War propaganda in Poland, focusing on the political actions of the British Embassy in Warsaw and the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, and correlating them with measures undertaken by the British Council and British media. The research hypothesis is that while Poland was subject to British propaganda policy toward USSR satellite countries, it constituted a separate entity, as the British government believed that Polish society was uniquely open to ideological change. For that reason, Poland was targeted by numerous operations of the Information Research Department, the BBC, British diplomats, and others.

The term *propaganda* is often interpreted inconclusively, depending on the sphere it describes. Usually, it is defined as a deliberate action aimed at shaping specific views and behaviors of an individual or a community.<sup>1</sup> Propaganda is often associated with materials prepared by the authorities of a given country to promote attitudes among citizens consistent with *raison d'état*, such as encouraging them to join the army to defend the country in wartime. In terms of politics, as Walter Lippmann pointed out:

Under the impact of propaganda, not necessarily in the sinister meaning of the word alone, the old constants of our thinking have become variables. It is no longer possible, for example, to believe in the original dogma of democracy; that the knowledge needed for the management of human affairs comes up spontaneously

---

1 *Propaganda*, in: *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* [PWN Polish Dictionary], <https://sjp.pwn.pl/slownik/propaganda.html> [access: 16.06.2022].

from the human heart. Where we act on that theory we expose ourselves to self-deception, and to forms of persuasion that we cannot verify. It has been demonstrated that we cannot rely upon intuition, conscience, or the accidents of casual opinion if we are to deal with the world beyond our reach.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Bernays, recognized as the father of Public Relations, also developed a similar elitist approach to propaganda, suggesting that the conscious manipulation of the views of the masses is an important element of a democratic society.

Both British politicians and the British media were acutely aware of the potential of internal and external propaganda in reinforcing the intellectual battlefield. Means with the most potential in shaping societal views – popular media like press, radio, and cinematography – and are of interest in this article. Tony Shaw notes that this is especially interesting as:

Artists, poets, actors, intellectuals, and philanthropies may or may not have been aware of the state's behind-the-scenes involvement in their activities [...]. But the fact that so many people and groups were prepared, unprompted, to write an essay or perform in a play that extolled democracy's virtues or condemned the Communist way of life is one of the main reasons that official propagandists in the West in the long run held the whip hand over their Eastern competitors.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in terms of the stated hypothesis, the points to be investigated are: Was there a special scope of British propaganda in Poland, or was it a resultant of actions undertaken toward other Soviet satellites? How efficacious were the measures undertaken by the Information Research Department (IRD)? It must be stated that the topic of British propaganda directed at Poland in the period of 1947–1948 has not yet been thoroughly researched by both Polish and British historians.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with the overview of the post-war history of Polish-British political relations, which is well-described in historiography.<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that works depicting the topic

2 Original text from 1922. See new version: W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, New York 2004, p. 136.

3 T. Shaw, *Review: The Politics of Cold War Culture*, "Journal of Cold War Studies," 3 (2001), no. 3, p. 75.

4 In 2018, Andrea Mason published a related study, *British Policy Towards Poland 1944–1956* (London 2018), which primarily focuses on the 1944–1946 period, dedicating only a few pages to the events in 1947–1948. John Jenks's anthology, *British Propaganda and the News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh 2006), discusses British propaganda in new media but provides limited details on the case of Poland. The topic of propaganda from the Polish perspective has been addressed by Jacek Tebinka, a Polish historian specializing in post-war Polish-British relations. See J. Tebinka, *British and Polish Intelligence Services in the 20th Century. Co-operation and Rivalry*, "Acta Poloniae Historica," 84 (2001), pp. 101–135; J. Tebinka, *Brytyjska propaganda wobec Polski w latach 1947–1956*, in: *Media w PRL, PRL w mediach*, eds. M. Malinowski et al., Gdańsk–Warszawa 2004, pp. 23–24.

5 W. Borodziej, *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby. Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945–1947*, London 1990; A. Korzon, *Skrócona misja ambasadora brytyjskiego w Polsce w 1956 r.*, "Dzieje Najnow-

published in Poland before 1989, while potentially burdened with ideological interpretations, are factually valuable and cannot be disregarded.

## 1. British political anti-communist decisions

The post-war ideological tension between the liberal West and the communist East exacerbated, particularly after the Conference of Szklaska Poręba and the subsequent proclamation of Cominform.<sup>6</sup> The British concept of the “Third Force,” embodied in a fractional unit of the Foreign Office, later developed to a full-scale propagandist. However, before these initiatives materialized, Britons made political decisions that shaped their relations with Communists in Poland.<sup>7</sup>

The British Labour government prioritized international relations, which significantly influenced its diplomatic, financial, and social policies. Domestic affairs, however, frequently took precedence. Clement Attlee faced numerous internal problems, including country’s severe post-war economic devastation, while simultaneously navigating growing dependence on U.S. support and striving maintain Britain’s superpower status on the international stage. Cabinet-level decisions set the tone for official discussions regarding the Soviet Bloc, including Poland. The Foreign Office’s Secretary of State and the Head of the Northern Department played leading roles in formulating policy toward Warsaw. Despite its pragmatic nature, the extensive system for managing foreign relations often led to ideological disagreements. Open polemics were common regarding the legitimacy of diplomatic decisions, perceived lack of firmness in relations

---

sze,” 34 (2002), no. 1, pp. 155–183; M. Pułaski (ed.), *Miedzy dwoma totalitaryzmami: Europa srodkowa i poludniowo-wschodnia w latach 1933–1956*, Kraków 1997; M. Pasztor, *Francja i Wielka Brytania wobec polskich koncepcji rozbrowojeniowych 1957–1964*, “Dzieje Najnowsze,” 35 (2003), no. 1, pp. 85–111; D. Piotrowicz, *Dyplomacja kulturalna Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski na przykladzie dzialalnosci British Council w latach 1945–1982*, in: *Historia w dyplomacji publicznej*, ed. B. Ocieпка, Warszawa 2015, pp. 99–114; J. Tebinka, *Nadzieje i rozczarowania. Polityka Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski 1956–1970*, Warszawa 2005; J. Tebinka, *Szczecin w polityce brytyjskiej w latach 1945–1970*, in: *Polska w podzielonym swiecie po II wojnie swiatowej do 1989*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 2002, pp. 67–68; J. Tebinka, R. Techman, *Ostatni raport brytyjskiego wicekonsula w Szczecinie Henryego F. Bartletta o sytuacji w tym mieście (6 III 1951 r.)*, “Przegląd Zachodniopomorski,” 15 (2000), no. 4, pp. 211–250; A. Zaćmiński, *Emigracja polska w Wielkiej Brytanii wobec mozliwosci wybuchu III wojny swiatowej 1945–1954*, Bydgoszcz 2003.

6 The cominform was founded on October 5, 1947, primarily to control and coordinate the activities of all communist parties in Europe. For more information, see V. Zubok, C. Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, London, 1996, pp. 100–119, 160–170.

7 The concept discussed was developed by George Douglas Howard Cole, who proposed that the United Kingdom should guide Western Europe toward a socialist-liberal future. See P. Lashmar, J. Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War*, Gloucestershire 1998, p. 27.

with Soviet Bloc governments, actions against Moscow, or excessive deference to the U.S. stance.

Beginning in early 1947, the British government began to meticulously plan its policy toward Poland. On January 14, the Foreign Office agreed to utilize BBC programs to achieve their propaganda objectives. During a subsequent meeting on January 17, a proposal was made to maintain a press correspondent in Poland, despite limited British press interest due to readers' low engagement with Eastern European issues. British authorities had to plan their anti-Communist policy in anticipation of the upcoming elections to the Legislative Sejm. The outcome of these elections came as no surprise, as the possibility of Poland violating the Yalta provisions on free elections had been discussed in the British Parliament days prior. It was understood that the opposition in Poland would not gain power.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, during this period, British Ambassador Victor Cavendish-Bentinck was recalled and declared *persona non grata*, accused of spying and supporting the illegal opposition.<sup>9</sup> The action plan of the new Ambassador, Donald St Clair Gainer, initially aimed to counteract the expansion of Soviet ideology in Poland by promoting Western models. To this end, on January 21, 1947, British Information Centre opened in Warsaw at Marszałkowska 59/61, and the British Embassy continued to publish its licensed magazine, "Voice of England," distributed in over 35,000 copies.<sup>10</sup>

At this time, Poland was open to global cultural cooperation and desperately needed to restore its education institutions. While the Soviets could fully provide

---

8 British politicians recognized that the rigged elections in Poland marked a new era in bilateral relations. Most members of the British Parliament understood that initiating further disputes with Poland would have negative consequences. Poles shared similar sentiments, as evidenced by a conversation between the director of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office and Karol Lapter, *chargé d'affaires* of the Polish Embassy in London. Lapter expressed a willingness to resolve disputes and foster cooperation with the British government. See TNA, FO 371/66176, United States views on Poland: comparison with United Kingdom attitude, *Hankey's note*, February 10, 1947; Hansard HC Deb, 5th Series, vol. 433, cols. 1150–1151, February 19, 1947.

9 TNA, FO 371/66091, Political Situation in Poland, *Cavendish-Bentinck to Bevin*, January 29, 1947; FO 371/66153, Anglo-Polish Relations, Cavendish-Bentinck to Foreign Office, January 31, 1947–February 6, 1947; TNA, FO 668/72, Marynowska, The Marynowska Trial: First Day of Trial; Act of Accusation. The topic is further detailed in E. Gdaniec, *Aresztowania i procesy sądowe brytyjskiego personelu dyplomatycznego oraz obywateli brytyjskich w Polsce (1947–1956)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze," 49 (2017), no. 3, pp. 121–144, <https://doi.org/10.12775/DN.2017.3.05>; E. Gdaniec, *1947 rok – proces Marii Marynowskiej współpracującej z „polskim podziemiem” w świetle dokumentów brytyjskich*, in: *Badania młodych naukowców*, vol. 1, ed. M. Rajewska, Siedlce 2016, pp. 63–78.

10 The facility housed an open reading room with a small book collection, and was visited daily by a few individuals. Books could be borrowed with a returnable deposit, and film screenings were held every Wednesday. TNA, FO 953/32, *Quarterly reports from Warsaw*, A report for 1st January – 31st March 1947, April 14, 1947.

technological assistance due to the “technological boom” in the West, this presented an opportunity for the British to subtly integrate propaganda under the guise of cultural institutions. One such institution was the British Council, which reopened in Warsaw in January 1946. That year, it donated books to 49 Polish, including various universities and the Parliamentary Library.<sup>11</sup> There was also a significant demand for English studies, with almost 400 students enrolling to English departments at Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1947. English language departments also opened in Łódź, Poznań, Wrocław, and Warsaw.<sup>12</sup> The British plan was to leverage these facilities to promote Western lifestyle and ideals, and to educate Polish intellectual elite, who might seek a change in authority in the near future. The British Council’s Director, George Bidwell, reported to the Foreign Office that the institution experienced both many successes as failures in its activities. While Poles frequently visited the open library, attended cinema screenings, and exhibitions, some initiatives were stopped or banned due to “problems of political nature.”<sup>13</sup>

British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin, met with Polish authorities Zygmunt Modzelewski and Józef Cyrankiewicz on his return from the Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers. The Poles expressed concern about E. Bevin’s frank questioning of the legitimacy of post-war territorial grants east of the Oder-Neisse line.<sup>14</sup> Although the tension was evident, the Polish press described the meetings as factual and conducted in a “friendly atmosphere.” The British press also positively assessed Bevin’s brief visit to Warsaw. Press comments remained moderate, as a financial agreement was imminent.<sup>15</sup>

---

11 For information on the British Council’s activities in Poland after 1949, see E. Gdaniec, *British Council’s Initiatives for the Polish Community in the Stagnation Time of the Cold War (1949–1952)*, “Heteroglossia,” 2022, no. 12, pp. 285–292.

12 M. Sroka, ‘*Spreading the Word*’ in the Polish People’s Republic: *The British Council and the English Reading Room at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, 1946–1989*, “Library & Information History,” 36 (2020), no. 3, p. 176, <https://doi.org/10.3366/lih.2020.0031>.

13 TNA, BW 51/5, Poland Fine Art. Exhibition, British Council Poland Annual Review 1947, no date.

14 TNA, FO 371/66155, Anglo-Polish relations: anti-British propaganda in Warsaw and attempts to discredit British representatives, Board to Foreign Office; Record of Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Polish Prime Minister, April 27, 1947.

15 Media commented on the possible connection between the visit and the agreement, without specifying the points at issue. Press comments appeared after May 6, following E. Bevin’s official report, indicating that the media utilized official information. See *Bevin Stopped in Warsaw*, “Western Daily Press,” May 6, 1947, p. 3; *British-Polish Pact*, “Dundee Courier,” May 6, 1947, p. 2; *Harvesting*, “Belfast News-Letter,” May 6, 1947, p. 5; *Poles Urged to Return*, “Western Mail,” May 6, 1947, p. 2; *Trouble Ahead*, “Western Morning News,” May 6, 1947, p. 2; *British and U.S. Policies in Europe*, “The Scotsman,” May 13, 1947, p. 4.

Subsequently, *chargé d'affaires* Philip Broad assessed the preceding six months of British policy toward Poland and its effectiveness. He observed that British-backed socialists in Poland exerted little influence over the pro-Moscow government.<sup>16</sup> Broad expressed concern that Polish society might perceive the London government as accepting the new political order in Poland, as E. Bevin's meeting with J. Cyrankiewicz and Z. Modzelewski could be seen as an official legitimization of the Communist authorities. Broad recommended continuing the current policy of supporting socialists but urged the expansion of cultural, educational, and information activities through the British Council and the BBC.<sup>17</sup>

Serious debate arose concerning the funeral of Władysław Raczkiewicz, the former president of Poland in exile. While the presence of Her Majesty's Government representatives at the funeral ceremonies in Newark seemed natural, the Communist authorities of Poland did not view it as such. A protest note was sent from Warsaw against the presence of a delegation of British Members of Parliament at the funeral,<sup>18</sup> arguing that representatives of the British government should not openly support émigrés whose aim is to discredit the legal government in Warsaw.<sup>19</sup>

London's propaganda measures against the communist ideology grip in the East were re-evaluated after Poland's rejection of the Marshall Plan.<sup>20</sup> Ernest Bevin emphasized that after the Communists in Poland opted out of benefiting from overseas

- 
- 16 Britons collaborated in the escape of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, head of the Polish People's Party (PSL), from Poland. After PSL activists learned about planned lifting of immunities at the next session of the Sejm, scheduled for October 27, they sought asylum abroad to avoid fraudulent trials. Mikołajczyk seriously considered relocating to London. George Andrews met with the PSL leader and arranged a meeting at the American Embassy for the following day. The possibility of extracting the politician from Poland was discussed by the U.S. Ambassador Stanton Griffis and Philip Broad, *chargé d'affaires* at the British Embassy. Mikołajczyk was offered three escape routes: 1) in an empty coffin transported with the bodies of American soldiers to Berlin, 2) across the border with Czechoslovakia, or 3) on a ship from Gdynia to the United Kingdom. On October 20, Mikołajczyk boarded a truck filled with American diplomatic mail in Warsaw and traveled to Gdynia, from where he escaped to the UK on board of "Baltavia." For more details, see T. Wolsza, *W „polskim” Londynie o ucieczce Stanisława Mikołajczyka z kraju*, "Dzieje Najnowsze," 28 (1996), no. 1, pp. 227–232.
  - 17 TNA, FO 371/66093, Political situation in Poland: election arrangements and party relationships, Broad to Bevin, June 3, 1947.
  - 18 TNA, FO 371/66185, Activities of the Polish émigrés in London: funeral of ex-President Raczkiewicz, Note from Poland, June 15, 1947; TNA, CAB 128/10/4, Cabinet Conclusions, Foreign Secretary Speech, June 10, 1947.
  - 19 Subsequently, the topic was discussed at meeting of the House of Commons and the Cabinet, where some Members of Parliament expressed surprise at the Polish reaction. See Hansard HC Deb, 5th Series, vol. 439, cols. 4–5W, June 23, 1947.
  - 20 Initially, it appeared that the Polish government would sign the agreement proposed by the U.S. On July 6, Z. Modzelewski assured S. Griffis that Poland would participate in the Paris meeting. The

aid, they should not expect any loans or economic concessions with the West. Robin Hankey, the head of the Northern Department, called for immediate propaganda measures in the Soviet Union's satellite states, demonstrating the negative effects of rejecting Marshall Plan aid.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the superficial continuation of trade cooperation between the two countries, this decision, and the conditions set by the United States for signatories, influenced not only Polish-British economic relations but, above all, the diplomatic sphere. The exacerbation of Cold War tensions, exemplified by the Berlin Blockade, shifted London's focus to other international political objectives. Growing military needs and persistent tough socio-economic conditions resulted in cuts to ideological initiatives in the Soviet Union's satellite countries. The efforts of local Foreign Office envoys from the British Embassy in Warsaw, Consulates, and cultural and educational institutions like the British Council, were often reviewed on a limited budget. Changes in relations with the West were also visible in statements from politicians and diplomats of the J. Cyrankiewicz government. In August, Polish ambassador to the United States Józef Winiewicz, presented relations with Great Britain as an example of symbiotic cooperation in a conversation with Secretary of State George Marshall, while in September, Z. Modzelewski emphasized the exemplary relationship with France.<sup>22</sup>

On November 25, the Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers was held in London, addressing the problems of countries within the Soviet sphere of influence. A significant "cooling" in relations with the East was evident. During one of the speeches, Russian Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov attacked the "world of imperialism," which ended the deliberations and confirmed the West's conviction that there were too many divergences between Eastern and Western. At the December Cabinet meeting, E. Bevin stated that it was impossible to reach a consensus with the government in Moscow, and thus it would also be difficult to gain influence on the situation in Poland.<sup>23</sup>

A significant event in international British politics was the opening of IRD. As mentioned, the idea of establishing a unit to promote Western ideology and counteract the expansion of Communism emerged as early as 1946. To this end, E. Bevin

---

following day, Modzelewski discussed Poland's foreign policy with D. Gainer. They discussed British confirmation of the Oder-Neisse border and considered adopting a cultural convention.

- 21 M.J. Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain and International Communism, 1945–1950*, London 2009, p. 65.
- 22 FRUS, 1947, Eastern Europe, vol. IV, Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State, August 6, 1947; Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State, September 26, 1947.
- 23 TNA, CAB 128/10/46, Cabinet Conclusions, Council of Foreign Ministers, December 15, 1947; CAB 128/10/47, Cabinet Conclusions, *Council of Foreign Ministers*, December 18, 1947.



commissioned work on “propaganda of the third force.” Guidelines were prepared by Parliamentary Undersecretary of State Christopher Mayhew and former chairman of the Soviet FO Commission Christopher Warner. Mayhew was one of the few politicians who, since the end of the war, were suspicious of the communist ideas. He predicted that Britain would soon face an ideological duel with the Soviet Union and its influence on Europe. In his views, Britain’s main goal was to disseminate the so-called “demoluded” propaganda, featuring elements of a reformist, progressive, and anti-communist nature. Some of these concepts were adopted by the emerging IRD.<sup>24</sup>

The official mission of the Department, as presented by E. Bevin in a top-secret Cabinet Memorandum, was to collect information on Communist policy, tactics, and propaganda, and provide materials for anti-Communist publicity.<sup>25</sup> The latter was to be disseminated through Information Services abroad in cooperation with the BBC. Bevin prompted the idea of empowering European socialists and peasants from Communist countries with knowledge on the Western lifestyle and resources for their struggle within their own nations. He sought “to make London the Mecca for Social Democrats in Europe.”<sup>26</sup> Initially, the department’s operating methods mirrored those used during the war, involving printing and distributing propaganda leaflets and pamphlets in target countries. However, they proved ineffective, leading to a decision to intensify open activities in the press. The department would focus on: 1) immediately challenging the allegations of the Soviet Union against the capitalist world; 2) preparing speeches for British diplomats, enabling them to effectively counter any potential attacks by the USSR; 3) preparing newspaper articles with attached testimonies of witnesses, statistics, or other authenticated information (such comments were to appear in the press immediately after any Communist attacks); 4) disseminating “sibs” and spreading false, typically negative, rumors among citizens of a given country, leveraging the psychological tendency for people to share unpleasant or controversial facts and

---

24 On February 25, the Deputy Permanent Undersecretary of State Sir Orme Garton Sargent informed representatives of Foreign Office departments about the official opening of the Information Research Department (IRD). Ralph Murray was appointed as the first director, with one assistant and one expert. The newly created department received a budget of £150,000. However, it quickly became apparent that the tasks facing the IRD required a significant number of personnel and much greater financial outlays. After just six months of operation, sixteen people worked in the IRD office, demonstrating its dynamic development. At the end of 1948, the Cabinet, in a secret ballot, decided to increase the funding of intelligence and propaganda activities by another £100,000. For more details, see: FCO Historians, Library and Records Department, *IRD Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946–1948* (1995), no. 9, p. 2; P. Lashmar, J. Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War*, pp. 14–15.

25 TNA, CAB 129/23, Cabinet Conclusions, Future Foreign Publicity Policy, January 4, 1948, p. 1.

26 TNA, CAB 129/23, Cabinet Conclusions, Future Foreign Publicity Policy, January 4, 1948, p. 2.

events.<sup>27</sup> As early as after two months after its opening, the IRD began preparing reports on the situation in Poland. A comprehensive note was created, describing the distressing activities of the Communists, who were taking control over all spheres of life in the country. The social discontent in Poland was of particular interest, as the key element of IRD's publicity was "equating the Communism with Nazism."<sup>28</sup>

The cooling of mutual relations was evident also in economic policy. On April 16, 1948, all countries receiving aid under the Marshall Plan signed the European Economic Cooperation Convention, the aimed to broaden the scope of their relations. With the United Kingdom's accession to the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, the number of trade contacts with Poland decreased.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of 1948, the exacerbation of the Cold War was apparent in most spheres of social life in Poland. The actions of British diplomatic posts were constrained. The most effective channel for permeating Western values was through media and activities of the IRD.

## 2. Countering communism and the media

British policy for counteracting Communist ideology in relation to all Soviet Bloc countries, centered on: 1) aid measures for economic development, the "side effect" of which was the signing of lucrative trade agreements for essential raw materials for the British; 2) expansion of cultural activities through the activities through the British Council and libraries offering English-language press; 3) producing leaflets with pro-liberal slogans and organizing exhibitions and cinema screenings promoting the "Western" lifestyle; 4) influencing the press by sending ideologically marked articles prepared by the British, supporting pro-freedom movements, 5) the activities of radio stations. In addition to regular activities within the these domains, Britain undertook a great number of political and diplomatic initiatives aimed at counteracting Communism. The press played a significant role in shaping the perception of cultural relations, both from Polish and British newspapers, which sought to leverage their

27 For instance, the British used this approach to highlight the authorities' antagonistic response to positive gestures from the West, which citizens could then discussed among themselves.

28 TNA, FO 1110/25, Conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: various reports; briefs on conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and Communism in Poland and Yugoslavia, Conditions in Poland, Conditions in Soviet Union, March 11–12, 1948; P. Lashmar, J. Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, p. 29.

29 M. Szatlach, *Rola Planu Marshalla w początkowym okresie procesu instytucjonalizacji integracji europejskiej*, "Świat Idei i Polityki," 4 (2004), pp. 79–86.

position in the political arena. Although they could be perceived as carriers of news, their content would often represent interests of wealthy boards. Press articles were also the result of the propaganda activities of relevant services, and in the case of the British, also of the IRD. British media, firmly entangled in the propaganda campaign, were also subtly controlled, due to the post-war reinforcement of pro-capitalist discourse.<sup>30</sup> John Jenks states that: “This legacy of total war and the exigencies of Cold War – particularly propaganda – kept the British media tightly self-disciplined when it came to the Soviet Union and Communism.”<sup>31</sup> To the British, propaganda also appeared to be the most effective weapon in countering Communism and maintaining Britain’s global leading status, because it involved less expenses than other measures.<sup>32</sup>

Investigative reporter David Leigh described the IRD as a “media management instrument” that “poisoned the wells of journalism.”<sup>33</sup> The British published articles describing the reality behind the Iron Curtain, but some of them aimed to evoke a feeling of injustice and compassion in the reader, while simultaneously justifying London’s actions toward Poland and other pro-Soviet states. Regarding Poland, the premise presented in the British press was clear: the gradual deterioration of Poles’ living conditions, caused by the strengthening cooperation with the Soviet Union and the communization of social life, should be stopped. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these premises corresponded to the implementation of political and economic assumptions. The latter was clearly identified by the IRD, which instructed the media to focus mainly on topics proposed in the form of long lists. Among them were: 1) presenting the accounts of former communists who condemned socialist ideas, 2) showing the losses experienced by the Soviet Union’s satellite countries due to the rejection of the Marshall Plan, and 3) publishing reports from forced labor camps and prisons of a political nature.<sup>34</sup> One of the minutes sent to the IRD confirms that such techniques were frequently employed. Jonathan Griffin sent a record of his discussion on Poland with French musician Henri Barraud, after his three-week visit to the country. Barraud visited major Polish cities and met several tourists, including Americans, who encountered no problems traveling freely. He was amazed by the

---

30 The D-notice system and The British Board of Film Censors were both introduced in the UK in 1912. Self-censorship was also quite common.

31 Jenks, *British Propaganda*, p. 2.

32 P. Lashmar, J. Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War*, p. 24.

33 D. Leigh, *Death of the Department That Never Was*, “The Guardian,” January 27, 1978, p. 13. Similar assumptions were presented by Andrew Defty in the Introduction to his *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945–53: The Information Research Department*, New York 2004.

34 FCO Historians, Library and Records Department, *IRD Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946–1948* (1995), no. 9, pp. 15–16.

“extraordinary speed and scale of the reconstruction” and noted that an average worker in Poland could afford more food than a French one. However, he did mention problems in Poland’s clothing industry, stating that “clothes and shoes are terribly expensive,” and commented on the inequality in salaries between high officials and workers, asserting that “economic inequality being far greater in Poland than in France.” This section is highlighted in the documents and annexed with a brief stating that the negative fragment should be used in the media, but the Northern Department needs to find a source to cite it in the press.<sup>35</sup>

To some extent, British authorities realized that effective counteraction in propaganda could be achieved by building social resistance. For this purpose, content was selected to show the true nature of communist policy in various spheres of life. This was important because the communist media operated on the principle of a “megaphone syndrome” – the authorities’ propaganda outlet, the press and the radio were integral to the political struggle. The constant defamation of the British authorities, diplomats, and Western ideas was intended to curb Poles’ interest in living on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Such a policy, however, backfired.

Western radio stations were gradually gained popularity. Since part of the BBC broadcasts was consulted with the IRD, media became the executor of government assumptions. One of the researchers of the IRD, H. Wilford, called the BBC “the most important non-FO channel for the dissemination of IRD output overseas.”<sup>36</sup> However, financial considerations posed a significant limitation. Due to the difficult budget situation in 1947, shortening the duration of Polish BBC broadcasts was even considered, but ultimately did not occur. The main opponent of such a solution was British Ambassador D. Gainer, who understood that the BBC was the main tool for conveying British propaganda in the East and that it influenced Poles with great effectiveness. It is true that the direction of radio propaganda was not always supported by British diplomats in Poland. Gainer tried to convince the management of the Northern Department to take steps to soften the content of the broadcast, for example, in the case of the programs of *Głos Wolnej Polski* by Adam Ciołkosz and Jan Nowak. The BBC’s program was much softer, yet the communist authorities tried to interfere with all Western broadcasts, including the British ones.<sup>37</sup> Compared to the programs offered

35 TNA, FO 1110/90, Material on Poland, Griffin to Tennant, July 28, 1948.

36 H. Wilford, *The Information Research Department: Britain’s Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed*, “Review of International Studies,” 24, (1998), no. 3, pp. 364, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210598003532>.

37 This fact, however, contributed to the increased popularity of these programs and the creation of new ones, including Radio Madrid by Charles Wagner in 1949.

by other radio stations, the BBC commented on the reality in a moderate manner. This was in line with Britain's overall policy of launching propaganda attacks, but not indiscriminately.<sup>38</sup>

After S. Mikołajczyk's escape to London, the British press widely publicize the fate of his associates who remained in Poland.<sup>39</sup> It was argued that they were being interrogated and falsely accused of collaborating in his escape. This problem was also widely commented on by British politicians, who expressed concern about the Polish government's actions that led to the situation. The Polish press did not publicize Mikołajczyk's escape extensively, a typical Communist action to suppress such incidents. Yet another "glitch" on the Warsaw-London line was the show trial of Maria Marynowska, an employee of the Information Section of the British Embassy in Warsaw. It coincided with the Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers, during which V. Molotov attacked Western states, accusing them of imperialism. As Włodzimierz Borodziej claims, this criticism did not go unnoticed in Poland and thus could have impacted on the course of the trial and its outcome.<sup>40</sup> Marynowska was accused of being a WiN activist and of translating and passing memoranda to the United Nations and the then British Ambassador V. Cavendish-Bentinck; the second charge was distributing resistance movement press in the American and British embassies.<sup>41</sup> She was sentenced to twelve years in prison and deprived of public rights for five years. The Polish side used the trial to depreciate the image of Western diplomats. The negative tone of cooperation and support for anti-communist actions by the C. Attlee government was emphasized, even though London's policy toward the Polish underground was different. Additionally, the WiN organization was presented as a group of traitors collaborating with imperialist powers. Following the announcement of the verdict, Ambassador D. Gainer openly stated that the trial had only a political dimension and that no judge in the United Kingdom would even consider the process, let alone conduct it. He argued that due to Poland's ideological dependence on the Soviet Union, the verdict could not be different. At the same time, he emphasized that if the

---

38 TNA, FO 953/245, BBC services to Poland, Gainer's Letter to Bowen, January 1, 1947.

39 *Mikołajczyk*, "Birmingham Daily Gazette," November 4, 1947, p. 1; *Mikołajczyk's Friends in Gaol: More Arrests*, "Lancashire Evening Post," November 6, 1947, p. 4; *Mikołajczyk's Friends Held*, "Hull Daily Mail," November 6, 1947, p. 2; *Mikołajczyk Loses Citizenship*, "Gloucestershire Echo," November 22, 1947, p. 1; *Britain Offers Refuge to Mr. Mikołajczyk*, "Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer," November 28, 1947, p. 1.

40 W. Borodziej, *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby*, p. 345.

41 Ruch Oporu bez Wojny i Dywersji "Wolność i Niezawisłość" (The Resistance Movement without War and Diversion "Freedom and Independence"). Maria Marynowska's case was, in fact, an addendum to the trial of the members of the Third Main Board of WiN.

legitimacy of the law in Poland were recognized, the British embassy as part of the process, would also be to blame.<sup>42</sup> While upholding the principle that the British would not comment on political arrests, the trial, despite the constant lack of comments from British politicians, became extremely media-driven. Polish-British relations were said to have “hit rock bottom.” Western press focused on the political dimension of the process and the unlawful sentence. However, the Polish press used it as an example of aggressive Western influence-seeking methods.<sup>43</sup>

Media also played a significant role in shaping the political atmosphere surrounded the Summer Olympics, held in London from July 29 to August 14, 1948. The Games, resuming after a twelve-year hiatus, featured athletes from fifty-nine countries, notably excluding the Soviet Union, which decline to participate. The Kraków daily “Dziennik Polski” published an article describing the opening of the Games, highlighting in bold “the first scratch” – a British publishing house’s map of participating countries that includes Poland’s 1939 borders.<sup>44</sup> According to the article’s author, this was a deliberate measure intended to diminish Poland’s post-World War II standing. Despite the unpleasant political atmosphere, contacts between Polish sportsmen and capitalist states positively influenced the authorities in Warsaw and affirmed the position of Polish sport globally.<sup>45</sup>

In the fall, another political arrest gained media attention. Charles Whitehead, the technical director of the Wedel sweets factory and an employee of the Advertising Section of the British Embassy in Warsaw, was accused of collaborating with the Third Reich during World War II.<sup>46</sup> Initially, the British Embassy opted for a different strategy than that employed during M. Marynowska’s arrest, choosing to publicize the case. British diplomats in Warsaw eagerly commented on the political dimension of the detention. The director of the Northern Department, R. Hankey, instructed the Embassy’s personnel to emphasize the absurd nature of Ch. Whitehead’s arrest in public statements. However, this tactic soon proved ineffective and risked provoking

42 TNA, FO 668/72, Marynowska, Gainer to Warner, December 30, 1947.

43 *Walka ze wsteczniactwem to walka o niepodległość Polski*, “Życie Warszawy,” December 27, 1947, p. 2; *Europe: Life Behind the Iron Curtain*, “Reading Eagle,” January 4, 1948, p. 17.

44 *Olimpiada otwarta*, “Dziennik Polski,” July 31, 1948, p. 8.

45 After the Olympics the activities of the Polish Olympic Committee were suspended and resumed two years later, though they were significantly dependent on the authorities in Warsaw.

46 Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, 72/654 Wydział V Karny, sygn. V 1 Sn 624/48 *Karol Whitehead oskarżony jako dyrektor techniczny firmy E. Wedel o bicie, odbieranie polskim robotnikom deputatów żywnościowych, organizowanie sieci szpiegowskiej na terenie zakładu, uniemożliwianie pracy polskiego ruchu oporu*.

the prosecutor. The ultimate lack of media interest in the trial contributed to a relatively light sentence, with Whitehead being sentenced to four years in prison.<sup>47</sup>

In 1948, discussions also occurred regarding the possibility of relocating the “Voice of England” office from Kraków to Warsaw, citing closer cooperation of journalists with the British Embassy’s Information Department, easier data flow, and a more secure method of transmitting confidential information. An atmosphere of suspicion toward Western journalists and diplomats was apparent. All overt activities of British posts in Poland faced significant restrictions.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, this period presented an opportunity for the IRD to pursue its core objectives: to inform the Polish audience about the disparity in social living standards and political freedom, and empower them to pursue their own, non-Soviet driven politics, a development that would not fully materialize in Poland until 1956.

## Conclusion

Numerous propaganda methods were employed by the British authorities to promote the Western way of life. For Poles, British diplomatic posts, such as British Consulates or Embassy in Warsaw, served as centers of knowledge about events behind the Iron Curtain, which consequently led to restrictions on their activities by the Communists. For this reason, the British Council and numerous English language departments in Polish universities assumed the role of propagating the Western way of life. They also disseminated propaganda materials under the guise of educational context, although, their actions were also impeded starting in 1948.

The tightening grip of the Cold War eventually led to an almost impenetrable blockade of most official British pro-Western initiatives in Poland. The gradual isolation of diplomats and citizens working in Western institutions made it increasingly difficult for the British to operate. No later than four years after its reopening in Poland, the British Council had to cease direct sales of English-language books and periodicals. The Warsaw government took control of all such activities, introducing restrictions on the sale of non-Russian publications. Due to numerous problems and failures, the planning of concerts and theater events with the participation of British artists was also discontinued. Still, covert measures to achieve the Foreign Office’s goals were continued by global media. The BBC, softly steered by the IRD, proved most successful

---

47 TNA, FO 688/75, Whitehead Charles, Hankey to Allen, February 6, 1948; Allen to FO, October 28, 1948.

48 TNA, WORK 10/411, Embassy: hiring of staff residence, Report by Mr. A. S. Paterson, August 31, 1948.

in reaching Polish homes. The Department aimed to gather information on difficulties within Polish society, such as food-shortages, unavailability of basic products, wage inequality, and the employments of women and youth work in heavy industry, and subsequently use this information to highlight the gap between Western and Eastern socialist models.

All things considered, Poland remained of interest to C. Attlee's government, especially as it provided Britain with essential goods such as meat or timber. His Majesty's Government (HMG) needed to find a way to counter Communism and undermine the monolithic spread of soviet ideology in Poland, but in a manner that would not jeopardize mutual economic relations. Thus, due to aforementioned factors, a need for implicit impact emerged and was embodied in cultural and education initiatives, supported by the IRD, the BBC, and the local press. Local diplomats, teachers, lecturers, librarians, trade unionists, and other Britons working in Poland played a key role as both gatherers of knowledge about conditions behind the Iron Curtain and circulators of propaganda among Poles. It is difficult to evaluate their precise success, though considering that the Polish society sought contact with Western facilities, eagerly listened to the BBC, and pursued British press, the likelihood of British propaganda reaching Polish homes was high.

## References/Bibliografia

### ARCHIVAL SOURCES

#### The National Archives

TNA, BW 51/5 Poland Fine Art. Exhibition.

TNA, CAB 128/10 Cabinet Conclusions.

TNA, CAB 129/23 Cabinet Conclusions.

TNA, FO 371/66091 Political Situation in Poland.

TNA, FO 371/66093 Political situation in Poland: election arrangements and party relationships.

TNA, FO 371/66153 Anglo-Polish Relations.

TNA, FO 371/66155 Anglo-Polish relations: anti-British propaganda in Warsaw and attempts to discredit British representatives.

TNA, FO 371/66176 United States views on Poland: comparison with United Kingdom attitude.

TNA, FO 371/66185 Activities of the Polish émigrés in London: funeral of ex-President Raczkievicz.

TNA, FO 668/72 Marynowska.

TNA, FO 688/75 Whitehead Charles

TNA, FO 953/32 Quarterly reports from Warsaw.



TNA, FO 1110/25, Conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: various reports; briefs on conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and Communism in Poland and Yugoslavia.

TNA, FO 1110/90 Material on Poland.

TNA, WORK 10/411 Embassy: hiring of staff residence.

### **Hansard, House of Commons Debates**

Hansard HC Deb, 5th Series, v. 433, cc 1150–1151; v. 439, cc 4–5W.

### **The Foreign Relations of the United States**

FRUS, 1947, Eastern Europe, vol. IV.

### **Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie**

AANW, 72/654 Wydział V Karny, sygn. V 1 Sn 624/48.

### **Foreign & Commonwealth Office Historians**

FCO Historians, Library and Records Department, *IRD Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946–1948* (1995).

## **LITERATURE**

Borodziej W., *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby. Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945–1947*, London 1990.

Defty A., *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945–53: The Information Research Department*, New York 2004.

Gdaniec E., 1947 rok – proces Marii Marynowskiej współpracującej z „polskim podziemiem” w świetle dokumentów brytyjskich, in: *Badania młodych naukowców*, vol. 1, ed. M. Rajewska, Siedlce 2016, pp. 63–78.

Gdaniec E., *Aresztowania i procesy sądowe brytyjskiego personelu dyplomatycznego oraz obywateli brytyjskich w Polsce (1947–1956)*, „Dzieje Najnowsze,” 49 (2017), no. 3, pp. 121–144, <https://doi.org/10.12775/DN.2017.3.05>.

Gdaniec E., *British Council's Initiatives for the Polish Community in the Stagnation Time of the Cold War (1949–1952)*, „Heteroglossia,” 2022, no. 12, pp. 285–292.

Jenks J., *British Propaganda and the News Media in the Cold War*, Edinburgh 2006.

Korzon A., *Skrócona misja ambasadora brytyjskiego w Polsce w 1956 r.*, „Dzieje Najnowsze,” 34 (2002), no. 1, pp. 155–183.

Lashmar P., Oliver J., *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, Gloucestershire 1998.

Lippmann W., *Public Opinion*, New York 2004.

Mason A., *British Policy Towards Poland 1944–1956*, London 2018.

Pasztor M., *Francja i Wielka Brytania wobec polskich koncepcji rozbrojeniowych 1957–1964*, „Dzieje Najnowsze,” 35 (2003), no. 1, pp. 85–111.

Piotrowicz D., *Dyplomacja kulturalna Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski na przykładzie działalności British Council w latach 1945–1982*, in: *Historia w dyplomacji publicznej*, ed. B. Ociełka, Warszawa 2015, pp. 99–114.

Pułaski M. (ed.), *Między dwoma totalitaryzmami: Europa środkowa i południowo-wschodnia w latach 1933–1956*, Kraków 1997.

Silverstone M.J., *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain and International Communism, 1945–1950*, London 2009.

- Shaw T., *Review: The Politics of Cold War Culture*, "Journal of Cold War Studies," 3 (2001), no. 3, pp. 59–76.
- Sroka M., 'Spreading the Word' in the Polish People's Republic: The British Council and the English Reading Room at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, 1946–1989, "Library & Information History," 36 (2020), no. 3, pp. 175–193, <https://doi.org/10.3366/lih.2020.0031>.
- Szatlach M., *Rola Planu Marshalla w początkowym okresie procesu instytucjonalizacji integracji europejskiej*, "Świat Idei i Polityki," 4 (2004), pp. 73–86.
- Tebinka J., *British and Polish Intelligence Services in the 20th Century. Co-operation and Rivalry*, "Acta Poloniae Historica," 84 (2001), pp. 101–135.
- Tebinka J., *Brytyjska propaganda wobec Polski w latach 1947–1956*, in: *Media w PRL, PRL w mediach*, eds. M. Malinowski et al., Gdańsk–Warszawa 2004, pp. 65–96.
- Tebinka J., *Nadzieje i rozczarowania. Polityka Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski 1956–1970*, Warszawa 2005.
- Tebinka J., *Szczecin w polityce brytyjskiej w latach 1945–1970*, in: *Polska w podzielonym świecie po II wojnie światowej do 1989*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 2002, pp. 299–322.
- Tebinka J., Techman R., *Ostatni raport brytyjskiego wicekonsula w Szczecinie Henry'ego F. Bartletta o sytuacji w tym mieście (6 III 1951 r.)*, "Przegląd Zachodniopomorski," 15 (2000), no. 4, pp. 211–250.
- Wilford H., *The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed*, "Review of International Studies," 24, (1998), no. 3, pp. 353–369, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210598003532>.
- Wolsza T., *W „polskim” Londynie o ucieczce Stanisława Mikołajczyka z kraju*, "Dzieje Najnowsze," 28 (1996), no. 1, pp. 227–232.
- Zaćmiński A., *Emigracja polska w Wielkiej Brytanii wobec możliwości wybuchu III wojny światowej 1945–1954*, Bydgoszcz 2003.
- Zubok V., Pleshakov C., *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, London 1996.