will become better equipped to write balanced international histories of the Cold War in the Third World. If this monograph is evidence of current trends, it appears that the academic community is headed in the right direction.

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Reviewed by David Stafford, University of Edinburgh

Beginning in 1948 under Labour prime minister Clement Attlee, successive British governments financed a unit of the Foreign Office known as the Information Research Department (IRD) to wage covert propaganda against Communism. For almost thirty years the IRD was covertly subsidized from the budget of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and closely linked with both the SIS and the MI5 domestic security service. The IRD operated secretly around the world, using a network of newspapers, news agencies (including the British Broadcasting Corporation and Reuters), radio stations, publishing houses, and individual journalists and authors. Many of these organizations and individuals, but by no means all, were unwitting in their complicity. IRD’s activities took place on the domestic front, extended to the Middle East and Asia, and included specific covert operations in Greece, Malaya, Egypt, and Indonesia. IRD was born under one Labour foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, and it died under another, David Owen, who in 1977—in the midst of détente—declared that the organization had outlived its purpose.

Owen’s decision may have occurred for reasons other than détente. Rumors were spreading that the IRD had taken part in an intelligence campaign against the Labour Party. The possibility of a major scandal, with all the ammunition it would provide to Moscow, was acutely on Owen’s mind. Investigative journalists were already on the trail, and within months of IRD’s demise a series of articles in the British press, notably in the *Observer* and *Guardian*, revealed its former existence and mission. For a while the IRD was, perhaps understandably, a sensational headline.

Nowadays, however, the breathless and shocked tone that pervades *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War* seems out of place. After all, nearly 25 years have passed since the scandal broke, and more than a decade has elapsed since the Cold War ended. The alarmist tone of the book, combined with a plethora of misspellings and factual errors (which may or may not be the result of careless or non-existing editing), casts doubt on the authors’ credibility as historians. Often they seem to be no more than journalists seeking a controversial story. They should have avoided such spelling infelicities as *Soldatensender Calais* (the wartime British black propaganda station created by Sefton Delmer, whose correct title was *Soldatensender Calais*); they might have taken the trouble to get the correct name for Tom Braden of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency; they should have known that it was simply impossible for any IRD employees to witness the funeral of King George V from their offices on Carlton...
House Terrace along the Mall, since George V died thirteen years before IRD was created; and they most definitely should know the difference between “principal” as an adjective and “principle” as a noun. Because the IRD was founded in 1948, it would have been appropriate for the book to discuss the Berlin Blockade of that same year. This omission is undoubtedly due to the authors’ belief that Stalin was misunderstood and that the West was mainly to blame for the Cold War. Constant references to “the British state” suggest a conspiratorial mindset; but the text itself reveals that the IRD had many enemies in Whitehall and that no monolithic state existed.

Fortunately, there is enough of value and interest in the book to make it worthwhile. This is especially true of what the authors tell us about the IRD’s publishing activities. Lashmar and Oliver have contacted old IRD warriors and hunted down documents that reveal the rich and fascinating hidden connections between the worlds of journalism, academia, and intelligence. Although some of the findings are predictable, it is useful to have the links confirmed and to learn of unexpected names. Key clients of IRD at its height included such noted figures as the journalist and Soviet expert Victor Zorza, the writer Guy Wint, and other luminaries of the British press such as Donald McCormick, Elizabeth Monroe, and David Floyd. The authors have also benefited from the release of IRD files. As these reveal—and as many journalists have already trumpeted—George Orwell was one of IRD’s most powerful assets.

The book is also helpful in tracing continuities from the personnel and practices of British secret agencies during the Second World War, including the Political Warfare Executive and the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Even here, however, the depth of the authors’ historical knowledge is occasionally uncertain. They make much of the IRD policy toward Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s and claim that the organization played a major role in undermining the regime of President Sukarno and assisting the rise of General Suharto. But they curiously fail to note that Sir Andrew Gilchrist, the British ambassador in Jakarta at a critical moment during the operation, was an old SOE hand with considerable Asian experience.

In sum, parts of this book are very useful and convey much fascinating information. On the whole, however, the book is to be treated with caution—much like the often selective products of IRD itself.