

Wielding CBC's "Voice of Canada" as a weapon of Cold War propaganda

Throughout the Cold War, Canada's Department of External Affairs wielded the CBC's International Service (CBC-IS)¹ as a propaganda weapon in what it called "political warfare." The CBC-IS (aka "The Voice of Canada") was, Liberal Foreign Minister Lester Pearson boasted in 1951, "doing valuable work for Canada and playing a useful part in the psychological war against communism." As he explained to the House of Commons, this "psychological war" is "an important part of the total war against communism—the struggle or the battle for men's minds."²

As Canada's leading Cold Warrior, Pearson was key to orchestrating the psy-war operations of a top-secret interdepartmental group called the "Psychological Warfare Committee."³ Like others dedicated to fighting what he called the "total war against communism," Pearson's dream was not only to collaborate in the subversion, breakup and eventual destruction of the Soviet Union, he also wanted to rid the entire world (including Canada) of all communists.

Although planning for the CBC's international reach began in the late 1930s, not until 1942 did Prime Minister Mackenzie King issue an order-in-council to create it. Two years later, just as the Soviets were finishing the liberation of Eastern Europe, having forced the Nazi war machine back to Germany's borders, the CBC-IS began broadcasting. It was Christmas Day, 1944. From head offices in a former Montreal brothel,⁴ the CBC-IS began its military mission to beam messages in English and French to Canadian soldiers, and in German to Nazi troops. But with the Allied victory almost complete, CBC-IS broadcasts soon made an about-face. Canada's German-language transmissions quickly redirected their propaganda attacks against the citizens of East Germany, and communism across Eastern Europe became Canada's prime target.

The first language to be added to CBC-IS broadcasts was Czech. This began in 1946 because Czechoslovakia's communist party won that year's democratic election. To anticommunists around the world, the communists' election victory was an intolerable precedent to be nipped in the bud. Canada soon began a steady barrage of politically abusive Czech programming. Commenting on these broadcasts, an article in the Czechoslovak daily, *National Liberation* said "from Canada we hear nothing except large doses of anti-Soviet insults and a lot of slander against people's democracies." This harsh critique of Canadian propagand-



Cold War Canada went far beyond mere meddling in foreign politics to aiding and abetting US-led wars and coups that were camouflaged as missions for peace and democracy.

Propaganda was central.

As Foreign Minister Pearson said in 1951, **CBC International** was "playing a useful part in the psychological war against communism" and was "an important part of the total war against communism."

da was later quoted by CBC-IS director Ira Dilworth as proof that Canada was doing an excellent job fighting the global war against communism.⁵

In 1946, after four years at Canada's embassy in Washington, Pearson became the deputy minister of External Affairs and helped to oversee Canada's proUS, Cold War agenda. This included ramping up CBC-IS propaganda. After adding Czech broadcasts, CBC-IS began programming in Dutch and three Scandinavian languages, as well as in English to the Caribbean, and in Portuguese and Spanish to Latin America.

CBC broadcasts to "America's backyard" were in tune with US offensives assailing popular left-wing liberation movements. Besides using economic and propaganda weapons, the US pushed the West's twisted ideas of "freedom" and "democracy" by rigging elections, fomenting coups, waging counterinsurgency wars and launching invasions to install brutal, far-right dic-

tatorships. The US propped up its business-friendly client states, and their terrorist death squads, with money, military training, arms, diplomatic support and anti-Red propaganda.⁶ Blatant US interference in Latin American politics was replicated around the world and has continued to this day, with much support from NATO allies like Canada.

In early 1947, Pearson initiated a policy group to provide guidelines for the DEA's propaganda efforts. Canadian historian Gary Evans notes that according to these guidelines, the function of the Psychological Warfare Committee was

to undermine and disrupt by overt/covert means enemy morale and to 'sustain and foster the morale and spirit of resistance of our friends in enemy-occupied countries.'⁷

In 1948 the department increased Canada's propaganda war against its communist enemies. The impetus for this came in February, when massive rallies and strikes involving millions of people, supported Czechoslovakia's popularly elected communist government in an effort to consolidate its power. In March, Canadian Cold Warriors reacted to this "coup" by suggesting that the department "prepare recommendations ... to set up for wartime propaganda purposes."⁸ Pearson set up a special group to "report on the desirability and practicability of using the [CBC] International [Service] for political warfare."⁹ In April, he met with top department and CBC officials to escalate Canada's psychological war against "countries dominated by Communist regimes."¹⁰

By July, the department produced a detailed report outlining its strict lines of authority and control over CBC-IS propaganda. This report was couched in extremist, Cold War language that divided the planet into two opposing camps: the "active, free, civilised nations" of the capitalist world, and their archenemies, the "totalitarian regimes" of the socialist world. Ironically, the department's report concluded that it was important not to create "the impression in the minds of [CBC-IS] listeners that the service was an agency of propaganda,"¹¹ even though it was explicitly designed, organized and funded to fulfil that very purpose.

By 1950 the department had further tightened its grip on the CBC-IS. A declassified memo from undersecretary of state Arnold Heeney to CBC General Manager August Frigon detailed the department's "policy objectives." A key purpose of CBC-IS, he stated, was to "participate actively on behalf of Canada in the Cold War." This,