From the diary of the Head of the Press Department of the People's Commissariat on Foreign Affairs of the USSR, N.G. Palgunov, dated 5 October 1943

Secret

On 5 October, I received Ralph Parker[[1]](#footnote-1), the correspondent of London “Times” who has just come back from a trip to Britain. Parker spoke about the circumstances of his trip from London to Moscow, specified that a considerable part of the journey was by steamship and that its caravan once encountered a German submarine. It happened that instead of attacking the caravan the submarine itself was attacked by the caravan convoy vessels and that in the Mediterranean Sea the caravan was lucky to capture 2 Italian torpedo boats, etc. While in Britain Parker met with a large number of British and foreign politicians, visited defense industry factories, has been to our embassy several times, talked with Comrade Sobolev, Zinchenko, Rotshtein[[2]](#footnote-2), Rostovsky[[3]](#footnote-3) and others. Parker regretted that he did not manage to meet with Maysky in London, as they missed each other on the way[[4]](#footnote-4).

“Having come to the information ministry, - Parker said, - I have specified that I haven’t been to Britain for the last four years and that I would very much like if my compatriots considered me to be a kind of Soviet correspondent who, before coming back to the Soviet Union, would like to have an opportunity to accumulate material for comparison. I was shown several factories manufacturing military goods, which were very well organized. I can tell you a secret: according to my obsevations, the British workers are terribly tired, they want the war to end as soon as possible, they want the second front to be opened immediately, since the opening of the second front shall provide a quick end to the war. Without paltering, I can tell that expectations of the British people concerning the second front coincide with expectations of the Soviet people[[5]](#footnote-5). Interest in the Soviet Union in Britain is exceptionally strong. At the same time, very little is known about the Soviet Union in Britain. Repeatedly I met different people, delivered speeches on the radio, and at my performances I had to answer questions which seem absolutely ridiculous to us due to their naivety. For example, I got questions on what and how people eat in the Soviet Union, whether in the Soviet Union there exists early breakfast in the morning, whether people eat meat, whether Russians love their children and how children treat their parents, whether they have love for them, etc. It seems to me that Mr. Rostovsky, the head of your propaganda in London, is to a certain extent guilty of the fact that the British people are inclined not to recognize that Russians have elementary human feelings. Your propaganda in Britain seems to underline too much the heroism of Russian people. Each Russian is represented by this propaganda as a hero deprived of usual human feelings - love, tenderness to children, care for oneself, of own rest and education. Your propaganda presents only one side of Russian character - patriotism, utter devotion to the native land absorbing and eliminating all the other human feelings. I think that’s incorrect. Anyway, in my speeches and conversations I tried to demonstrate to the audience and interlocutors that Russians are usually normal, cultural people with good temper, strong will, and all that is humane may be found in them.

I come back to the Soviet Union at the time when the work of foreign correspondents is becoming especially difficult. Quite recently very little was required from foreign correspondents: they were required to write about the war situation and about the military efforts of the Soviet Union. Any information on these topics was guaranteed interest and success. Now our work shall be very difficult. Both the British political circles and the British readers are first of all concerned about political issues, issues of the post-war order, of mutual relations between the allies, etc. I do not want to say that due to this correspondents will have some difficulties with your censorship, I am thinking of something else: it will be difficult to get the necessary materials explaining the position of the Soviet establishment”.

In the end Parker said that he also met the archbishop of York[[6]](#footnote-6), who was coming back from the Soviet Union completely satisfied by the trip, and with Comrade Orestov[[7]](#footnote-7), TASS correspondent in Teheran, - “a young intelligent journalist”. “I regret a lot, - added Parker, - the departure of Mr. Umansky[[8]](#footnote-8) from the Soviet Union. Mr. Umansky invited me from time to time, talked to me and informed me about the general Soviet policy. Mr. Umansky did not intend our conversations for the press; they were for my general orientation. This strongly facilitated my work. I would like to have a similar source of the information in the absence of Mr. Umansky. I have some hope that Mr. Maisky will have me over from time to time. I was hinted about such a possibility in the Soviet embassy in London”.

I replied to Parker that I do not expect any great difficulties for foreign correspondents accredited in Moscow in receiving an explanation of Soviet Union foreign policy. Soviet Union policy is absolutely clear and consistent. There are no reasons to expect our censorship to be fault-finding with foreign correspondents in their explanation of foreign policy issues, since, as Parker acknowledged, our censors exhibited great tolerance on allowing military information and the correspondent’s commentary on it.

Before leaving Parker asked me whether the News Department will object if from time to time either he himself or his secretary will send articles to the magazine “Everybody” for publishing in London. This magazine has a circulation of 1/2 million copies and until recently was notorious for being as a pro-fascist publication. Lately, according to Rotshtein, a London TASS correspondent, it has sharply changed its direction.

I promised to answer later, since the magazine named by Parker is completely unknown to the News Department.

Saying goodbye, Parker remarked that at the American embassy any day they expect Harriman’s[[9]](#footnote-9) arrival and that general Faymonville[[10]](#footnote-10) is going to Teheran to meet with an American guest.

News Department manager

(N. Palgunov[[11]](#footnote-11))

05.10.43.

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1. Parker, Ralph (1907 - 1964) - British journalist and writer, Moscow war correspondent for the "The Times" (UK) and the "New York Times" (USA); "News Chronicle" correspondent in Moscow (1947-1948). He worked for the British and Soviet intelligence. In 1949 he decided to stay permanently in the USSR. Subsequently, he worked as a Moscow correspondent for Communist and left-wing Labour newspapers and magazines. Author of the book ‘The Plot against Peace’ (1949). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rothstein, Andrew (1898 - 1994) – A figure in the British communist movement; contributor for the Russian News Agency since 1924; contributor for the London branch of TASS during the war and an author of several books about the Soviet Union and the foreign policy of the United Kingdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rostov, Semyon Nikolaevich (1904 - 1990; pseudonym - Ernest Henry) - Soviet journalist and intelligence officer. He was in the UK since 1933 and during the war was a Sovinformburo representative, chief editor of War News Weekly (Weekly Soviet military news, since 1942). In 1951 he returned to the USSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Maisky was recalled to Moscow at the end of June 1943 "for consultations", and finally resigned as Soviet ambassador to Great Britain in September 1943, departing London on the 14th (Mayskiy I.M. Vospominaniya sovetskogo diplomata 1925 – 1945gg. M., 1971. p. 688). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Amid the fears and the reluctance of the British authorities to open a second front in Europe, Maisky was convinced that the public mood in the UK was "certainly in favour of active military support for the Soviet Union" (from a telegram dated 6 November 1941). This assessment repeatedly featured in his reports. See: Put’ k Velikoy Pobede. p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Garbett, Cyril (1875 - 1955) - Archbishop of York (1942-1955), the second senior person in the Church of England (after the Archbishop of Canterbury). His visit to the Soviet Union took place from 19 to 28 September 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Orestov, Oleg Leonidovich (1910 - 2003) - Soviet journalist and writer, TASS correspondent in Tehran during the war and later, the correspondent for "Pravda". Author of memoirs (Doroga dlinoyu v polveka, 1987) and a number of books and essays. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Umansky, Konstantin (1902 - 1945) - Soviet diplomat and journalist; Soviet ambassador to the United States (1939-1941); member of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat of the USSR (1941-1943) and Soviet Ambassador to Mexico (1943-1945). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Harriman, Averell (1891 - 1986) - American statesman and diplomat; US ambassador to the USSR (1943-1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Faymonville, Philip Ries (1888 – 1962) – U.S. Army Brigadier-General; head of the U.S. supply mission in the USSR (1941–1943). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Palgunov, Nicholas G. (1915 - 1993) - Soviet diplomat and journalist; head of the press department of the People's Commissariat of the USSR (1941-1944), and Head of TASS (1944-1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)