Cabinet memorandum by the Foreign Secretary, E. Bevin, outlining recommendations for future foreign publicity policy, 4 January 1948

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CABINET

FUTURE FOREIGN PUBLICITY POLICY

In my paper on “The First Aim of British Foreign Policy” (C.P. (48) 6) I have shown that the Russian and the Communist Allies are threatening the whole fabric of Western civilisation, and I have drawn attention to the need to mobilise spiritual forces, as well as material and political, for its defence. It is for us, as Europeans and as a Social Democratic Government, and not the Americans, to give the lead in spiritual, moral and political sphere to all the democratic elements in Western Europe which are anti-Communist and, at the same time, genuinely progressive and reformist, believing in freedom, planning and social justice – what one might call the “Third Force”. Equally in the Middle East and possibly in certain Far Eastern countries such as India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China, Communism will make headway unless a strong spiritual and moral lead on the above lines is given against it, and we are in a good position to give such a lead. In many countries of Western Europe the forces of Social Democracy will be the mainstay, but even in Western Europe and obviously in the Middle East and Far East our appeal could not be only to Social Democratic Parties.

Soviet propaganda has, since the end of the war, carried on in every sphere a vicious attack against the British Commonwealth and against Western democracy. Our publicity has hitherto been confined to supporting and explaining the current policy of His Majesty’s Government in foreign affairs and at home, to advocating our way of life, and publicising our social-democratic programme and achievements. Except in the Middle East, where we have allowed ourselves more latitude, our propaganda where Russia and Communism are concerned, has been non-provocative, and we have not attempted systematically to expose the myths of the Soviet paradise. Something far more positive is clearly now required. If we are to give a moral lead to the forces of anti-Communism in Europe and Asia, we must be prepared to pass over to the offensive and not leave the initiative to the enemy, but make them defend themselves.

*Recommendations*

1. We should adopt a new line in our foreign publicity designed to oppose the inroads of Communism, by taking the offensive against it, basing ourselves on the standpoint of the position and vital ideas of British Social Democracy and Western civilisation, and to give a lead to our friends abroad and help them in the anti-Communist struggle.

*Considerations*

Soviet propaganda has, since the end of the war, been directly hostile to this country, and for many months past has reverted to its old pre-war line of direct antagonism to Social Democracy. As my colleagues are aware, the Prime Minster and I, and other members of the Government, are often directly attacked. The propaganda of the Soviet satellites now, of course, follows exactly the same line, and is apparently to be coordinated by the Cominform. We can no longer submit passively to the Communist offensive; we must attack and expose Communism and offer something far better. What we have to offer in contrast to totalitarian Communism and laissez-faire capitalism, are the vital and progressive ideas of British Social Democracy and Western civilisation.

I suggest that the following are the principles which should guide our publicity: -

(a) We should advertise our principles are offering the best and most efficient way of life. We should attack, by comparison, the principles and practice of Communism, and also the inefficiency, social injustice, and moral weakness of unrestrained capitalism. We must not, however, attack or appear to be attacking any member of the Commonwealth or the United States.

(b) Our main target should be the broad masses of workers and peasants in Europe and the Middle East. We should, therefore, use the arguments most likely to appeal to them. First amongst these is the argument that, compared with Social Democratic countries, such as Britain, Sweden and New Zealand, the standard of life (wages, food, housing, &c.) for the ordinary people is extremely low in the Soviet Union, where “privilege for the few” is a growing phenomenon. Russia’s pretence to be a “Workers’ Paradise” is a gigantic hoax. We can fairly ask why the Communists, if life under Communist rule is so enviable, should shut themselves off so completely. Social Democracy on the other hand, gives higher living standards for the masses and protects them against privilege and exploitation, whether Capitalist or Communist.

(c) Equally important is that we should stress the civil liberties issue pointing to the many analogies between Hitlerite and Communist systems. We cannot hope successfully to repel Communism only by disparaging it on material grounds, and must add a positive appeal to Democratic and Christian principles, remembering the strength of Christian sentiment in Europe. We must put forward a positive rival ideology. We must stand on the broad principles of Social Democracy which, in fact, has its basis in the values of civil liberty and human rights. Examples should be given in order to show what the loss of civil liberties and human rights mean in practice. This is especially necessary in countries where the loss of these rights and liberties have never been experienced and therefore is not appreciated.

(d) We should represent Communism and the foreign policy of Communist countries as a hindrance to international cooperation and world peace. We should expose the immorality, militancy and destructiveness of Communist foreign policy and diplomatic methods, their manoeuvre to divide and impoverish Western European countries and to exploit their control of Europe’s main food-producing areas[[1]](#footnote-1). We should represent the satellite countries as “Russia’s new colonial empire” serving Russia’s strategic and economic interests at the cost of the freedom and living standards of the Eastern European peoples. The myth that the Russians never break treaties should be exposed, and Communism portrayed as the stalking-horse of Russian imperialism.

(e) Finally we should disseminate clear and cogent answers to Russian misrepresentations about Britain. We should not make the mistake of allowing ourselves to be drawn into concentrating our whole energy in dealing with those subjects which are selected for debate by Russian propaganda. On the other hand we must see to it that our friends in Europe and elsewhere are armed with the facts and the answers to Russian propaganda. If we do not provide this ammunition, they will not get it from any other source.

In general we should emphasise the weakness of Communism rather than its strength. Contemporary American propaganda, which stresses the strength and aggressiveness of Communism, tends to scare and unbalance the anti-Communists, while heartening the fellow-travellers and encouraging the Communists to bluff more extravagantly. Our propaganda, by dwelling on Russian’s poverty and backwardness, could be expected to relax rather than to raise the international tension.

We must not, of course, exaggerate the effects which can be produced by publicity alone. But I am convinced that in the interests of this country, the British Commonwealth and of our friends abroad, we must now take this more definitely anti-Communist line in our publicity. I ask for the active support and cooperation of my colleagues.

[TNA, CAB 129/23/8]

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1. Refers to Soviet control over Ukraine, Poland, Hungary and other countries that produced significant quantities of agricultural products. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)