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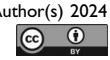
JCH

Journal of Contemporary History
2024, Vol. 59(4) 621–638



DOI: 10.1177/00220094241270988
journals.sagepub.com/home/jch


# Speaking Truth to a Foreign Power: Anti-Bolshevism and *Truth* in the Early Cold War, 1945–53

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**Abstract**

Analysis of the periodical press allows historians to further their understanding of the turn against the Soviet Union in the West after the Second World War, and delineate how anti-Bolshevism was constructed to repudiate wartime partnership between 1941 and 1945. Right-wing periodicals such as *Truth* were active proponents of opposition towards Communism in early Cold War Britain, articulating concerns about the perversion of democratic values and the threat to liberal societies. The nature of *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism was reactionary but also reflective, highlighting unease on the Right around the postwar consensus, Labour's domestic programme of state intervention in the planning and management of economic activity, and the general eclipse in Britain's international standing. *Truth*'s attempts to conflate the Communist threat with Labour's democratic socialism also frame the paper as an embryonic staging point in a wider chronology of neo-liberal challenges to the postwar political order. Anti-Bolshevism was therefore multifaceted and could speak to many different constituencies and agendas beyond a commentary on the actual basis of Soviet rule, Communist subversion, and the polarization of postwar Europe.

**Keywords**

anti-Bolshevism, Cold War, communism, periodical press, postwar consensus, Soviet Union

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Writing in *Truth* in January 1947, Sir Ernest Benn articulated the ostensibly contradictory elements of anti-Bolshevism that predominated in postwar Britain. 'The Russian myth', Benn wrote, that had developed around the Soviet Union's contribution to victory in the Second World War, was 'merely the figment of our own imagination'. Benn went further: 'Internally Russia is Hell'; its economic power 'negligible' in his words; its society wracked by purges and state-sanctioned terror, and its people driven 'in their millions to the slaughter'. By deprecating the Soviet Union's pretensions to global pre-eminence – its military preparedness was dismissed as 'impotent and incompetent' – Benn hoped to rally the 'supine Allies' toward a tougher stance against Stalin's regime.[1] Yet if Soviet Communism was characterized by chaos and instability, as Benn inferred, why did it pose such a grave challenge to the Western democracies? The answer, Benn also divulged, was because of the breadth of Soviet subversion, undermining Britain and its allies from within without the need for more direct confrontation. Benn's views represented *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism in microcosm: the Soviet regime was a sophisticated and malign threat determined to eradicate Britain's hard-won freedoms by stealth, but it was also easily disparaged with a domestic order that survived only on tyranny and subjugation.

As the range of Benn's criticisms demonstrate, anti-Bolshevism remains conceptually ambiguous, even more so in British conditions as compared to the 'Red Scare' of McCarthy-era America. In highlighting its construction in monolithic terms, Marc Selverstone has shown how international communism was portrayed as 'a highly coordinated, conspiratorial movement', with the Soviet Union acting as the epicentre of indiscriminate global agitation.[2] Elsewhere, I have suggested in respect of the 1930s that anti-Bolshevism was an expression of domestic concerns as much as attentiveness to the international situation or a specific indictment of Communism in Soviet conditions, and this article expands this thesis to Britain during the nascent Cold War.[3] In more intemperate cases, anti-Bolshevism could encompass 'othering' of the Soviet peoples alongside condemnation of Stalin's regime, or include a more programmatic aspect. Historians have been drawn to the propaganda operations of the Foreign Office's shadowy Information Research Department (IRD) for this latter reason.[4] Nevertheless, these works, and particularly those that paint the wider historical canvas beyond the IRD, are

1 *Truth*, 24 January 1947.

2 Marc Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain, and International Communism, 1945-1950* (Cambridge, Mass. 2009), 16.

3 See David Vessey, 'Anti-Bolshevism and the Periodical Press in Interwar Britain: The Case of the Saturday Review, 1933-36', *Historical Research*, 96, 271 (2023), 103–123.

4 See John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh 2006); Daniel W.B. Lomas, 'Labour Ministers, Intelligence and Domestic Anti-Communism, 1945-1951', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12, 2 (2013), 113–33; Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (London 2004); Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War* (Stroud 1998); Wesley K. Wark, 'Coming in from the Cold: British Propaganda and Red Army Defectors, 1945-1952', *International History Review*, 9, 1 (1987), 48–72; Richard J. Fletcher, 'British Propaganda since World War II: A Case Study', *Media, Culture and Society*, 4, 2 (1982), 97–109; Lyn Smith, 'Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department, 1947-77', *Millennium*, 9, 1 (1980), 67–83.

exceptions rather than indicators of a more established historiography on anti-Bolshevism in mid-twentieth-century Britain. If the existing scholarship is not quite the 'historiographical nonentity' identified by Jennifer Luff, it is certainly not far off.[5]

Literature on the media and the Cold War in a general context is slightly more abundant.[6] However, this study takes greater inspiration from the various works that have delineated the Cold War and media representations in a formative sense, demonstrating the media's role in articulating – or regretting – the East–West divide before the pattern of bipolarity became an established fact in the public consciousness.[7] The late 1940s, as Tony Shaw has explained, provided a window for the press to influence British policy and affirm the characteristics of anti-Bolshevism before ideological differences made meaningful dialogue 'insurmountable'.[8] Moreover, alongside cinema, and because of more 'deferential' radio coverage of foreign affairs, newspapers and periodicals retained their status as the primary indicators and formulators of popular opinion before the rise of television.[9] *Truth*'s writing on the Soviet Union, as Benn's call to arms shows, existed in this context: it was an active participant in dismantling the wartime consensus of Anglo-Soviet amity rather than a passive commentator on already settled international questions, even more so because of the dichotomy between understandings of foreign news and coverage of domestic affairs. As Kingsley Martin, titan of the periodical press as editor of the *New Statesman*, observed, ignorance about foreign news enabled a greater propaganda effect: 'About the world outside the frontiers of our own country few of us have any real knowledge at all. We cannot check the news, and therefore even though we may be sceptical of what we are told we remain open to suggestion'.[10]

Any appraisal of *Truth*'s qualities of 'suggestion' – more belligerent than guileful – is contingent on a wider understanding of the role of propaganda in shifting public opinion. The Second World War had made the task of inculcating anti-Bolshevism more challenging. As Philip Bell has shown, from the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, through to at least 1943, a pro-Soviet attitude predominated amongst the British public.[11] It was encouraged and channelled by the press; Stalin, for

5 Jennifer Luff, 'Labor Anticommunism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, 1920-49', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53, 1 (2018), 113.

6 See, for example, Brian McNair, *Images of the Enemy: Reporting the New Cold War* (London 1988); Peter Salisbury, 'Giles's Cold War: How Fleet Street's Favourite Cartoonist Saw the Conflict', *Media History*, 12, 2 (2006), 157–75; Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London 2006); Alban Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London 2014).

7 See Alan J. Foster, 'The Beaverbrook Press, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and the Coming of the Cold War: "Independent Conservatism" and Foreign Policy', *Media, Culture and Society*, 8, 1 (1986), 103–23; Tony Shaw, 'British Feature Films and the Early Cold War', in Gary D. Rawnsley (ed.), *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s* (Basingstoke 1999), 125–43.

8 Tony Shaw, 'The British Popular Press and the Early Cold War', *History*, 83 (1998), 66–85.

9 Ibid., 68. The close links between the BBC and the Foreign Office are chronicled in Alban Webb, '"Auntie Goes to War Again": The BBC External Services, the Foreign Office and the Early Cold War', *Media History*, 12, 2 (2006), 117–32, and Adam Adamthwaite, '"Nation Shall Speak unto Nation": The BBC's Response to Peace and Defence Issues, 1945-58', *Contemporary Record*, 7, 3 (1993), 557–77.

10 Kingsley Martin, *The Press the Public Wants* (London 1947), 78.

11 Philip Bell, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (London 1990).

example, was reframed as 'Uncle Joe', an affable distant relative that had seemingly emerged untainted by the discomforting reality of purges and repression in the 1930s.[12] Even news of the Katyn massacre (April 1943, albeit without full knowledge of Soviet culpability) and the Soviet response to the Warsaw Uprising (August 1944) did not fatally undermine popular support for Britain's wartime partner.[13] Yet the Anglo-Soviet alliance was built on unstable foundations, and the manipulation of public opinion had limits. As Bell observed, 'Pro-Soviet zeal was never boundless', and if vocal criticism was largely absent beyond the isolated grumbling of periodicals such as the *National Review*, there was no guarantee that Britons might not easily revert back to earlier attitudes of scepticism and antipathy towards the Soviet Union.[14] Moreover, interest in the Soviet war effort did not necessarily translate into support for Communism, providing a potential basis for postwar anti-Bolshevism as the Cold War developed.

Historical debate about the role of the IRD is instructive in this latter respect. In particular, Hugh Wilford's assertion that a Cold War anti-communist consensus was manufactured as much as it was a response to international events – notably the Soviet-backed Czechoslovakian coup in February 1948, and the blockade of West Berlin that began in June – is compelling.[15] Yet with the exception of Shaw's work on the popular press, research has thus far concentrated on the lead offered by the IRD from an institutional, top-down perspective, without evaluating the practical effects of its contacts with journalists, editors and proprietors in the media realm, or how newspapers and periodicals independently evolved their positions on the communist threat. Hence, this article uses *Truth* to redress this imbalance and look beyond the IRD: by focusing not on how the message was cultivated but rather on how it was actually presented, and thereby how the British public potentially absorbed anti-Bolshevism in the 1940s and early 1950s.

*Truth* had been founded by the Liberal politician Henry Labouchere in 1877 and continued in a radical tradition until the First World War. It could, as Kenneth Lunn has written, 'only be classified as an "independent" journal in the sense that it had no direct links with the Liberal party. … its Radical stance [was] quite obvious'.[16] This political outlook persisted despite more traditionally right-wing preoccupations such as anti-Semitism, particularly against the stereotype of Jewish moneylenders.[17] In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the paper moved rightwards in the inter-war period. It was purchased by Sir Joseph Ball, part of the Conservative Research Department, in 1936 via a front organization named the National Publicity Bureau (NPB). Funds were provided by Lord Luke, Bovril magnate and director of Lloyd's

12 See Claire Knight, 'The Making of the Soviet Ally in British Wartime Popular Press', *Journalism Studies*, 14, 4 (2013), 476–90.
13 Bell, *John Bull*, 126–54.
14 Ibid., 105; Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945* (London 1992), 349.
15 Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24, 3 (1998), 369.
16 Kenneth Lunn, 'The Marconi Scandal and Related Aspects of British Anti-Semitism, 1911-1914', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield (1978), 157.
17 Ibid., 317–9.

Bank and the *Daily Express*.[18] *Truth*'s *raison d'etre* became support for Neville Chamberlain's premiership and particularly his foreign policy, remaining fervently loyal even after the failure of appeasement and the outbreak of war. With Chamberlain's fall from office, however, *Truth* entered into a new phase in its history.

In the autumn of 1940, editorial control of *Truth* passed to Collin Brooks. Agreement was reached with Ball in October with Brooks' tenure beginning on 11 November 1940.[19] He had a long career in the mainstream press, editing the *Sunday Dispatch*, becoming a confidant of Lord Rothermere (he was appointed literary legatee of Rothermere's estate upon his death), and writing for other periodicals such as the *Saturday Review* under the pseudonym 'Historicus'. Brooks had largely escaped repudiation for his flirtation with fascism as 'Historicus', and whilst he gradually moved more towards mainstream Conservatism, he was clear in conversations with Ball that 'You are quite sure you know what you'd get with me – a Right Wing Tory policy hammered hard'.[20] This, Ball must have understood, meant denunciation of the Soviet Union once peacetime normality made it feasible to do so. By September 1944, Brooks had hired former British Union of Fascists member and *Blackshirt* editor, A.K. Chesterton, as his editorial assistant, confiding that a number of 'big industrialists' desired 'to support a strong nationalist movement with the object of opposing the spread of socialism and communism'.[21] The 'movement' eventually took the name of the After-Victory Group, in turn becoming the short-lived National Front with Chesterton succeeding Brooks as its head.

It was in *Truth* that this opposition to socialism, communism and the Soviet Union was distilled most effectively. This began in controversial terms during the war itself. In two Commons debates in October 1941, the paper was attacked for its opposition to Britain's wartime allies. Labour MP, Josiah Wedgwood, urged the government to proscribe *Truth* since its views were 'those of the British Union of Fascists, and contain sneers at America and Russia'.[22] Wedgwood subsequently labelled the paper a 'public danger', arguing that it was 'pro-Fascist, it is anti-Semite, it is pro-peace, it is anti-Churchill, it is anti-American, it is pro-German, and it is now anti-Russian'.[23] After this episode, Ball's NPB shares were transferred to Brooks, masking the involvement of the Conservative Party, and giving him a controlling interest in the paper's management.[24] He continued to benefit from the financial support of Lord Luke as well as that of Lord Queenborough, a Conservative peer with prior fascist sympathies, who collectively invested £17,000 in the period 1939–46 to subsidize the paper.[25]

Despite the disputatious character of *Truth*'s ownership history and editorial team, its importance in the broader scope of the periodical press was accepted in the contemporary

18 R.B. Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*', *The Historical Journal*, 33, 1 (1990), 134.
19 N.J. Crowson (ed.), *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics: The Journals of Collin Brooks, 1932-1940* (Cambridge 1998), 9.
20 '22 October 1940', in Crowson, *Fleet Street*, 276.
21 Graham Macklin, *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right* (London 2020), 183.
22 HC Deb. (5th series), 9 October 1941, vol. 374, col. 1108.
23 HC Deb. (5th series), 15 October 1941, vol. 374, col. 1455.
24 W.E.B. (Viscount) Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* (London 1947), 152.
25 *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947-1949* (London 1949), 227.

record; indeed, in relative terms it was endowed with a degree of respectability that belied its radical, right-wing characteristics. The first Royal Commission on the Press (1947–49) bracketed *Truth* alongside the *Economist*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, the *Spectator*, *Time and Tide*, and *Tribune* as 'the weekly journals of opinion which, in providing a forum for the informed discussion of political affairs, are in some respects the successors of the highly political newspapers of the last century'.[26] The Commission's findings confounded assumptions about the demise of the periodical press due to competition from popular daily newspapers, noting that 'Pre-war figures for two of the principal weekly journals of opinion [including *Truth*] are not available, but the circulation of the remaining four was 174.5 per cent. higher in 1947 than in 1937'.[27]

In his own postwar survey, *The Press the Public Wants*, Kingsley Martin claimed to detect 'an ever widening demand … for news and comment which is independent of the control of the great proprietors who own most of the daily papers'.[28] He went further; *Truth*, along with other 'weekly journals of opinion', possessed 'an influence out of all proportion to their circulations'. Cumulatively, Martin claimed that sales did not exceed 200,000 each week, a fraction of the reach of the leading daily newspapers, but such journals were disproportionately read by 'that minority which still, as a rule, controls the destinies of this country'.[29] *Truth*, Claire Hirshfield has observed, could be found 'in respectable clubs, libraries and bookshops', and retained prominent commercial partners such as Ford and Ovaltine despite its anti-Semitism and often belligerent anti-Bolshevism.[30]

This fusion of respectability and reactionism allows *Truth* to be repositioned within the media landscape of mid-twentieth-century Britain, and within a broader teleology of neo-liberalism and conservative political thought.[31] This should not be over-exaggerated – *Truth* only parenthetically endorsed the ideas of Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), nor was it Thatcherite before Thatcher – but it did echo and amplify Hayek's concerns about the depth of state intervention in postwar, Beveridge-inspired Britain.[32] The ostensible accommodation of mainstream Conservatism with the postwar consensus meant, as this article contends, that *Truth*'s importance has been under-appreciated, occupying a liminal space between the 'respectable' and 'radical' Right because of its historical reputation, and acting as a redoubt for the maintenance of ideas and the general milieu that had held sway in conservative thought and experience throughout the 1930s. As E.H.H. Green has claimed, the 1930s were arguably just as important to 'the Thatcherite schema' as the Victorian era,

26 Ibid., 13.
27 Ibid., 81.
28 Martin, *The Press*, preface.
29 Ibid., 54.
30 Claire Hirshfield, 'The Tenacity of a Tradition: *Truth* and the Jews 1877-1957', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 28, 3–4 (1994), 74–85.
31 For the evolution of neo-liberalism in British conditions, see Ben Jackson, 'Currents of Neo-Liberalism: British Political Ideologies and the New Right, c. 1955–1979', *English Historical Review*, 131 (2016), 823–50.
32 For example, the argument of Conservative MP, J.R. Bevins, that 'the political revolution' in the expansion of state power had vindicated Hayek's thesis: *Truth*, 29 June 1951.

and *Truth* had a small part to play in preserving the memory of inter-war political orthodoxy against the Keynesian challenge.[33] In this context, anti-Bolshevism operated analogously – almost surreptitiously – by connecting the democratic socialism of Clement Attlee's Labour government with the creeping threat presented by the Soviet Union.

The terminology used by the article is deliberately specific to the Soviet context. Anti-Bolshevism denotes a fear and animus towards *Soviet Communism* as distinct from other communist regimes that had proliferated by the late 1940s, notably that of Josip Tito in Yugoslavia, the various satellite regimes set up in Eastern Europe under Soviet authority, and the increasing control of Mao's communist forces in China (in power by 1949). It also differentiates criticisms of the Soviet Union from that of home-grown communism. The two were often linked in the popular consciousness – the Communist Party of Great Britain as compliant servants of their Moscow masters – but keeping the two separate helps to delineate the various characteristics that were particular to indictments of Bolshevik rule. Doing so also separates condemnation of the regime from the wider Soviet citizenry. *Truth*, in common with the wider press, often struggled to maintain the distinction, but attempting to do so allowed the Soviet peoples to be redeemable if only they could be freed from the shackles of Bolshevik rule.

To date, the dedicated scholarship on *Truth* lacks a sustained analysis of its journalism and output under Colin Brooks' ownership, akin to R.B. Cockett's brief sketch of the paper under Sir Joseph Ball's influence and Chamberlainite position, or Hirshfield's more sweeping and justifiably excoriating study of anti-Semitism.[34] Broader works by Graham Macklin and Luke LeCras, which concentrate on the fascist affiliations and prejudices of Brooks and Chesterton, and in which coverage of *Truth* is largely incidental, neglect the content of the publication itself in charting the pair's extreme views.[35] Though by no means intentional (their studies are not primarily situated in the historiography of British media forms), this has the effect of relegating *Truth* to a conspiratorial fringe of the periodical press, thereby potentially marginalizing its representative significance. *Truth* was as capable of legitimizing and amplifying latent anti-Soviet prejudice as its pre-war antecedents in the periodical press, and it remained enduringly relevant on this basis.

Indeed, as Cockett has previously established, anti-Bolshevism had long been the 'dominating creed' of *Truth*.[36] This preceded the takeover by Brooks, but thereafter the character of *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism became multifaceted, acting as more than just a pretext for a pro-Chamberlain purpose. Like the *Saturday Review* in the 1930s, there was an intellectual incongruence to *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism.[37] Yet in *Truth*'s case, it

33 E.H.H. Green 'Thatcherism: An Historical Perspective', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1999), 20.

34 Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*'; Hirshfield, 'The Tenacity'.

35 Macklin, *Failed Führers*; Luke LeCras, *A.K. Chesterton and the Evolution of Britain's Extreme Right, 1933-1973* (London 2020).

36 Cockett, 'Ball, Chamberlain and *Truth*', 140.

37 Vessey, 'Anti–Bolshevism', 106–107. The divergent strands of British anti-Bolshevist propaganda were also reflected in Cabinet discussions: see Elisabeth Barker, *The British between the Superpowers, 1945-50* (London 1983), 105.

might be suggested that this fundamental paradox – more apparent the deeper one read – mattered less than tone and continuity in editorial messaging, both of which were consistently hostile towards the Soviet Union. The immediate postwar period was marked by an attempt to make sense of the emerging Cold War divide, but thereafter, *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism settled into distinct strands. These included: conspiracy theories about the depth and effectiveness of Soviet subversion; commentary on internal instabilities in the Soviet Union, extending to 'othering' of the Soviet population; and domestic unease, where anti-Bolshevism was inverted to decry the postwar settlement, and to delegitimize democratic socialism by conflating Labour's programme with Stalinism. In tracing these strands, this article contends that *Truth* showcased the wider nature of anti-Bolshevism in postwar Britain, and demonstrates the media's role in overturning the brief wartime interlude of Anglo-Soviet rapprochement within a wider chronology of opposition and animosity towards the Soviet project.

*Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism was readily identifiable in its coverage of international affairs in the 1930s, but it lacked the intensity that characterized the paper's approach under Brooks' management. It was often reactionary, but to no defined purpose other than to reinforce innate notions of British supremacy. In January 1933, for example, an article that otherwise effectively highlighted the plight of the Soviet peasantry during the famine of 1932–33, still dismissed them as 'a primitive people half-emerged from feudalism'.[38] This admixture of sympathy and superiority persisted in commentary on subsequent episodes, notably the assassination of Sergei Kirov in December 1934, which marked the symbolic start of Stalin's 'Great Terror'. 'Plain Dealer' wrote in *Truth* that 'Russians are terribly backward and terribly long suffering', before taking solace – complacently so – in the belief that Britain's democratic ethos provided a natural barrier to the appeal of dictatorships, whether communist or fascist.[39] At this stage, *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism cannot be straightforwardly constructed as an instinctive counter-reflex against insecurities about Britain's domestic order and international standing.

The effects of the war and the paper's change in ownership transformed the nature of *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism, though this was initially a tentative process. Making sense of Cold War bipolarity, as well as a residue of popular Sovietophilia, led to a degree of restraint in the paper's coverage of the Soviet Union. Yet it did not inhibit the paper's efforts to shake the British people from their alleged indifference about Britain's place in the postwar world. In an article from March 1945 entitled 'Whither Britain?', *Truth* attacked the 'large numbers of our people [who] are preparing to meet the menace of the future by splitting our national unity from top to bottom, by again throwing away the arms which have preserved us'. The Soviet Union, in contrast, inspired a degree of grudging admiration amidst a veiled warning about its postwar intentions:

> Russia, too, harbours no doubt about her own place in the sun, and since her colossal feats of arms have been due, not to her clumsily over-centralized system, but to her superb national

38 *Truth*, 18 January 1933.
39 *Truth*, 2 January 1935.

> leadership and the dynamic force of her national spirit, we may be quite certain that she will apply only one test to every postwar problem, and that will be its effect upon the national interests of the Russian people.[40]

Britons, in other words, rather than objects of assumed indefatigability, needed saving from themselves and their appeasing tendencies.

Government concerns about this mindset – what we might identify as fatigue with international affairs – as well as about the endurance of wartime pro-Soviet sentiment, led to Cabinet approval for the IRD (originally named the Communist Information Department) in January 1948. Yet *Truth* had been actively formulating its anti-Bolshevist message for some years by this point. Just weeks after VE Day, the paper attacked the Soviet Union's grasp on eastern Europe. Comparing its methods to those of the defeated Axis powers, the Soviet Union – named obliquely as an 'Ally', a concession to extant wartime partnership – was condemned for its 'wrong' and 'menacing' actions.[41] Writing in the same issue, Sir Ernest Benn reinforced this view. He had achieved his wealth in the Benn Brothers family publishing firm and used it to disseminate 'neo-fascist' views from 1942 onwards, including by printing a newsletter – *The Statist* – that was censured in parliamentary debates as 'a subversive organ'.[42] At this stage, Benn's anti-Bolshevism was informed by an eclectic combination of classical liberalism – his column was occasionally titled 'Murmurings of an Individualist' – that necessitated a defence of the traditional international order, and conspiratorial paranoia about the Soviet Union's ambitions. A superficial starting position of friendship – 'The middle of the slaughter was not the moment to raise questions' – gave way in the article to repudiation of Stalin's regime: 'The Kremlin is a mixture of the tortuous mentality of an Asiatic, the ruthlessness of a Borgia and the intellectual perversion of a Machiavelli, to which has been added a coating of modern science and organising genius – the whole giving to the conception of power politics an original and very disturbing terror.' Soviet propaganda, he believed, pervaded Britain's towns and villages, and the country needed to fight back against a 'surfeit of Sovietism'.[43]

*Truth* could also be more pragmatic in its coverage of the Soviet Union, an acknowledgement of Cold War realities, as well as the fact that anti-Bolshevism did not entail a corresponding enthusiasm for American ascendancy. Anticipating the 'third force' proposals of Labour's *Keep Left* group, the paper wondered in November 1945 whether there was 'a certain safety in Russia's present strength? Between Russian behaviour in Eastern Europe and American behaviour in Eastern Asia lies a difference only in degree, not in kind'. Britain had to find its own 'breathing space' between the two superpowers.[44] Anti-Bolshevism was therefore initially adaptable in *Truth*'s case; it became

40 *Truth*, 30 March 1945.
41 *Truth*, 25 May 1945.
42 Hirshfield, 'The Tenacity', 79.
43 *Truth*, 25 May 1945.
44 *Truth*, 16 November 1945.

more dogmatically rigid, however, as the alienation of the Soviet Union from its former allies became more established in late-1945 and early 1946.

One comfortably reassuring aspect of anti-Bolshevism, not least became it distracted from Britain's own domestic hardships after the war, was the denigration of living conditions in the Soviet Union. This was promoted despite strict controls on information about life behind the Iron Curtain, especially in comparison with the inter-war period.[45] One columnist, Donovan Touche, part of the family accountancy business that would later merge with Deloitte, thought that the war had caused Soviet soldiers to be 'filled with naïve astonishment at the most elementary gadgets of civilised life'. Touche's report held out the hope that the Communist order would collapse under the weight of its own iniquities. 'The Russian people', he claimed, 'have been taught to believe that they were much better off than the wretched proletariat in capitalist countries, who were supposed to live in chronic unemployment and poverty. The facts, if known to the Russians, would make the Communist case look ridiculous and undermine belief in the entire system'.[46]

This confidence in the ultimate weaknesses of Communism occasionally led *Truth* to resile from Britain's foreign policy consensus. Perhaps surprisingly, in the midst of the Berlin Blockade, and the Anglo-American effort to airlift supplies to the beleaguered population of West Berlin in 1948–49, *Truth* supported Britain's withdrawal, believing that 'There is no administrative purpose to be served by staying in that ill-starred city, and a gain in prestige must surely result from the ending of the indignities which we now endure there'. Instead, the Allies had merely to wait for the Soviet experiment to fail: 'Once the stranglehold is broken we can mount guard at the frontiers, withhold all cooperation, and silently wait for the whole monstrous Soviet system to die of its own vast incompetence and bulk'.[47] The article was entitled 'The Way to Deal with Russia', and saw no contradiction in terms between a more belligerent attitude towards the Soviet Union and abandoning Germany's capital to the Communist Bloc.

More commonly, however, critiques of the Soviet regime were splenetic in nature, outpourings of rage against the various tenets of Communist rule. Chesterton, for example, epitomized this resentment in a piece on the immorality of the Soviet state, ending it by dismissing Stalin as a 'swart, dumpy blackguard'.[48] In Chesterton's case, there could be no complacency against the Soviet threat. In July 1951, he used a review of Edward Crankshaw's *Russia by Daylight* to criticize the book for undermining a sense of the Soviet Union as a powerful adversary that demanded a trenchant response from Britain and the West. Crankshaw had been attached to the British Military Mission to the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1943, and returned as the *Observer*'s correspondent for Russian and East European affairs in 1947. The book, whilst co-opting a sense of scientific precision, was a rather rambling attempt to demystify the character and

45 See David Vessey, 'First-hand Accounts? Walter Duranty, William Henry Chamberlin and Eugene Lyons as Moscow Correspondents in the 1930s', *Journalism Studies*, 24, 2 (2023), 209–225.
46 *Truth*, 16 August 1946.
47 *Truth*, 10 September 1948.
48 *Truth*, 21 May 1948.

intentions of the Bolshevik regime. The internal struggle between ruled and rulers, Crankshaw thought, was 'hopelessly at odds with the conception of a modern, closely-organised and industrialised state'.[49] His grave mistake, argued Chesterton in response, was to portray 'Stalin as a colossal dolt who has brought himself and his regime to the verge of ruin'.[50] Unlike some of *Truth*'s other correspondents, there could be no inadvertent concession to a less vigilant attitude that attenuated the existential threat posed by the Soviet Union.

There was a degree of logic in Chesterton's mindset since it allowed Communist subversion abroad to be intellectually underpinned by a more permanent and indomitable Soviet world order. This construction of Soviet power ran alongside confident assessments of Communism's inherent weaknesses. Touche, for example, concurrent with his prediction of imminent collapse, still saw the Soviet Union as 'the greatest power for organised evil the world has ever known'. The British Empire was particularly vulnerable; Touche believed 'Moscow is working overtime' for its destruction by encouraging sedition via radio propaganda.[51] Likewise, Benn, while debunking 'The Russian myth', also detected a 'world-wide plot' to redirect its economic activity into external espionage:

> Russian export and import business is reserved to the State; timber, oil and other products are commandeered from a slave people and exported in exchange for pounds, dollars, or any foreign currency; some of this money is used to buy machinery for farcical industrial developments, but the greater part is spent by the Soviet's diplomats abroad in stirring up trouble in other countries.[52]

According to Benn, one tangible manifestation of Communist destabilization was in the rise of industrial action against British interests: 'Decent people are inclined to imagine that if a man forgoes his wage there must be substance in his grievance; they have not yet been willing to believe that, in Britain, the well-paid, highly organised revolutionary forces such as regularly operate in less happy lands can enjoy a real existence that matters very much'.[53] No direct evidence was offered – indeed, the number of days lost to strikes had not spiked in 1946–47, and was actually lower than the final two years of the war – but the sensationalist aspects of the accusation served *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism just as usefully as a more well-founded argument.[54]

Chesterton's version of Benn's plot was more venomous. Using the situation in the Middle East as a pretext, he interwove conspiratorial anti-Bolshevism with his anti-Semitic beliefs:

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49 Edward Crankshaw, *Russia by Daylight* (London 1951), 131.
50 *Truth*, 27 July 1951.
51 *Truth*, 15 November 1946.
52 *Truth*, 24 January 1947.
53 *Truth*, 24 January 1947.
54 Office for National Statistics (2015), *The History of Strikes in the UK*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/thehistoryofstrikesintheuk/2015-09-21 (accessed 28 September 2023).

> The Jewish campaign of murder and defamation against Britain has not been because we refused to do anything for Jewry but because we have only done nine-tenths of what that exacting race required from us. … As the Jews would scarcely claim to be the most universally loved of peoples is it not strange that their power over, or influence with, the Governments of the world should be so great? Indeed, the fact that both Washington and Moscow … should unite in supporting the Jews in their struggle to seize an Arab land is one of the most curious happenings of our time.[55]

'New York financiers' were said to be behind both the downfall of the Tsar and the rise of the Bolsheviks; supporting the migration of Jews from the Eastern Bloc to the Middle East was merely *quid pro quo* for these earlier debts. By the end of the article, the scope of Chesterton's theory was limitless: 'The issue is not fundamentally one between Capitalism and Communism, between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. It is not even locally an issue between Jews and Arabs. What is being sought is power – power over the whole world. Capitalism, Communism, Zionism are all means to this end'.[56] There is no doubt that Chesterton saw the fusion of anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism as entirely compelling, but the Communist component was a convenient addition, reinvigorating long-held prejudices. Indeed, Chesterton's theory was unquestionably inspired by *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* despite the text being exposed as a fabrication by *The Times* in 1921.[57] This sleight of hand – devaluing anti-Bolshevism by appending it to a more sweeping sense of grievance – also risked making *Truth*'s warnings against the Soviet threat seem remote, ethereal and largely unrecognizable to British readers and their quotidian preoccupations.

More local and immediate were stories that propounded the presence of Communist fifth columns operating in Britain. A review of Freda Utley's memoir, *Lost Illusion*, for example, found solace in the inefficiency of Bolshevism (which was not wholly in alignment with Utley's account), but cautioned against the 'insidious infiltration by treacherous fifth columns directed by degenerate "intellectuals"'.[58] The threat, as *Truth* described it, was both overt in the sense that Soviet espionage was said to be centred on 'embassies, legations and consulates', but also covert as their real purpose had been disguised. Solutions varied in their extremity and credibility. Benn supported breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, dismissing the economic value of Anglo-Soviet trade.[59] 'P.B.' was more interventionist, arguing that anything with a connection to the Soviet Union should be proscribed, blurring the distinction between British communism and Soviet diplomatic representatives.[60] Meanwhile Chesterton – by 1951 obscuring his identity behind his initials – was simply indignant, describing the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain as 'mere creatures of the Soviet Union,

55 *Truth*, 4 February 1949.
56 *Truth*, 4 February 1949.
57 *The Times*, 16–18 August 1921.
58 *Truth*, 8 July 1949.
59 *Truth*, 26 March 1948.
60 *Truth*, 28 October 1949.

without mind, without will, without soul'.[61] British 'sovereignty', by which Chesterton meant independence of spirit and purpose, had to be reasserted at all costs.

What made Chesterton's argument even more urgent was the sense that British 'sovereignty', or an idealized version of it, had been surrendered since the end of the war. In this respect, *Truth* used anti-Bolshevism to pass comment on democratic socialism in British conditions, lamenting the postwar consensus around state intervention, and hinting that Labour's approach was teleological, with Communism as the intended destination. Touche's writing was archetypal in this respect. He had previously produced a pamphlet entitled *Britain's Lost Victory*, which suggests a degree of dissatisfaction with the postwar settlement, and foreshadowed the ideas and tone of Correlli Barnett's historiographical thesis (though Touche is not cited in *Lost Victory*). Britain's wartime pro-Soviet stance, Touche believed, was caused by 'pandering to the Left', had promoted class sectionalism, and had left the country unable to reunite against the expansion of communism in eastern and central Europe.[62] Touche subsequently invoked the spirit of *Guilty Men* to indict Attlee's foreign policy, claiming that the government was 'convicted as the gratuitous appeasers of Russia at a time when Britain was still armed to the teeth'.[63]

Chesterton, too, accused the government of complacency. Through 'a long succession of errors', not least the misapprehension that a social democratic administration might receive more goodwill from Stalin, Labour had failed to rouse the population to a tougher stance against Soviet aggression.[64] *Keep Left*'s 'third force' alternative was also derided for the naïve belief, in early 1950, that Cold War bipolarity could be ameliorated by Britain acting as an independent honest broker.[65] Other commentators detected something more insidious in the government's actions. In one example entitled 'The Red Death', Commander Hyde C. Burton likened Communism to the bubonic plague, inflicting havoc on contemporary Europe just as *yersinia pestis* had once devastated the medieval world. Attlee and his fellow ministers had allowed the 'infection' of Communism to take hold through their complacency, and had presided over 'a deterioration of the spirit and of a decadence of national fibre':

> It is not too much to say that, whatever their protestations, they are near-Communists, who in seeking to promote State ownership of all economic resources are determined at whatever cost to deprive the individual of his independence and make him the helot of the State. That *is* Communism – its accomplishment will mean the death of England.[66]

Burton was a regular contributor to journals associated with the radical Right, and a particular critic of the perceived surrender of the Conservatives to the postwar consensus

61 *Truth*, 5 January 1951.
62 *Truth*, 19 July 1946.
63 *Truth*, 3 April 1948.
64 *Truth*, 21 May 1948.
65 *Truth*, 27 January 1950.
66 *Truth*, 1 September 1950.

around state intervention.[67] *Truth*'s readership was clearly influenced by Burton's explicit conflation of Labour's domestic programme with Bolshevism. One letter writer argued that 'tyranny in Russia is the logical outcome of the completely socialised State'; Labour's approach was 'a half-way house' towards Britain's own surrender to Communist rule.[68]

The apogee of *Truth*'s construction of anti-Bolshevism as a commentary on Labour's postwar settlement occurred in a four-part series written by Benn in July and August 1949. 'The Russian Bogy' even carried a disclaimer that 'All the views expressed by the writer are not necessarily those of TRUTH', though they were entirely consistent with the arguments of the paper's other correspondents. As well as characterizing Labour as a precursor to Communism, Benn's series drew together the various strands of the paper's anti-Bolshevist rhetoric: subversive conspiracy, ridicule of Bolshevist rule and 'othering' of the Soviet population. 'Socialists', Benn mocked in the first article, could never make up their minds about how the Soviet experiment should be depicted: 'At one moment Russia is a paradise with which to persuade the unsuspecting worker to renounce the means to progress known as Capitalism, and, later in the game, becomes a menace threatening the very existence of the delights modelled on the Russian pattern'.[69] He even compared Labour to Hitler's Germany in using Bolshevism as an external distraction to bolster support for Britain's failing domestic reforms.

The second article was more directly pernicious in its survey of the Russian people. Progress and civilization, Benn thought, 'owes little to Russia': 'Her contribution to statesmanship is negligible; a list of the great figures of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, men who have left their mark upon political thought and philosophy, would be complete enough if no single Russian name were included'. Without the rigid control of the Bolshevik state, the Russian people would revert to 'primitive barbarism'. There was also nothing for the West to fear from the Soviet Union's armed forces; it was 'nonsense' to accede to its great power pretensions when 'Russian impotence' and reliance on Allied aid had characterized the Red Army's war record.[70]

All of this informed Benn's proposals for British policy in the Cold War environment. In effect, he advocated the 'containment' strategy espoused by George Kennan's 'long telegram' dated 22 February 1946. In Benn's analogy, rather than 'appeasement', 'estrangement' should be Britain's preferred approach, though his case was based less on geopolitical considerations and more on the alleged backwardness of the Bolshevik regime. The indifference of the suggestion 'we will go *our* way, enjoy our own life and leave you to go yours' was tempered by confidence that the Soviet 'road [led] back to the Dark Ages'. Moreover, Benn was embittered that Labour appeared to be travelling on the same road 'to the destruction of the British way of life. … We are heading straight for the very evils against which we are busy piling up the materials of war'.[71] A

67 Mark Pitchford, *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right, 1945-75* (Manchester 2011), 99.
68 *Truth*, 9 February 1951.
69 *Truth*, 22 July 1949.
70 *Truth*, 29 July 1949.
71 *Truth*, 5 August 1949.

planned economy, nationalized industries, and state investment – particular targets of subsequent neo-liberal attacks on the postwar consensus – were all repudiated. Britain had a choice: break off diplomatic relations with Stalin's regime or see the fabric of its national life unpicked by a Communist fifth column intent on fomenting 'trouble anywhere'.[72]

If there was a practical dimension to *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism, it was perhaps best captured by its enthusiasm for the arguments proposed by Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, the renowned veteran of armoured warfare during the First World War. *Truth* acclaimed his article *How to Defeat Russia* and endorsed his 6-point plan for the Western powers:

1. That all Russian activities within the Western nations be suppressed; we are at war, and peacetime liberties are out of place.
2. That the Communist Manifesto be challenged by a Western Charter, setting forth what Western nations believe in.
3. That once it is published, its principles be lived up to by the Western nations.
4. That a central organ of information and propaganda be created, the object of which is to eradicate the Russian cult and to keep alive the Western spirit in all countries occupied by Russia.
5. That resistance movements within the occupied countries and Russia be stimulated by every means.
6. That out of these movements, secret, potential forces be organized, which in the event of war will play havoc with the Russian communications.[73]

Fuller's ideas were not significantly beyond the diplomatic and intelligence manoeuvres actually undertaken by Britain and its allies during the early Cold War, but *Truth* characteristically went a stage further, particularly in response to Fuller's first point: the suppression of subversive activity by Soviet agents. '[T]raitorous criminals who wage political and economic warfare against their own land and against their own people' needed to be identified and, where appropriate – and *Truth* certainly thought it proportionate – eliminated.[74]

It would be a mistake to see this response, as with the writing of Benn, Chesterton and *Truth* more generally, as the inchoate ramblings of disaffected agitators. Postwar surveys of popular opinion eventually highlighted a turn against the Soviet Union and showed that the same anti-Bolshevist tropes found purchase in the minds of many British people. Opinion polls by the British Institute of Public Opinion tell part of the story: in April 1948, 62 per cent of respondents thought that the government's policy towards the Soviet Union was not firm enough.[75] The question was periodically repeated until October 1950, and a majority of Britons always supported a tougher stance.

72 *Truth*, 12 August 1949.
73 *Truth*, 2 February 1951.
74 Ibid.
75 'April 1948: Russia', in George Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-1975 – Vol. 1: 1937–1964* (New York, 1976), 173.

Similarly, Mass-Observation surveys detected a hardening of attitudes and a susceptibility to anti-Bolshevist arguments. As one woman put it in March 1948, 'I suppose I'm reacting to propaganda. I'm beginning to dislike Russia'. While residual wartime Sovietophilia persisted longer than is often credited, comments such as 'They're just trouble makers and get away with it', and 'I think it's time we drew the line with Russia', became more typical as the Cold War developed.[76]

*Truth* played a consequential part in encouraging the British people in this more hostile direction, but in one respect it was pushing against a closed door. From the time of the Winter War in 1939–40, the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland, survey respondents had consistently doubted the one-sidedness of news about the Soviet threat. In one of his summaries of Mass-Observation's findings, Tom Harrisson, the organization's co-founder, highlighted healthy scepticism for stories about Soviet ineptitude, and the belief that the media was not giving Britons 'all the truth'. One diarist wrote that 'I have a feeling that the reporters are just playing with us, that they invent more than half of the tripe that is put over in most of the papers'.[77] Another representative response was captured in March 1940. Explaining their belief that the Finnish war effort was being artificially inflated, one interviewee claimed that 'The news is being used as a means of propaganda – the public are being doped'.[78] Even at a moment when the Soviet Union's actions cast its relationship with Britain in more antagonistic terms, the British people could question attempts to deprecate its military effectiveness, thereby undermining implicit commentary on the wider illegitimacy of the Communist experiment.

After Operation Barbarossa thrust Britain and the Soviet Union into wartime partnership, pro-Soviet views had space to flourish. These were never synonymous with ideological considerations, and were coloured by a more general concern for international stability, but they remained enduringly consistent even in the early years of the Cold War. Harrisson again found that 'beneath the surface of an increasingly unfavourable verbal attitude, the solid base of respect for Russian achievement and coherence has remained. Respect of Russia's success in war – contrary to our newspaper predictions which for years had ridiculed Russian arms and efficiency – has survived'.[79] Harrisson's colleague at Mass-Observation, H.D. Willcock, also identified continued distrust of press reports for British people 'reserving judgement' about the Soviet Union's intentions. As during the Winter War, 'instinctual' doubts about newspaper portrayals remained.[80] When Mass-Observation published *Peace and the Public* in 1947, it continued to claim that 'the old pro-USSR attitude is rapidly returning; the 1946 antagonism was largely at the public level. Fundamentally and privately, there was always much more sympathy towards Russia than a stranger (an interviewer) could obtain'.[81]

76 Mass-Observation, File Report 2578: 'Attitudes towards America and Russia' (March 1948), 5–6.
77 Tom Harrisson, 'Public Opinion About Russia', *Political Quarterly*, 12, 4 (October 1941), 359–60.
78 Mass-Observation, File Report 53: 'Finnish-Russian Peace' (March 1940), 1.
79 Tom Harrisson, 'British Opinion Moves Toward a New Synthesis', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 11, 3 (1947), 329.
80 H.D. Willcock, 'Public Opinion: Attitudes towards America and Russia', *Political Quarterly*, 19, 1 (January 1948), 71.
81 *Peace and the Public: A Study by Mass-Observation* (London 1947), 22.

This prediction turned out to be premature with the Czechoslovakian coup in early 1948 and the subsequent blockade of Berlin. The hardening of public opinion against the Soviet Union after this point would seem to suggest the importance of events over propaganda, just as earlier surveys had indicated resistance to the message of papers such as *Truth* that had consistently promoted anti-Bolshevism. Yet *Truth*'s propaganda was distinctive by tapping into Britons' domestic situation and everyday concerns as well as the external threat of the Soviet Union. As Harrisson had written in summarizing the state of public opinion, 'A skilled listener-in might go for days through Britain without hearing a single mention of U.N., U.S.A., U.S.S.R.', but 'He would collect volumes on the neighbours, shortages, sport, the weather, the land, and perhaps some references to prices, jobs, Jews, pensions and certainly the latest leading crimes'.[82] By depicting the democratic socialism of the postwar Labour government as a stepping-stone to Sovietism, *Truth*, however conspiratorially, could keep the issue alive within the scope of public debate, laying the groundwork for the moment in the first half of 1948 when propagandistic claims were made real by the actions of the Soviet Union. If it could never fundamentally undermine support for Labour and the postwar settlement, it could more convincingly claim to have been right all along in its warnings about the Soviet Union.

Collin Brooks' management of *Truth* came to an end due to ill-health in March 1952 (he was possibly suffering from Alzheimer's Disease). His controlling interest was sold to the Staples Press in March 1952 who appointed George Scott, a liberal journalist, as editor.[83] Chesterton was eventually dismissed by the new owner, Ronald Staples, in February 1953, defending his writing as 'pro-British' and intransigently committed to the preservation of 'British interests'.[84] Scott sought to rehabilitate *Truth* in a more temperate, mainstream guise, but the paper's coverage of the Soviet Union had already begun slowly moving in this direction before Brooks relinquished control. In January 1952, for example, Major Lewis Hastings, who had been a commentator on military affairs for the BBC during the war, conceived the Cold War in more pragmatic terms. Rather than inveighing against Communism, Hastings was fair-minded, proposing a 'demilitarised zone' between Western Europe and the frontiers of the Soviet Union.[85] The paper still published more eccentric anti-Bolshevist articles; J.P. Hourston, for example, who later in his career was involved in the Aims of Industry lobby group in favour of free enterprise – another link to *Truth*'s nascent neo-liberalism – claimed that there were 11,000 Communist civil servants, 2000 Communist school teachers, 200 Communist priests in the Church of England, and numerous Communists in the BBC.[86] Nevertheless, this conspiratorial writing became more exceptional. The greater importance attached to respectability after Brooks' departure was evidenced by F.A.

82 Harrisson, 'British Opinion', 339.
83 Macklin, *Failed Führers*, 186.
84 LeCras, *A.K. Chesterton*, 95.
85 *Truth*, 18 January 1952.
86 *Truth*, 15 August 1952.

Voight, the *Manchester Guardian*'s revered diplomatic correspondent, contributing more sophisticated yet still fundamentally anti-Bolshevist writing to *Truth*.[87]

*Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism was idiosyncratic, but it was by no means aberrant in articulating wider attitudes to the Soviet Union in the climate of uncertainty that initially prevailed in Cold War Britain. Indeed, it exemplified a more productive formula for conceptualizing the Soviet threat. The paper offered reassurance by situating Britain's postwar struggles – indebtedness, rationing and reconstruction – against the paucity and dysfunctionality of Soviet rule. It also supported vigilance by amplifying conspiracy theories about a hidden war of Soviet subversion and a sustained attempt to dismantle the institutions – the Church, the BBC, the Civil Service – that underpinned Britain's national life. Finally, *Truth* was anachronistic in its anti-Bolshevism. Resentment at the domestic record of the postwar Labour government was unquestionably manifest in the paper, but this belied a deeper disenchantment about Britain's diminished place in the international order; a crisis of confidence that later became embodied in Dean Acheson's famous line that 'Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role'. The paradox within *Truth*'s anti-Bolshevism – the Soviet Union was all powerful but also always on the brink of collapse – can be explained by this sense of existential self-doubt. It reflected a strand of domestic uncertainty that anchored perceptions of the Soviet Union in an implicit commentary on Britain's own hesitant path after 1945. The truth, in other words, was that fictions – partial or otherwise – about the Soviet Union, said just as much about what *Truth* felt was wrong with Britain as about the external realities of the early Cold War.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Professor Adrian Bingham for his encouragement and invaluable advice on earlier drafts of this article.

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## Biographical Note

**Vessey's** work considers the intersections between the media and political engagement in modern Britain. This article forms part of a wider project on perceptions of the Soviet Union in Britain from the 1930s to the early Cold War. The main output will be a book with the working title: 'Looking East: Britons and the Soviet Union.'

87 *Truth*, 30 January 1953.