

European Service, and the Foreign Service—and it may be assumed that news was tailor-made to suit the listening audience. For example, during the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, the BBC in its Home News broadcast figures each day for numbers of German aircraft shot down, compared to losses by the RAF. The figure for enemy losses was over-estimated in some cases by up to 75% in order to boost morale.

When Churchill succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister he turned his attention to the MOI and ordered the department to assume full responsibility for propaganda. He left the director general Sir Frank Pick in no doubt that propaganda was to become a key weapon in the future conduct of the war. Pick knew that Churchill distrusted the BBC and its 'pontifical mugwumpery', and he warned his opposite number in the BBC—F.J. Ogilvie—that the government might take over his department.

One of the key elements in Churchill's armoury of propaganda warfare was Reuters Press Agency. Reuters, like most news agencies, owned no radio transmitters but leased time on communication links. It began life as a news agency using pigeons to carry stock exchange news from Aachen to Brussels in April 1849. Julius (later Baron) Reuter, a German linguist, developed his company into the foremost news agency in the world, developing a reputation for truth, accuracy and honesty that was above reproach.

Since 1926 Reuters had bought air-time on Leaffield and Rugby, two of the most powerful long-wave transmitters in the world, and it was over this British Post Office communications network that it transmitted news to almost every country in the world. During the First World War, and again in the Second, Reuters Press Agency was eagerly copied by most countries. The stature of its chairman, Sir Roderick Jones, in terms of influence was equalled by few, his importance in the world of propaganda equalled only by Churchill himself, and as befits a man of such importance Jones lived at Hyde Park Gate.

One of the best kept secrets of both wars was the secret subsidy agreement between the British Government and Reuters Press, signed in July 1938. In return for payments, Reuters agreed to transmit news over its network that had been supplied by the Foreign Office. This fabricated news was intended to deceive nations, both neutral and enemy. The first such doctored news came out of Leaffield and Rugby on 22 September 1938, and continued throughout the war years and long after. In May 1940 Reuters received its first payment of £64 000 for 'propaganda services'. Nevertheless, Reuters Press succeeded in projecting its image of honesty and neutrality while taking an active part in the propaganda war.

Another player in the secret war of propaganda was the Ministry of Economic Warfare, a dependency of the Foreign Office, which operated from Electra House, London. During the early years of the war the MEW exercised considerable influence. It spent much of its time dreaming up ideas whereby Germany might be defeated by methods other than the obvious—military warfare—which had failed disastrously with the retreat from Dunkirk. Methods considered included economical, political and subversive. It was this department that had the idea of using pamphlets to spread subversive propaganda to discredit Hitler.

There was nothing new in this idea: leaflets had been used by both sides during the First World War, and the use of pictures in cartoon form for propaganda purposes has a long history. During the Napoleonic Wars cartoons depicting Napoleon as a fool were common in Britain, bolstering national morale. Using