The Dove Flies East: Whitehall, Warsaw and the 1950 World Peace Congress

PHILLIP DEERY
Victoria University

In 1950 the Cold War turned hot in Korea, the threat of atomic annihilation hovered menacingly and the spectre of another world war haunted Europe. The establishment of the World Peace Council that year was one response to these fears. In November 1950 the Council decided to hold a World Peace Congress in Sheffield. The British Labour government sabotaged this Congress and forced it to shift to Warsaw. This article analyses this event which, to date, has received no scholarly attention. It argues that the attitudes and actions of the protagonists were a microcosm of the Cold War in that each side, East and West, saw the Congress as an opportunity to achieve moral authority, political leverage and strategic advantage over the other. The article also highlights the role of the state in controlling major political events during the Cold War.

Just after 2pm on Sunday 12 November 1950 a young marathon runner, Stan Horsham, was chased by scores of London police. In what was reportedly “an amazing scene” he was pursued through side streets from Piccadilly Circus to Leicester Square. He was part of a relay team that had started in Sofia and was to end in Sheffield — the site of the second World Peace Congress due to open the next day. He carried a “peace baton” bearing the now familiar emblem of a dove, designed recently by Pablo Picasso. ¹ The police caught, arrested and charged Horsham but not before he passed the baton to a motor cyclist who, in turn, was hunted by two police cars through back streets. Some time later, Horsham was released by police and reappeared at Hyde Park from where, amid cheers of by-standers, he set off on a five mile run, peace baton aloft, out of London along the road to Sheffield. The next morning he returned to face a charge in court of “insulting behaviour” and participating in an unauthorised “political march”.²

This seemingly inconsequential incident, entirely overlooked by the mainstream press, was emblematic of a fiercely fought contest between East and West during the early Cold War. In November 1950 there were two sets of combatants. On the one side was the British Peace Committee, backed by the powerful, Soviet-sponsored World Peace Council; on the other, the full resources of the State embodied by Clement Attlee’s Labour government. This article will explore, primarily, the attempts by the World Peace Council to stage its second Congress in Sheffield and the efforts by the

¹ The genesis of the peace dove emblem, which soon became a striking symbol of the peace movement, was Henri Matisse’s gift to Picasso of a white fantailed pigeon in early 1949. For a detailed account of this and Picasso’s visit to London and Sheffield in November 1950, see “Painting Picasso Red”, Guardian Weekend, 12 September 1981, p.9.
² Daily Worker, 13 November 1950, p.1; Challenge (“Britain’s Fighting Youth Weekly”), vol.11, no.45, 18 November 1950, p.1. The relay had commenced on 10 October; from Bulgaria it passed through Rumania, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland and France. Another group of “peace runners” went through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Holland and Belgium. See Sheffield Star, 16 October 1950; Challenge, vol. 11, no.42, 20 October 1950, p.1.

© 2002 Department of History, School of Political Science and International Studies, The University of Queensland and Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
British government to thwart it. Despite extensive comment and assessment at the time, and despite its contemporary significance, this event has generally escaped scholarly attention. The only detailed historical account, a thirty page roneoed booklet by Bill Moore, is highly partisan and was published in 1990, well before the relevant archival files became available. This article will draw on those recently-released files. Moore argued that the Congress was planned because the British people, just five years after the end of World War II, had a “profound yearning for peace that was not being satisfied by the Labour Government”. He also argued that the government’s tough response was due to the “McCarthyist atmosphere” in which, throughout the western world, there was “deliberate persecution” of all communists, progressives and “fellow travellers”. My argument is different. It will locate the events of 1950 in a wider Cold War context, as part of a struggle between government and peace movement for people’s allegiance. That struggle revolved in part around a vexed question: with whom should the responsibility for preventing war and preserving peace reside — the fledgling United Nations or the embryonic World Peace Council?

Preparations

The genesis of the second World Peace Congress (WPC) was the inaugural meeting of the Communist Information Bureau, or Cominform, in September 1947. The Soviet representative, A. Zhdanov, postulated the “two camp” thesis: a world irreconcilably divided between the peace-loving progressive forces, championed by the Soviet Union, and the warmongering capitalist countries, spearheaded by the United States. This sharp dichotomy, between the defence of peace and the imperatives of war, underpinned Russian foreign policy for the next five years. In 1949 a Cominform resolution directed that peace “should now become the pivot of the entire activity of the Communist Parties”. Most Western communist parties faithfully responded and injected the “struggle for peace” into both their doctrines and their strategies. The postwar peace movement took shape at the first WPC, held in Paris in April 1949. It recommended the creation in every country of “national peace committees”; accordingly the British Peace Committee was formed the following month. It also established a World Committee of Partisans for Peace, to be renamed in November 1950 as the World Peace Council. The structure of that Committee included a twelve

---


4 Moore, Cold War in Sheffield, pp.2, 21.

5 Cited in J.P. Forrester, Fifteen Years of Peace Fronts (Sydney, 1964), p.2.


7 Papers of the British Peace Committee, Labour History and Archive Centre, Manchester, CP/CENT/PEA/01/01, Rules and Constitution [1949].

8 For its self-published history see What is the World Peace Council? [Berlin, nd], J.D. Bernal papers, Marx Memorial Library, London. For simplicity and consistency the term “World Peace Council”,
person permanent Executive Bureau chaired by Professor Frederic Joliot Curie, a
Nobel Prize-winning physicist, High Commissioner for Atomic Energy and member of
the prestigious French Institute; nearly all members were communists or sympathetic to
communism. The one exception was O. John Rogge, a former deputy Attorney
General in the Roosevelt administration, a leader of Henry Wallace’s left-leaning
American Progressive Party and one of the “Hollywood Ten” defence team.

A major initiative of the “Partisans for Peace” was the Stockholm Appeal launched
in March 1950 for the banning of atomic weapons. In what amounted to a sustained
propaganda campaign 473 million signatures — a remarkable number — were
collected internationally. It was not always conducted in a spirit of consensus: “Ask
for a public explanation from all those who refuse to sign this call for the Peace and
Security of all peoples”. It therefore provoked from the “enemies of peace” a
“campaign of lying and calumny” whose aim was to undermine both the “historic
significance of this peoples’ referendum” and “the confidence of the masses in the
efficacy of signatures”. From the perspective of these “enemies of peace”, the
Stockholm Appeal served directly the interests of Soviet foreign policy. It was an
“integral part of the Communist-sponsored world peace movement” and a “political
trick played with varying success upon the free peoples to separate them from their
governments, and upon the peoples of the Communist countries to bind them to their
governments by conjuring up a non-existent threat from the West”. The quest for the
“hearts and minds” was on. According to the fortnightly newsletter of the Victorian
Peace Council, the results of “this great international movement”, the Stockholm
Appeal, would be declared at the second WPC to be held in Italy in October 1950. There,
the battle lines would be clearly drawn.

rather than “World Committee of Partisans for Peace”, will be used for the period April 1949 to
November 1950.

He was also president of the World Federation of Scientific Workers whose vice-president was J.D.
Bernal, Professor of physics at Birbeck College, Oxford University. Bernal was another important
member of the Executive Bureau and a member of the CPGB since 1923. (See his “Peace or War?”,
The Modern Quarterly, Autumn 1950, pp.291-4; World Without War (London, 1958); and Brenda
The general secretary of the Bureau was Jean Lafitte, a leading member of the French Communist
Party.

The full wording of the Stockholm Appeal is contained in a pamphlet In Defence of Peace: For
Prohibition of the Atomic Bomb, [Paris], 1950 (J.D. Bernal papers, Marx Memorial Library,
Clerkenwell, London. Bernal was president of the Marx Memorial Library from 1950 until his death
p.6E.

One signatory was Abbé Jean Boulier, a French Catholic Church dignitary; see his fifteen page
argument in Why I Signed the Stockholm Appeal to Ban the Atom Bomb, [Paris], 1950. See also World
Committee of the Defenders of Peace, For the Banning of the Atom Bomb [Paris], 1950. Both
pamphlets are located in the papers of the Australian Peace Council, Swarthmore College Peace
Collection, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

In Defence of Peace, No. 11, June 1950, p.4 (editorial).

PRO FO 975/54, “The Record of the World Peace Council”, November 1951, p.4.; National
Archives of Australia (henceforth NAA), A1838/1, 851/19/1 Pt. 1A, Memorandum, “Stockholm
Appeal”, A.H. Tange to Secretary Prime Minister’s Department, 17 July 1951. For a more lurid
analysis of “this colossal confidence trick” see also “‘Ban Atom Bomb’ Petition Is Sly Red
Propaganda”, Smith’s Weekly (Melbourne), 12 August 1950, p.5.

The Congress, however, was held neither in Genoa nor in October, as planned. In a foretaste of Sheffield, Italy’s foreign minister, Count Carlo Sforza, withheld delegates’ entry permits.\(^\text{15}\) It was sufficient that the Italian Peace Council, echoing the Soviet position, had absolved North Korea from any responsibility for the June invasion of South Korea.\(^\text{16}\) The Executive Bureau of the World Peace Council then decided to reschedule the Congress for 13-19 November in London. Its rationale for that decision was not made public. However, according to a secret Foreign Office memorandum the general aim, consistent with Cominform imperatives, was to “cause confusion among N.A.T. [North Atlantic Treaty] Powers and to whip up popular support throughout the world for Soviet policy towards peace, disarmament and atomic warfare”.\(^\text{17}\) More specifically, the timing was deliberate since the Congress coincided with the meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations and its resolutions were expected to synchronise with proposals put forward by the Soviet delegation on atomic disarmament.\(^\text{18}\) The location was also deliberate and linked directly to specific objectives:

(b) To conceal the Communist influence in the Peace campaign under a veneer of popular support in the West by holding the Congress in a Western European capital. (c) To describe any Peace resolutions or list of war-mongers that may be adopted by the Congress as “The London Resolution”, “The London Black List”, etc. (d) To stimulate the Peace Campaign in the United Kingdom which has so far failed to elicit much popular support.\(^\text{19}\)

The US State Department shared this assessment. It was especially concerned that the “old Commie Peace Petition” would be revived in London; that “the label ‘London’ will be affixed to this propaganda as has occurred in the case of ‘Stockholm’” and that, because the Congress would not be held in “an iron curtain capital such as Warsaw, it may attract a much larger non-Communist attendance than it would otherwise have

\(^{15}\) Such denial of visas and passports on political grounds, common in the United States, was not universal. In April 1950, the anti-communist Menzies Government in Australia permitted the entry of the Dean of Canterbury, Dr Hewlett Johnson, nicknamed “The Red Dean” by the British press for his pro-Soviet views. See NAA A5954/69, 2127/1; SP 368/1, 7/32/4. He was invited by the Australian Peace Council to address a Peace Congress in Melbourne at which more than 12,000 attended. See Sun (Melbourne), 20 April 1950, p. 13; Peace. The Journal of the Australian Peace Council, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1950; Hewlett Johnson, Searching for Light: an autobiography (London, 1968), pp.277-8.

\(^{16}\) PRO PREM 8/1150, Correspondence (“Secret”) from Foreign Office to Attlee, 26 September 1950. The Communist Party and most members of the British Peace Committee also believed that South Korea invaded North Korea, not vice versa. This myopic view attracted widespread criticism; a letter to the Manchester Guardian (7 September 1950, p.4) from H. Wood referring to the Sheffield Congress was typical: “Any Peace Convention which does not appeal to the Kremlin to end the war in Korea is a sham”. For a useful assessment of the Attlee government’s position on Korea in 1950, see Kenneth O. Morgan, Labour in Power 1945-1951, (Oxford, 1984), pp.422-31.

\(^{17}\) PRO PREM 8/1150, memo to Sir Gladwyn Jebb, Annex 11, 26 September 1950. Although rarely stated explicitly, it is arguable that — at least in sections of the Foreign Office, such as the Russia Department, and the British Embassy in Moscow — an undercurrent of fear prevailed that the ultimate objective of the World Peace Council was not merely to compete with but to supplant the United Nations. See, for example, PRO FO 1110/349, J. Nicholls to Bevin, 4 December 1950; FO 1110/370, Nicholls to Murray, 27 December 1950. There is, however, no extant evidence from Cominform or WPC sources to confirm with any certainty this fear.

\(^{18}\) Ibid. For G.W. Harrison, location and timing were linked: “It would be most damaging to have the ‘London Manifesto’ resounding round the world and dominating Communist propaganda for several critical months”. PRO FO 1110/347, Confidential Minute to Sir P. Dixon, 31 August 1950.
The reference to Warsaw was unintentionally prescient. The State Department also wished to know what action Whitehall proposed to take. Whitehall recognised that “this Congress was on a different scale altogether and had a far greater political significance” than previous international gatherings held in the UK that may have been Soviet-inspired. Thus, as we shall see, between the months of September and November the British government devoted much attention to this “most burning topic of the day”.

Simultaneously, the British Peace Committee commenced the huge task of preparing for the second World Peace Congress. On 9 September it announced that the Congress would switch from London to Sheffield. It had sent 400 letters of application and the only available and suitable venue was the City Hall of Sheffield. Even then the booking, according to the Manchester Guardian, “caused a storm”. It was vigorously opposed by conservative members of Sheffield City Council on the basis of the Congress being communist-controlled and the “grave possibilities of disorder”. The preparations for the expected 2500 delegates were prodigious. They had to listen, eat and sleep. The biggest job involved wiring the large oval hall for the simultaneous translation into six languages — unprecedented in England — of all the speeches. A team of electricians installed 2845 pairs of earphones to enable access to the words of thirty-seven translators working in relays under the platform. Since the hall was booked for an orchestral evening of the final day of the Congress, Saturday 18 November, the intricate wiring system, which used no nails or screws, was designed for speedy dismantling. To enable adequate eating arrangements, a giant £4000 marquee was erected over a Second World War bombsite in West Bar. It was to be used as a dining room serving 1700 delegates at one sitting, so underneath a newly-constructed wooden...
floor was an elaborate plumbing system linked to gas cooking stoves and a series of sinks. Signs in six languages, including Chinese, which read “to the restaurant” were fixed to lamp posts. Only 250 delegates were to sleep in Sheffield; most were accommodated in Leeds, a ninety-minute bus journey away, as were the 600 technical staff and 200 stewards. Sixty-four coaches would take the delegates to and from the Congress. Concern over the shortage of accessible accommodation was expressed repeatedly and the organising committee requested billeting in private homes.

Numerous pre-Congress receptions were planned — such as the luncheon arranged by the Coventry Trades Council for a party of thirty Czech trade unionists destined for Sheffield. To offset some of the costs in staging this event, estimated to be £35,000-£40,000, overseas delegates were to pay £14 each; this included accommodation and travelling expenses. Each of these delegates would receive a welcome letter from the British Peace Committee. It was full of lyrical appeals to Britain’s physical beauty, immortal writers, heroic history and “glorious” traditions. It began:

Dear Friend

From wherever you come, whatever your race, religion or colour, welcome to Britain; welcome as an honoured visitor, a fighter for peace. Welcome from all of us who love our country and who are proud of all that is best in its history and life […] Welcome, dear friend. Our people and yours will forge the bonds that will shackle the warmongers […]

This lofty rhetoric seemed justified, since this would be a Congress that would constitute the “greatest international gathering this country has ever seen”.

Such grand illusions were soon shattered. The British government, as we shall see, through its shrewd timing and effective execution, sabotaged the Congress. Because more than two thirds of the foreign delegates and the entire foreign leadership of the World Peace Council were excluded, the British Peace Committee was forced, at the last minute, to cancel the Congress. The initial incredulity of the organisers turned to bitterness and despair. The WPC Press Relations Officer, Miss Patricia Hart, was “shocked”. Amongst other difficulties, she had to deal with hotel proprietors who were claiming an allowance for the 2000 unoccupied hotel rooms and the managing director of Sheffield United Tours, the motor coach operators contracted to transport delegates before and during the Congress; he alleged breach of contract. The only

27 Some hoteliers cancelled reservations previously accepted due to their unwillingness, on economic grounds, to provide late night meals for returning delegates. Sheffield Telegraph, 2 November 1950.

28 Birmingham Post, 11 November 1950, p.3


30 Peace: A World Review, 11 November 1950 [np].

31 Daily Worker, 8 November 1950, p.1.

32 The Times, 13 November 1950, p.5. One of the few foreign dignitaries permitted entry was Pablo Picasso. At the protest meeting on 13 November he proclaimed, amidst loud cheering, that he stood for “life against death” and “peace against war”. During the proceedings he drew, and autographed, the dove of peace on a slip of paper that was later auctioned for £21. Sheffield Telegraph, 14 November 1950. An Australian delegate recalled in awe how “Comrade Picasso sat almost within reach”. Ian Turner, “My Long March”, Overland, No.59, Spring 1974, p.35.

33 Sheffield Star, 13 November 1950. The “special correspondent” for The Times (13 November 1950, p.4) described those gathered in Sheffield as “disconsolate”.

34 Manchester Guardian, 15 November 1950, p.5. He had previously written to Attlee’s private secretary seeking advice as to whether his contract would “conflict with the national interest”. PRO PREM 8/1150, E.L. Taylor to L.N. Helsby, 7 November 1950.
activity that eventuated was a protest meeting on the evening of Monday 13 November. It competed with a dance in the downstairs ballroom. By the next morning the massive marquee had been dismantled and the Sheffield City Hall was empty. Except, that is, for the decorations left, perhaps, in an act of pyrrhic defiance: the large banner in six languages that read “Welcome to the peoples of the world united in the struggle for peace”, the flags of all nations, the signposts on coloured boards indicating where each delegation would have sat, the yellow streamer bearing the words in big red letters “Ban War Propaganda”. The Attlee government’s war on peace, specifically the rationale and formulation of its policy, will now be traced.

The Assault

On 3 August the secretary of the British Peace Committee, Joyce Smith, wrote to the Prime Minister informing him that Great Britain had the “honour” of hosting a “great international event”, the second World Peace Congress, and desired an assurance that no obstacles would be put in the way by government departments to receiving the “hundreds of distinguished persons” from overseas who would be attending the event. Unknown to Mrs Smith, her letter did the rounds of Whitehall, from the Prime Minister’s Department to the Foreign Office to the Home Office and finally to Cabinet. The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, wished the Congress to be totally banned while the Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, believed that only “particularly undesirable persons” be excluded. When it became clear that the government possessed no legal power to ban the Congress, Bevin favoured denying entry to “a considerable number” of delegates. Attlee also sought the views of Lord Citrine and Herbert Morrison. Eventually, on 13 September, the British Peace Committee was sent a reply:

The Prime Minister has asked me to say that in this free country there is no power to prohibit this proposed Congress [...] Applications from foreigners to attend the Congress will be dealt with on their individual merits and His Majesty’s Government must reserve the right to refuse admission to any foreigner who is persona non grata.

By the end of September the British Peace Committee realised how disingenuous this reply was. It communicated with various government departments on 20, 26 and 28 September and its chairman, J. Crowther, called personally at the Home Office. It noted it was “still without the necessary knowledge” to enable the effective organisation of the Congress. The responses were tardy, perfunctory and non-specific. This was partly due to the fact that a policy was being evolved in which

---

35 For an account of this anti-climactic meeting, see Manchester Guardian, 14 November 1950, p.7.
37 See PRO PREM 8/1150. See also Minute, J.H. Peck, 8 September 1950, PRO FO 1110/347. There was even a special meeting between the Minister of State and the Home Secretary; see PRO FO 1110/347, Record of Meeting, 13 September 1950.
38 Bevin’s tougher line was consistent with that of Ralph Murray, the head of the Information Research Department within the Foreign Office, who was concerned that “our allowing this kind of Communist gathering [a Peace Conference in London in May 1950] puzzles our friends behind the Iron Curtain [and] throws them into despair”. PRO FO 1110/346, Murray to C.F.A. Warner, 3 June 1950.
39 PRO PREM 8/1150.
40 PRO PREM 8/1150, W. Gore (Acting Secretary, British Peace Committee) to Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 28 September 1950.
differences of opinion between various departments were only gradually resolved. The Attlee government was shifting from a position of caution and concern about enshrined freedoms\(^{41}\) to one of semi-authoritarian power; from imposing minor impediments to insurmountable obstacles. There was considerable pressure on the Home Office from the Foreign Office to take a “tougher line” and adopt a “stricter” definition of *persona non grata*. One of the five areas, for example, in which the Home Office was advised to seek enlarged powers, was the authority to prevent the press from interviewing any arriving foreign delegate who was refused permission to land.\(^{42}\) The Foreign Office, in turn, was influenced by both the Ministry of Defence, the Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Planning Committee. Peck wrote:

Major Kirby, to whom I spoke, was horrified when I said that 2500 [delegates] were expected, and he said he had no idea it was on this scale. He said that if a Communist-controlled gathering of this magnitude were to happen in Sheffield, the Ministry of Defence wd [sic] be very much interested and that he wd submit the facts at once […] Major Kirby told me that the Joint Planning Committee wd be interesting themselves in the matter.\(^{43}\)

There was also strong pressure from the US Department of State which expressed its concern in these terms: “I am sure you share my view of the high importance of doing everything within reason to discourage the holding of the [Congress] in London or at any other place within the United Kingdom”.\(^{44}\) Washington sent several telegrams to London that “stress[ed] the danger” of the Congress producing “an embarrassing ‘London Manifesto’”.\(^{45}\)

Throughout September and October numerous meetings were held and voluminous correspondence passed between the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Information Research Department (IRD), the Attorney General (Sir Hartley Shawcross) and the Prime Minister. Their minutiae need not concern us here. The fact that considerable time and effort were devoted to formulating a policy to subvert the efficacy and legitimacy of the Congress is indicative of how important the issue was seen. The upshot was a special Cabinet meeting on 30 October, called by Attlee, devoted entirely to the WPC.\(^{46}\) Differences of opinion were still evident. Bevin initially argued for legislation to ban the Congress outright but, realising the constitutional impossibility of this, agreed that instead all steps be taken to prevent it being a success — a position, he said,

---

\(^{41}\) As one Northern Department Foreign Office official wrote, “once you start banning or preventing meetings, it is difficult to draw a logical line short of declaring Communism illegal”. PRO FO 1110/346, Minute, P.S. Falla, 25 May 1950. Ralph Murray believed certain freedoms were an impediment to policy: unlike in the United States, he noted, “we are still inhibited by a liberal philosophy regarding admission of foreigners into the country”. PRO FO 1110/348, Murray to Edward Barrett (Department of State), 4 October 1950. His use of the word “inhibited” was telling.

\(^{42}\) PRO FO 1110/349, ‘Sheffield Peace Congress Flag “A”’, 2(d)

\(^{43}\) PRO FO 1110/348, Peck to Murray, 27 September 1950.

\(^{44}\) PRO FO 1110/348, Edward Barrett (Department of State, Washington) to Christopher Warner (Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office), 26 September 1950. On behalf of the ill Warner, Murray assured Barrett that the Foreign Secretary was “fully aware of the implications of the Congress”. *Ibid.*, Murray to Barrett, 4 October 1950.

\(^{45}\) PRO FO 1110/347, L.S. Murrie to J.H. Peck (Foreign Office), 13 September 1950.

\(^{46}\) PRO CAB 130/65, Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 30 October 1950.
supported by the Chiefs of Staff. Chuter Ede was opposed to refusing admission en bloc, preferring to assess each visa application on its merits in the light of MI5 security checks. This was too lenient for Shawcross. MI5 checks would reveal only “active Communist agents” when in fact all aliens wishing to attend a Congress “subversive in character” and intent on “sabotaging the country’s defence plans” should be excluded. Thus the Crown should apply its powers “very drastically”; otherwise the “effect on the Americans” would be “deplorable”. Gordon-Walker, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, recommended that Great Britain follow the example of India — an unusual twist in imperial relations — which had successfully imposed “a number of obstacles” in the way of a similar Congress in Calcutta. Attlee concluded the meeting by summarising the arguments. The general opinion, he stated, was

strongly against the admission of large numbers of aliens for the purpose of attending a Congress of this nature and that it was desirable to do everything possible to cripple the Congress by severely limiting attendance at it. For this reason, the rule of persona non grata should be very fully and strictly applied.

Attlee had long favoured “crippling [the Congress] by administrative measures”. The “merit” of deliberately not informing the British Peace Committee how the persona non grata provision would be interpreted was that it would “leave the organisers in uncertainty”. This provision had recently been redefined to embrace “any individual who has engaged or are likely to engage in activities detrimental to internal security or industrial peace”. Originally one Foreign Office official made the astonishing recommendation that it include “all propagandists [who] […] say outrageous things about this country”. In contrast Hohler, from the Information Research Department, sounded a cautionary note: “we must be very careful […] that, in our anxiety to frustrate the communists, we do not get drawn into heresy hunting & other undemocratic practices”. This received the rejoinder that summed up far more the dominant views in Whitehall: “I do not think there is any great danger — action of this kind is directed against foreigners, not against British subjects, and not because they are communists but because they are Soviet agents”. The Soviets themselves were particular targets. Referring to their UK visa applications the comment was made that

This is a very powerful delegation and indicates how important the Soviet Government consider the Congress. The leader, Tithonov, is the official head [of the World Peace Council] in the Soviet Union. Ehrenburg and the others are all first-rank intellectuals. It is as if a delegation headed by

---

47 Two weeks earlier the Foreign Secretary was told that the Chiefs of Staff wished “more active” and “more energetic” steps to be taken to either ban or incapacitate the Congress. PRO PREM 8/1150, Bevin to Attlee, 12 October 1950.

48 PRO CAB 130/65, Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 30 October 1950.


50 PRO FO PREM 8/1150, Bevin to Attlee (Secret P.M./50/65), 25 October 1950.

51 PRO FO 1110/348, Draft letter, Ashley Clark to W.S. Murrie, 2 October 1950.

52 PRO FO 1110/349, Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 30 October 1950. Government officials commented frequently that foreign delegates, if permitted, would be engaged not in legitimate political discussion but subversive activity.
Bernard Shaw, J.B. Priestley and the Poet Laureate were to be despatched from this country — with official blessing.53

The all-important Cabinet meeting of 30 October also agreed on the mechanics of implementing the position stated by Attlee.54 Once opinions became policy, the Sheffield Peace Congress was doomed. The Prime Minister reinforced policy with propaganda. On the evening of 1 November, Attlee addressed the Foreign Press Association in London.55 The BBC had already been “persuaded” to broadcast the speech live in Britain and relayed in Europe, selected newspapers had been contacted to write “follow up” leaders, and the speech had been carefully, but secretively, prepared.56 This occasion and these methods were chosen deliberately in order to convince public opinion both in Europe and at home of the Government’s firm and unyielding attitude. Attlee’s speech-writer, indeed, had taken a rather sanguine approach:

I want the Prime Minister to be able not only to do irreparable damage to the Congress, but [...] make a laughing stock of some of the persons on whom the organisers will rely for prestige: a judicious mixture, in fact, of serious exposure and of ridicule for those who fall for or encourage it [...] My main objective is to get the Prime Minister to hit where and how it hurts most [...] so that we may the more easily blow them sky-high.57

Attlee’s speech did not disappoint. After exposing the “sham” and “bogus” nature of this Cominform-inspired and financed Congress, he turned his attention to the foreign delegates:

We are not willing to throw wide our doors to those who seek to come here to subvert our institutions, to seduce our fellow citizens from their natural allegiance and their daily duties and to make propaganda for those who call us “cannibals and warmongers”.58

Between this address and the scheduled opening of the WPC, the government escalated its assault. The agreed policy, with its enlarged definition of persona non grata, did not reduce the number of visas as drastically as anticipated. Whilst it separated the

53 PRO FO 1110/347, G.W. Harrison to Bevin, 5 September 1950.
54 For these mechanics see PRO FO 1110/349, “Secret. Most Immediate” memorandum, “Sheffield Peace Congress” 2 November 1950. This memo spelt out, for example, the specific role of MI5 and the precise number of “aliens” from each country that would be rejected. “The Russian rejects include all the prominent propagandists and leading figures in the Peace Movement, including Ehrenburg, Shostakovich, Zarleviski and Siminov”. Paradoxically, Ilya Ehrenburg had already visited London in July to attend a Peace Conference; two of the speeches he made — at Holborn and Trafalgar Square — were reprinted in a 16-page pamphlet, Peace is Everybody’s Business.
55 Attlee had ruminated over this for some time; on 14 October, in his characteristic red pencil, he had scribbled on a memo “I might use Foreign Press for the purpose”, PRO PREM 8/1150, Bevin to Attlee, 12 October 1950.
56 PRO PREM 8/1150, memos to Attlee, 12 October, 16 October; memo from Attlee to Herbert Morrison, 17 October 1950.
57 PRO FO 1110/348, P. Anderson to F.R. Murray, 12 October 1950.
58 Cited in Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol.480, 14 November 1950, p.1561. This speech was judged “a great success” by Downing Street (PRO FO 1110/349, Paper by P. Jordan, 29 November 1950). However, Bernal, not surprisingly, described the speech as “ill-informed and bad-tempered”; J.D. Bernal, “The Way to Peace”, Labour Monthly, Vol.23, No.1, January 1951, p.13. In response to the speech, three members of the executive of the British Peace Committee (Crowther, Pritt and Bernal) hand-delivered a three-page letter, dated 2 November, to Number 10; naively or artfully, it extended “a sincere invitation” to Attlee to attend the WPC. See PRO PREM 8/1150.
“shepherds from the sheep”, to use John Peck’s curious phrase, more “sheep” would be admitted “than the Security Services could keep under close scrutiny whilst in this country”. This did not trouble the British embassy in Moscow — “one could say with certainty that all the delegates to the Congress would be much too busy with their meetings to engage in espionage or incite sedition outside the walls of the Congress” — but it did concern Ministers in Whitehall. So the policy was revised. Now, all but “innocuous fellow travellers” from non-communist countries would be excluded; visas already granted would be revoked; those with visas and about to arrive would be forbidden entry and forced to return; and the processing of new visa applications would be delayed. In addition, permission was suddenly withheld by the Ministry of Civil Aviation for eighteen special flights transporting delegates from Prague. None of this was transmitted to the British Peace Committee. The impact on the Congress organisers was devastating. Not only was the Congress shorn of its “shepherds”, its leading figures; it was also shorn of its numbers. It had been both decapitated and decimated. Furthermore, delaying visa applications left the organisers, as Attlee predicted, in confusion and without any certainty: on the morning of Saturday 11 November, just forty-eight hours before the Congress was due to start, 1700 applications were still outstanding. This “withholding of our hand until the last minute”, as one British diplomat put it, was particularly efficacious.

There was criticism of the government’s approach from parliamentarians — principally Sydney Silverman, Emrys Hughes and Konni Zilliacus — and the press. The Manchester Guardian asked in its leader, entitled “The Illiberal Mr Ede”,

Does not Mr Ede see what his procedure of the last few days amounts to? It is difficult to recall any precedent in our history for such an adoption of the methods of the Communist police States […] The stultification of the Sheffield congress is nothing to be sorry about; the tricks by which

59 PRO FO 1110/348, Minute 28 October 1950. The Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, obviously liked the phrase although he included “dogs” with the shepherds; see Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol.480, 14 November 1950, p.1686-7.

60 PRO FO 1110/349, Cabinet Conclusions (50) 72nd meeting, 9 November 1950, p.8. A combined force of MI5, Special Branch and other “Secret Service agents” arrived in Sheffield on 10 November to keep a “watching brief” on the Congress for its duration. On Attlee’s orders, Sir Percy Sillitoe, Director of MI5 and formerly Chief Constable of Sheffield, personally visited Sheffield to direct this operation. Sheffield Telegraph, 10 November 1950; Sheffield Star, 11 November 1950.

61 PRO FO 1110/348, H.A. Hohler to G.W. Harrison, 22 September 1950.

62 For example a group of French delegates, arrived at London airport was sent back to Europe. Another, larger French group, including Professor Joliot-Curie, arriving at Dover was also obliged to return to France. The sole delegate from Syria, the writer Salak Tazari, had been granted a visa but she, too, was turned back upon arrival in Britain. For other similar examples, see The Times, 11 November 1950, p.6. A question about Joliot-Curie’s treatment was raised in Parliament: see Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol.480, 14 November 1950, pp.1655-57.


64 PRO PREM 8/1150, D.V. Kelly (British Embassy, Moscow) to Bevin, 17 November 1950. It was only later that this “double-dealing [was]exposed”. See Daily Worker 13 November 1950, p.1.

we secured it and the British government’s illiberal panic are a blow to what little remains of freedom in the world.66

But Mr Ede defended his actions in a robust speech which was, according to a journalist who was there, “full of fire and passion […] one of the greatest of his career”.67 Besides, the criticism was sporadic, belated and ineffectual. A post-Congress analysis conducted by Downing Street pointed to the impotence of this opposition. Despite room for improvement in “our handling” of the visa and entry issues, the government’s propaganda campaign was “a great success” whilst attacks upon the government’s policy were quickly exhausted and “passed with little or no notice”.68 That they did was testimony to the depth and dominance of Cold War anti-communism.

**Why cripple the Congress?**

Yet this atmosphere of virulent anti-communism is an insufficient explanation for the Attlee government’s intransigent and vigorous opposition to the WPC. The overarching reason was, of course, the connection that existed between the Sheffield Peace Congress, the World Peace Council and the Cominform. This link had been extensively researched and documented by the Foreign Office (and, in particular, by the Information Research Department69) with much of the *prima facie* evidence being provided by documents emanating from the Cominform itself.70

Frankly the position from the Foreign Office is this. The World Peace Campaign is nothing more than a Communist stunt, an instrument of Soviet foreign policy designed to stir up resistance to the Western defence programme and to the Atlantic Pact. It is run by Communists under direction from Moscow and is not to be regarded as a genuinely international peace movement of a democratic kind.71

---

66 *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1950, p.4. The *News Chronicle*, *Evening News* and *Sunday Express* also “attacked us for our illiberality” (PRO FO 1110/349, P. Jordan to Murray, 29 November 1950). Emrys Hughes wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* editor (15 November 1950, p.4) in support of the paper’s iconoclastic position on the peace congress. The position of the CPGB veered between Attlee being a tool of Churchill or a lackey of Wall Street.


69 The IRD, established in 1948, was the brainchild of Christopher Mayhew, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary to Ernest Bevin. In 1950, as an executive committee member of the United Nations Association, he wrote a long article for the *Sheffield Telegraph* (13 November 1950), “Democratic Solution Exists Already If You Really Want Peace”. Presumably the timing — the opening day of the Congress — was deliberate.

70 In 1950-51 a range of lengthy papers were prepared; see PRO FO 975/50, “Peace and Soviet Foreign Policy”; FO 975/54, “The Record of the World Peace Council”; FO 975/64, “Aspects of Peace. A Study in Soviet Tactics”; FO 371/84285, “Russian Strategic Intentions and the Threat to Peace”; PREM 8/1150, “Disarmament and the Soviet Peace Campaign” (ten-page brief for the UK delegation to the UN General Assembly). Briefer documents on communist-organised peace congresses can also be found in PREM 8/966 and 8/1103. All these testify strongly to the importance placed by the British government on this activity.

71 PRO FO 1110/371, K.G. Younger to J. Chuter Ede, 5 June 1951. This view was shared by Vincent Tewson, the general secretary of the powerful Trades Union Congress, who alleged the peace campaign was “fraudulent” and a “tactic in the strategy of international communism”. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1950, p.6.
That the early post-war peace movement was a creature of the Cominform was regarded as axiomatic; it was "a fact not needing further proof". This view, when stripped of some of its Cold War clothing, is essentially correct: the World Peace Council did desire peace but on Soviet terms. And it is a view shared by the pre-eminent historian of the peace movement of this period. The claim of the British Peace Committee that it sought "solely to aid in the discovery of means whereby the present international tension may be reduced" was therefore disingenuous. It certainly contrasts with the more bluntly expressed view of its mentor, the CPGB, on the centrality of peace activity to the political struggle. So the Sheffield Congress was, to use the colourful phrase of Denis Healey, "a Trojan Dove".

But had the Sheffield Congress been simply a propaganda instrument, albeit a potent one, it is unlikely that the Attlee administration would have moved against it with such ruthlessness. There were other more urgent, more compelling reasons for attempting to subvert the Congress. A "top secret and personal" letter (there being "a considerable security issue involved") from Ralph Murray to Major-General Sir Ian Jacob at the BBC provides us with a clear clue: "For your private information, the motives which impelled Ministers to arrive at the decisions to which I have referred are those attributed to the ‘Peace Campaign’ in Section 6 of this paper". That section was part of a long submission from Bevin for the all-important meeting of Ministers on 30 October, discussed above. The broader context, it must be remembered, was the widespread conviction that the Cold War would soon turn hot, that World War III was both imminent and inevitable. Section 6 drew on extensive evidence to conclude that the World Peace Council has taken on a different and more threatening role:

From being originally an instrument of mass emotional appeal against the use of the atomic weapon it has turned into a “cover organisation” for the agitation towards industrial unrest and sabotage of rearmament […] It is also “cover” for the penetration of the armed Forces […] Clearly therefore, the purpose of the forthcoming Congress in Sheffield is not merely to build up pacifist sentiments to the advantage of the Soviet Union, but to give further impulse to the specific

73 See Lawrence S. Wittner, One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953, pp.177-86.
74 British Peace Committee, cited in Manchester Guardian, 28 September 1950, p.8. This innocuous claim starkly contrasts with the strident position of the Communist Party of Great Britain on the WPC as articulated in successive issues of its weekly World News and Views throughout October and November 1950 (copies are located in Marx Memorial Library, London).
75 See, for example, successive issues of its weekly World News and Views throughout October and November 1950.
77 PRO FO 1110/349, F.R. Murray to Sir Ian Jacob, 4 November 1950. Jacob’s reply (8 November) assured discreet use of this “very valuable” information. Murray maintained close links with the BBC, an organisation he had joined in the 1930s. See Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, Britain’s Secret Propaganda War (Phoenix Mill, 1998), p.31.
With its assertion of sabotage and subversion, this was a remarkable statement — but it was not unique. It was echoed, in various forms, in numerous confidential letters and documents. For example, the First Secretary at the British Embassy in Moscow, Jack Nicholls, wrote to the IRD convinced that if a third world war broke out the Peace Committees “will be expected to commit acts of sabotage, to refuse to join the armed forces, to impede war production and indeed to perform all the acts required of a fifth column”. The Chiefs of Staff also subscribed to this perspective. At a meeting at the Ministry of Defence on 11 October, they became “extremely hot under the collar” when discussing the imminent Congress. They stated that “the primary object of the Congress is to prevent recruiting for the forces of Western Europe”; they also “fear[ed] the possibility of strikes in the armament industries” which could flow from the “insidious peace propaganda” of the Congress. A related concern was that the “steel city”, Sheffield, was especially important to rearmament and it therefore assumed strategic as well as symbolic significance. The head of the IRD, Ralph Murray, commented that the fears of the Chiefs of Staff were “not exaggerated” and recommended that the office of the Prime Minister be informed of them.

The Prime Minister, however, was equally if not more concerned by the impact of the World Peace Congress within the United States and Europe. He and others feared the Congress “might cause uneasiness in American public opinion” and more than one Foreign Office official felt it “desirable to show the [US] State Department that we are in earnest about this”. Attlee’s Foreign Press Association speech was delivered with a definite eye on North Atlantic Treaty countries whom Great Britain was urging to take

---

78 PRO CAB 130/65, Cabinet paper, GEN. 341/1, “World Peace Congress”. According to Richard Thurlow (The Secret State, p.291), this document was an MI5 report. Although MI5 and Special Branch closely monitored the Sheffield Congress and worked closely with Immigration Department and Foreign Office officials in enforcing the persona non grata provisions, the IRD was responsible for this document. On the other hand, an eight-page paper, with the very similar title, “Second World Peace Congress”, was most definitely the work of MI5; see PRO FO 1110/370.

79 PRO FO 1110/370, J.W. Nicholls to F.R. Murray, 27 December 1950. These aspects were not emphasised by the British ambassador in Moscow in a highly analytical despatch, “Soviet-Sponsored peace Campaign: Assessment of its Revolutionary Potential”, which met with criticism in the Foreign Office. PRO FO 1110/349, Sir D. Kelly to Bevin, 8 December 1950; responses from K.S. Butler (12 December), J.H. Peck (14 December), [?].T. Morgan (8 January 1951). This was one of many detailed analyses of the “Peace Campaign”; for earlier instances see Kelly’s six-page letter to Warner, 30 August 1950, PRO FO 1110/347.

80 PRO FO 1110/348, Minute, D.P. Reilly, 11 October 1950

81 PRO FO 1110/348, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 11 October 1950, Confidential Annex.

82 “The propagandists of the Peace Campaign are stressing that the Congress is being held in what they call a stronghold of the capitalist armament industry”, PRO PREM 8/1150, M. Wilford (Foreign Office) to D. W. Hunt (Prime Minister’s Office), 25 August 1950. See “The War City That Can Work for Peace”, Daily Worker, 10 November 1950, p.2.

83 PRO FO 1110/348, F.R. Murray to Ashley Clarke, 17 October 1950. Indeed Murray cited peace movement literature to argue, similarly, that the Sheffield Congress “has every intention of conducting an agitation in this country both subversive and leading towards industrial unrest”. PRO FO 1110/348, Secret memo, F.R. Murray to Ashley Clarke, 16 October 1950, “Sheffield ‘Peace’ Congress”.

84 PRO PREM 8/1150, telegram, Attlee to P.M Broadmead, 26 September 1950; FO 1110/347, L.S. Murrie to J.H. Peck (Foreign Office), 13 September 1950
more resolute action in the defence against Communism. According to the Foreign Secretary,

If when we are leading Western Europe in organising opposition to the Cominform and Russian expansionism we are seen to be taking no effective measures to ban known Communism agitators from coming to this country, the strength of our leadership is affected. The same applies to members of the Commonwealth and the Colonies.85

Bevin had also argued earlier that if the government meekly sanctioned a communist Congress at which large numbers of Eastern European delegates would attend, this would be “widely misrepresented” by Iron Curtain countries as showing “weakness on the part of the Government”.86 A primary reason, then, for the British Labour government being prepared to take such drastic measures to frustrate the Peace Congress was to demonstrate its credentials, its leadership, its toughness to an anxious America, an equivocal Western Europe, a bellicose Eastern Europe and diffident if loyal colonies. This was in addition to the wilder fears of the “trojan dove” being an agent of sabotage and subversion. None of this has been acknowledged in the historiography of the World Peace Council and it certainly was not discerned by the hapless Miss Hart, the Sheffield Congress Press Relations Officer, who was frantically helping organise the transfer of delegates to Warsaw.

The Dove Flies East

On the night of Saturday 11 November, a small group of men and women — leaders of the British Peace Committee — gathered in the flat of Professor J.D. Bernal in Torrington Square, Bloomsbury. Having just learnt that the president and secretary of the World Peace Council, Frederic Joliot-Curie and Jean Lafitte, had been turned back at Dover, along with another fifty foreign delegates, they recommended that the Peace Congress in Sheffield be cancelled. One luminary who was present that evening was Pablo Picasso, and Ivor Montagu recalled him drawing a picture on one of the newly-painted walls of Bernal’s flat.87 It would have been one of the few light moments in an otherwise sombre evening. Although sympathetic publications attempted a positive spin — “The Plot that Failed”, “Now on to Warsaw”, and “The World Peace Congress Goes Forward”88 — it was clear any claim to victory by the British Peace Committee was self-delusory.89 The forces of the State had won. The Foreign Office judged, correctly, the government’s attempts to “cripple” the Congress — and this verb was

85 PRO PREM 8/1150, Bevin to Attlee (Secret. P.M./50/65), 25 October 1950 [p.4].
86 PRO FO 1110/347, Cabinet Conclusions, 56th of 6 September 1950.
87 Montagu papers, Labour History and Archive Centre, Manchester, CP/IND/MONT/11/3, correspondence [ND 1957?]. Apparently the drawing stayed on Bernal’s wall for many years before being dismantled and donated to the Institute of Contemporary Art in London where, today, it stands at the entrance to the building.
88 Working for Peace (Melbourne), No. 5, 17 November 1950, p.1; Daily Worker, 13 November 1950, p.1, World News and Views, 18 November 1950, p.1. According to Daily Worker (14 November 1950, p.1), “This Congress is news! Millions in Britain have now heard all about it and discussed it for the past week […] [This] presents a terrific opportunity to increase the sales of the Daily Worker!”.
89 According to the Manchester Guardian (13 November 1950, p.5), some members of the Bureau of the World Peace Council were “sceptical” that the British government would allow the Congress to take place but Ivor Montagu overcame objections. For Montagu’s probably connection with Soviet espionage during the Second World War, see Nigel West, “Venona’: The British Dimension’, Intelligence and National Security, 17 (1), Spring 2002, pp. 116-119.
used frequently throughout September and November — as a “turning point”. Peck stated that: “there is little doubt that we scored heavily by the shift to Warsaw.”\(^{90}\) Moreover, “we know from several sources that [the World Peace Council] regarded the failure to get the Sheffield label attached to their resolutions as a major defeat”.\(^{91}\)

Sunday 12 November in Sheffield was chaotic and confused. Some delegates arrived by coach to attend a “torch of peace” ceremony for which 80,000 leaflets had been printed for distribution in Sheffield, Leeds and Birmingham.\(^{92}\) Because, in part, of the driving rain, the crowd consisted mainly of reporters and newsreel cameramen.\(^{93}\) Other delegates were still continuing to arrive from Europe at Northolt and London airports; they were interviewed for three hours by security personnel and then turned back. Still other delegates were wondering how they would get to Warsaw. On this occasion, the Ministry of Civil Aviation — after considerable debate in Whitehall\(^{94}\) — facilitated rather than thwarted air travel. Shuttle flights of eight Czechoslovak and five charter planes took nearly 200 Britons (including that peripatetic fellow traveller, the Dean of Canterbury, Dr Hewlett Johnson) and a larger but unspecified number of foreign delegates to Prague en route to Warsaw.\(^{95}\) Both the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary agreed that “there may be some advantage to us in getting rid of a considerable number of undesirable foreign delegates without delay”.\(^{96}\) Many foreign delegates also returned by the same steamer ship, S.S. Batory, that brought Polish and Rumanian delegates to England two days earlier. About 1000 delegates flew from Paris (rather than by train) to avoid the anticipated hold-up with transit visas from the Allied Control Commission in West Germany. This remarkable two-day land, sea and air operation (Congress propagandists likened it to the evacuation from Dunkirk!) contrasted starkly with the fitful, protracted dribble of Congress participants who arrived in England in the preceding week. A bitter postscript, however, was the news from Australia that the passports of twenty-five Australian delegates would be cancelled if they went to Warsaw. Their passports carried that Cold War signature, “Not Valid for Iron Curtain Countries”. This, and the warning by British emigration

\(^{90}\) PRO FO 1110/371, J.H. Peck to P. Jordan (Prime Minister’s Office) 1 December 1950.

\(^{91}\) PRO FO 1110/371, J.H. Peck to C.F.A. Warner, 4 June 1951.

\(^{92}\) Emblematic of the Cold War, 10,000 leaflets were also printed by a White Russian emigré group (Free Russian Partizans of Peace); they were distributed in Sheffield on Monday 13 November and accused the Kremlin of preparing for war. (My thanks to Bill Moore for a copy of this leaflet.)

\(^{93}\) Sheffield Star, 13 November 1950. Originally a film covering the five days in November was planned but dropped after the Congress in Sheffield was aborted. However, in Warsaw, a film of the Congress, Peace Will Win, was directed by Joris Ivens. This film was screened by the University of Melbourne Peace Club on 26 March 1952. Ivens’ earlier films included The Spanish Earth (1937), The 400 Million (1938), Power and the Land (1941) and Indonesia Calling (1948). In 1946 he was appointed film commissioner of the Dutch East Indies, but his support for Indonesian independence lost him his Dutch passport and in the 1950s he lived in Eastern Europe. A major retrospective of his works, “Cinema Without Borders: The films of Joris Ivens”, was held in March 2002 in New York (see Village Voice, 26 March 2002, p. 112).

\(^{94}\) See PRO FO 1110/349, statements by A. Noble, E. Bevin, J.F. Slater, W. Harpham, G.W. Harrison and W. Strang, 13 November 1950;

\(^{95}\) The Times, 16 November 1950, p.5. The Polish Embassy in London established a special office to process speedily visa applications; any delegate or newspaper correspondent vouched for by the organising committee of the WPC was granted a visa immediately.

\(^{96}\) PRO FO 1110/349, D.H. Rickett to R.E. Barclay 14 November 1950.
officers, was an insufficient deterrent; they arrived in Warsaw on Thursday 16 November.97

For Mrs Nan Green, an organising secretary of the Sheffield Congress, going to Warsaw was “like changing worlds, like stepping into the sun after being in the rain”.98 Similarly, one young Australian communist found it “exhilarating” and “euphoric”.99 Flags, streamers and multi-coloured posters displaying Picasso’s peace dove decorated streets, shops, ports and railway stations. Large welcoming committees greeted the arriving delegates in Warsaw where, according to one report, “tremendous enthusiasm reigns”.100 According to the Daily Worker, “the Attlee ban has put a spotlight on the big British delegation, whose members have been thrilled by the warm welcomes everywhere”. At one welcome, at the Warsaw railway station, speakers attacked “the London lackeys of Wall Street” for preventing the Sheffield Congress.101 The New York Times correspondent described how “girls of 18 to 25 swarmed onto the platform as each train pulled in and handed bouquets to the delegates whilst army bands played”.102 The warm welcome would not be the only reason for British delegates’ gratitude: they, and others, each received 500 złoty (£45) pocket money (and cigarettes by their bedside every night) in addition to all travel, dining, entertainment and accommodation costs being met by the Polish government. Whether this was beneficence or bribery is difficult to tell but, to the British Foreign Office, “it made clear for all the world to see that the thing was a Cominform racket”.103 At least one delegate spent much of his pocket money, equivalent then to the average monthly wage of a Polish worker, on vodka and dinner-dances at the Bristol Hotel “while telling Poles who asked if I could help them escape that they should be ashamed to run away from socialism”.104

The Congress was declared open by Frederic Joliot-Curie at 7pm on 16 November in front of 1756 delegates representing eighty-one countries and 309 guests and

97 These Australian delegates experienced long and difficult delays when, subsequently, attempting to return to Australia. See NAA A3094/1, Item 235/8 (“Australian delegates to the World Peace Congress”, 19 December 1950); A432/80, Item 51/2001; A462/19, Item 696/6 and A1838/283, Item 69/1/1/16/1 Part 2 (“Warsaw Peace Congress”). The Minister of Immigration, Harold Holt, reached his decision after “careful consultation with security services here and elsewhere”. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates [H of R], Vol.210, 15 November 1950, p.2638.
98 Sheffield Telegraph, 19 November 1950.
99 Interview with Roger Wilson, Melbourne, 9 April 2000. Wilson, then an activist and later an official in the Seamen’s Union, remained a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) until 1984.
100 Daily Worker, 16 November 1950, p.1.
101 The Times, 18 November 1950, p.5.
102 New York Times, 17 November 1950, extracted in NAA A1838/283, Item 69/1/1/16/1 Pt.2.
103 PRO FO 1110/349, J.H. Peck to P. Jordan (PM’s office) 1 December 1950.
104 Ian Turner, “My Long March”, Overland, No. 59, Spring 1974, p.36. Turner was in 1950 secretary of the Australian Peace Council; he was expelled from the Communist Party in 1958 but remained a committed socialist until his death in December 1978. See his Room for Manoeuvre: Writings on History, Politics, Ideas and Play (Melbourne, 1982). Whilst in Warsaw he attempted to see Henri Gust, his wife’s uncle and a government official; for “security reasons” the meeting was prevented. Turner, however, did manage “an intense relationship with an American Negro girl” which, indirectly, contributed to his removal, by the CPA, from the leadership of the Peace Council in early 1951.
All the luminaries barred by the Attlee government — Pietro Nenni, Dmitri Shostakovich, Ilya Ehrenburg — were there. But the Yugoslavs — whose country had, until late 1948, been championed as the model “People’s Democracy” but now were apostates — were not credentialled. The venue was the unoccupied vast hall of the State printing works which had been transformed by the prodigious, round-the-clock efforts over four days by hundreds of Polish workmen. Huge pictures of Stalin, Bierut (the Polish President), Joliot-Curie and the now-ubiquitous white dove of peace adorned the low hall. The slogan “Stalin is with us” was displayed but, diplomatically perhaps, only in Polish. To those delegates from Western countries who were for the first time “experience[ing] a real people’s democracy”, the rituals, quite different from what could be expected in Sheffield, would be a surprise. Between speeches, the Congress organisers regularly brought into the hall groups of dancing boys and girls dressed in peasant costumes who showered the delegates with posies of flowers. Members of the Polish communist youth organisation gave leading speakers gifts such as the head of Stalin in coal. After certain speeches, “Pokoj”, the Polish word for peace, was repeated rhythmically to clapping for many minutes. When Pak Den-Ai, the North Korean delegate, spoke — in Russian — delegates “rose as one man” and cheered for a full ten minutes; when Mao and Kim Il Sung were toasted, “again they rose to cheer until they could cheer no more”. All of this may have been “intensely moving and inspiring” and its lasting impression “indelible”, but it did provoke concern, then unvoiced, in one delegate that “this was meant to be a peace conference not a communist conference”. The multifarious and, not infrequently, mellifluous speeches were widely reported and reprinted and will not be summarised here. What is important is how these speeches and the Warsaw Congress generally can be seen as part of the Cold War contest between East and West for the “hearts and minds” of its citizens.

Peace and the Cold War

In contrast to the historiographical neglect of the second World Peace Congress since 1950, Cold War combatants then knew the Congress was of immense political

---

105 The following is based on reports in *Daily Worker*, *Challenge*, *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times* and interviews with two Australian delegates, Ron Neave (15 May 2000) and Roger Wilson.

106 Stakhanovite-like propaganda was evident: according to the Polish press, the Congress was “inspiring the Polish workers to a spontaneous increase of output”. *The Times*, 17 November 1950, p.3. Similarly: “Polish factory workers joined ‘Peace Shifts’ in honour of the Congress and ran their machines at a still faster pace”. *Congress of Peace, Warsaw 1950* (Listopad, 1950), p.14.


108 *Daily Worker*, 21 November 1950, p.3.

109 Elinor Burns, “The Warsaw Peace Congress”, *World News and Views*, vol.30, no.48, 2 December 1950, p.567; interview with Roger Wilson, Melbourne, 9 April 2000. The one speech that failed to receive a standing ovation and was, instead, booed, was that by O. John Rogge, a friend of Konni Zilliuzus (referred to above) and author of *Our Vanishing Civil Liberties* (New York, 1949). He denounced North Korean aggression and denied that the US desired war. He, in turn, was denounced by *Pravda* as a tool of Titoism. See NAA A1838/283, Item 69/1/16/1 Pt. 2, Department of External Affairs Press Cuttings. For a fascinating discussion of Rogge’s political odyssey, see Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton, *The Rosenberg File. A Search for the Truth* (New York, 1983), pp.82-88.

significance. Symptomatic was the prolonged attention given in the Soviet press, on East Berlin radio and at the Warsaw Congress itself to a leaked secret document. The document was a Foreign Office despatch to British embassies setting out in full how the Attlee government planned to render ineffectual the Sheffield Congress. The duplicity of the government’s approach, including withholding results of unsuccessful visa applications until the last minute, was easily discernible. On 12 November it had “fallen into communist hands”. At the Prime Minister’s request, MI6 investigated this “serious leakage” and soon a member of the Information Registry Section of the British Embassy in Paris was being interrogated.\footnote{PRO PREM 8/1150, Minute, K.A. Geary, 19 December 1950; Bevin to Attlee, 27 December 1950.} The high-level response from both sides is indicative of what was felt to be at stake. Also at stake, from the Soviet perspective, was the standing and reputation of the “New Democracies”. Each delegate who visited Poland, and on whom the most lavish attention was directed,\footnote{As one non-communist delegate noted, “nothing had been left undone to meet the comfort and convenience of the delegates”. Rev. H.J. L Armstrong, \textit{A Visit to the Warsaw Peace Congress} (n.pub, n.d [1951]), p.10. Roger Wilson (interview 9 April 2000) recalled staying initially in the Bristol Hotel (an opulent establishment that survived the Second World War, now Le Royal Meridien) and later in newly-furnished flats for workers whom he realised, guiltily, had been relocated for the duration of the Congress.} would become an emissary for the values and virtues of the socialist project. These de facto ambassadors spoke in factories, on radio and at public meetings upon their return. Such “I was there, I saw it” testimonies were powerful propaganda weapons, especially when articulated by non-communists. Mrs Davies, the wife of the Labour MP for Merthyr Tydfil, S.O. Davies, told a Trafalgar Square meeting that the only “iron curtain” that existed was around Great Britain when it barred the entry of WPC delegates. She stated that in Poland she saw “no signs of dictatorship”.\footnote{\textit{Daily Worker}, 20 November 1950, p.2.} Dr Christopher Woodward, a “conservative Christian”, was “certain” there were no camps for political prisoners in Eastern Europe.\footnote{\textit{The Times}, 18 November 1950, p.5} This, of course, was at precisely the time that the American leftist, Hermann Field, was being incarcerated in a state security prison on the banks of the Vistula just away a few miles from the Congress.\footnote{See his remarkable autobiography, \textit{Trapped in the Cold War: the ordeal of an American family} (Stanford, 1999). With an Ivan Denisovich-like resilience he survived — just — until his release in 1954. His brother, Noel Field, was both a committed communist and a close confidant of Alger Hiss, was also imprisoned, but in Budapest; both were casualties of the terrible purges and show trials commencing in 1949-50 in nearly all the satellite countries.}

The British government believed the staging of the Peace Congress was a crucial dimension of the Soviet-sponsored “peace offensive” that, thanks to the Stockholm Petition, the debate over German re-armament and the war in Korea, was burgeoning. And because that offensive “has absorbed all other Communist activities and is now regarded by the Soviet leaders as the most important and active task of World Communism, embracing all the main objectives of Soviet foreign policy”,\footnote{PRO FO 1110/349, Information Research Department minute, 7 December 1950.} it must be confronted. If the Soviets’ peace campaign were now “a propagandist weapon of war”,\footnote{PRO FO 1110/370, “Secret” appreciation, “Second World Peace Congress” [p.1].} as an MI5 assessment argued, and the World Peace Congress a means of “weakening the determination of the Western powers to build up their defences against
Soviet pressure”, then the West must react aggressively. Stymieing the Sheffield Congress and forcing the dove of peace to fly east was part of that reaction. Several benefits would result from this: it would “convince Western Europe that our native communists are a feeble lot from whom we have little to fear”; it would deter “the well-meaning and muddle-headed” from supporting the peace movement; and it would combat the projection of the World Peace Council as an effective rival, a political alternative, to the United Nations, a point emphasised by speakers at the Warsaw Congress. With the outbreak of the Korean war on 25 June 1950, to which the UN was militarily committed, such a projection assumed even greater significance.

From both sides of the ideological divide during the early Cold War, therefore, this event in November 1950 was full of propaganda potential and political significance. In an important sense the Sheffield/Warsaw Peace Congress, the responses of the state in both Britain and Poland, and the American and Soviet involvement in or support for those responses were all very much what the Cold War was primarily about: the control and mobilisation of public opinion, at home and abroad.

---

119 PRO FO 1110/349, P. Jordan to Murray, 29 November 1950 [p.1].
120 PRO FO 1110/349, J.H. Peck to P. Jordan (PM’s office) 1 December 1950: “The appeal issued at the end of the [Warsaw] Congress, if it had emanated from Sheffield, might have attracted some of the well-meaning and muddle-headed. With the imprint of Warsaw upon it, it is far less likely to do us harm”.