

NOTE

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Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

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Further on Public Relations;
Interview with Mr. James Spence, etc.

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by AR for DHHS NDHQ
Date: NOV 13 1986

Canadian Military Headquarters,
2 Cockspur Street,
London, England.

The Director,
Historical Section,
General Staff,
National Defence Headquarters,
Ottawa, CANADA.

Sir,

I have the honour to present a
further report dealing with the public relations agencies of the Canadian
offices in London.

2. On 7 January I had an interview with Mr. James SPENCE, Press Officer, Canada
House, who talked to me at some length about his own work and that of other
agencies with similar tasks.

FUNCTIONS OF PRESS OFFICER, CANADA HOUSE

3. Mr. Spence has charge of the public relations of the Office of the High
Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, and on his own showing is on terms
of confidence with the present High Commissioner, the Hon. Vincent Massey. In
addition, however, he is charged with publicity for the Canadian naval forces
operating in the United Kingdom waters, and for the Royal Canadian Air Force
establishment in this country. For these he performs the functions performed
by Captain Abel for the military forces, as described in my report No. 2; and
he says that he gave Captain Abel considerable assistance in the early days of
the latter's organization. As Mr. Spence tells me that an expansion of the
R.C.A.F. establishment in the United Kingdom is in sight as a result of the visit
of the Chief of the Air Staff, his work in this connection will presumably
increase from now on. In connection with the Navy, he mentioned the official
photographer of whom Lieut. Farrow spoke to me in Ottawa; he says, however,
that this man is attached to one ship, and gets pictures only of activities in
which that ship is engaged.

RECORDS OF CANADIAN ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

4. Mr. Spence said that he had been collecting, since the outbreak of war,

all material that has come to his attention concerning the activities of the Canadian forces in the United Kingdom. In particular, he said that he had a complete collection of newsreel motion-picture films of important happenings, such as the arrival of the First Division, reviews of Canadian troops by the King and Queen, etc., etc. These films, he said, were chiefly stored in the strong-rooms of the film companies. Mr. Spence said that he had undertaken this work of his own volition. I urged him to continue collecting, unless some other agency should happen to be set up to carry on the work.

5. Later, while in Captain Abel's office, I mentioned this activity of Mr. Spence (who occupies the next office) and was surprised when Captain Abel said he had heard nothing of any such collection of films and expressed the opinion that it did not exist. At the moment, in fact, Captain Abel is negotiating with the film companies and the Canada House authorities with a view to obtaining (by gift or purchase) just such a collection as Mr. Spence says he has assembled; and while I was in the office Captain Abel telephoned two Canada House officials (Mr. PEARSON and Mr. AVERY) and they assured him that Canada House owned no films of any consequence. Mr. Spence's name was not mentioned, and Captain Abel did not approach him. I am at a loss to understand the situation, but perhaps I shall shortly be able to discover more facts about it. At any rate, it is clear that relations between the two Public Relations offices on the top floor of Canada House are anything but frank and cordial.

THE "CANADIAN MIRROR"

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6. This situation was further exemplified by what I was able to discover about the history of the "Canadian Mirror", an attempt at providing for the forces in England a journal which would give them news of Canada, which Mr. Lash in Ottawa has described as an enterprise in progress. Mr. Spence, I gather, worked for a considerable time on this project, and Mr. Massey (according to Mr. Spence) took a deep interest in it. It was abandoned, however. Two numbers were produced by "Roneo" and a third, dated 3 Aug. 1940, was printed. This number, in reporting a speech of Mr. Ralston, carried the misleading "streamer" headline "NO MORE CANADIANS FOR BRITAIN". Mr. Spence hinted that this led the Corps Commander to withdraw his support from the scheme; and no more numbers were published.

7. Consulting Captain Abel's office, I found that it had taken no part in the "Mirror" enterprise, and had criticized it on the ground that what the troops wanted was not "stale news from Canada" which they could get in Canadian papers,

but rather news from other units in Britain (which, Lieut. Gibbs tells me, the military authorities are dubious about; they have discouraged various proposals of the P.R.O. for setting up some sort of news-gathering organization in the Units). Lieut. Gibbs hinted that there were other reasons for the abandonment of the "Mirror" besides the objectionable headline; that, he said, was "a convenient handle". Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it serves to demonstrate what is going on behind the scenes in the matter of public relations in the Canadian offices here.

8. Mr. Spence gave me a copy of the one printed number of the "Canadian Mirror", and I enclose it with the original of this report, for the files of the Historical Section. I understand that about 30,000 copies were printed.

MISCELLANEOUS

9. I spoke to Mr. Spence of the apparent coolness existing between Mr. Lash and Captain Abel, which struck me as unfortunate. He said that it might perhaps be traceable to an episode which took place some months ago, at the time of Major-General CRERAR's return to Canada. Captain Abel's office had prepared an account of General Crerar, but instead of sending it to Mr. Lash for distribution they took the course of sending it from London by mail to each Canadian paper individually. This had the effect of both making the "story" too late, and leaving a bad impression on the mind of the Director of Public Information, and though the episode has not been repeated I gather that this effect has lasted. The parties would probably have no difficulty in cooperating if they could meet for discussion; but it is hard to explain things across the Atlantic Ocean. I shall do anything which I can do with propriety towards clearing the way to better relations.

10. The absence of any effective co-ordination of Canadian offices here is obvious. It is not my function to make suggestions in the matter, and in any case I scarcely see the situation clearly enough yet to do so with any confidence. But I suspect that if any measure of co-ordination is ultimately attempted, and if it is to succeed, the person who is to take charge will have to be one not involved in the present awkward situation, and one of considerable shrewdness and tact.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Sgd. C.P. Stacey, Major,
Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q.