

**Committee:** Britain WWII

**Character:** Duff Cooper, Minister of Information

After years of attempts to avoid war through efforts of appeasement, our country has finally come to face a brutal fact: the dictators that threaten continental Europe have discarded the old diplomatic methods of correspondence, favouring new methods, new morality, and a new vocabulary; they do not listen to the language of sweet reasonableness, forcing us instead to resort to the language of the mailed fist.<sup>1</sup> I have long predicted that our continual acquiescence to German demands would not bring lasting peace, and that our failure to clarify our stance and our plan of action would lead us to appear as a friend not to be relied on and a foe not to be feared.<sup>2</sup> This view underlay my opposition to our weak action regarding Abyssinia and our failure to react to the annexation of Austria, and culminated in my resignation from my post as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1938.<sup>3</sup> However, I could not be more regretful of the fact that, despite all the best efforts of my colleagues, my convictions have been proven correct.

Having been newly appointed the Minister of Information by my dear friend, the new Prime Minister Winston Churchill, I am prepared to forget past disagreements, and once again serve my country as a member of its government.<sup>4</sup> I bring to my new post the knowledge I have gained over fifteen years of political life, having served in four different government departments: the Foreign Affairs Office, the War Office, the Treasury and the Admiralty.<sup>5</sup> As Minister of Information, I hope to prepare the public mind for war, and dispel the doubts of the necessity of fighting this war.<sup>6</sup> Until recently, the public has been told that the danger of war had been permanently avoided by the Munich Agreement, so that now that war has erupted, they cling to the false hope that the conflict is a mistake, and that affairs can be patched up through diplomacy.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the sense of security derived from our geographical separation from the European continent has led to a lack of interest in foreign affairs, which constitutes a grave danger to our country.<sup>8</sup> I intend to combat this ignorance through close cooperation with the media, particularly with the British Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>9</sup> In this endeavour, I do not seek to distort or minimize the truth: in the state of mind that war produces, people are only too apt to exaggerate the importance of events, and to conflate one victory or one defeat with the result of the whole war.<sup>10</sup> Instead, I plan to allow the press as much freedom as is safely possible, so that the public can obtain from it all the information they require.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Duff Cooper, Personal Explanation, 3 October 1938, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 339, cc. 29-40, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1938/oct/03/personal-explanation>.

<sup>2</sup> Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 193.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Wrigley, *Winston Churchill: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 136.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 266.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>9</sup> BBC, "Censorship and Propaganda," *History of the BBC*, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/general/censorship-propaganda>.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 280.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

The Ministry has already begun to face enemy challenges to its mission of providing truth to the people of Britain. Nazi propaganda is both well-funded and well-established, and this “war of nerves” will require the coordination of every means of publicity.<sup>12</sup> The most recent threat is the propaganda broadcasts of “Lord Haw Haw,” whose nightly programme, *Germany Calling*, reaches millions of British listeners, and threatens Home Front morale.<sup>13</sup> The ministry has suggested that the BBC broadcast a nightly British program to follow *Germany Calling*, discrediting Haw Haw’s claims.<sup>14</sup> However, this idea has been met with resistance from the BBC, who worry that these rebuttals will undermine the trust of their audience.<sup>15</sup> Ideally, a compromise will be reached, but ultimately, action must be taken to counter the enemy propaganda.

The Ministry also faces the task of gaining support in neutral countries through overseas publicity.<sup>16</sup> The current focus of the government appears to be securing the support of America, and, thankfully, my recent engagement as a lecturer in that country has provided me with the insight necessary to achieving that end.<sup>17</sup> Through my travels, I have learned that a majority of American citizens are convinced that: a) they were enticed into the Great War by British propaganda, and b) the current war has arisen as the result of the harsh conditions of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>18</sup> These convictions, coupled with a disdain for Britain’s past policy of appeasement, have led the cause of Great Britain to be an unpopular one within the United States.<sup>19</sup> However, rather than respond as the British government has, by abandoning all attempts at propaganda in America, I believe we should aim to give information and correct misunderstanding through more subtle methods than were employed in the Great War.<sup>20</sup> It is my own persuasion that it is not within our right to ask the United States to fight for our cause; why should we ask another country to fight a war by which she is not directly threatened, when we ourselves were unwilling to do the same?<sup>21</sup> However, I do consider it within our right to expect America to repeal the Neutrality Act, and I plan to work towards achieving that end.<sup>22</sup>

As the war progresses, I hope to remain of service to my country, and I will do everything within my power to ensure that the nation, including its government, maintains a united front. In this dark hour of our history, there can be no resignation.

---

<sup>12</sup> National Archives, “The Ministry of Information, INF Series and INF 3,” *The Art of War*, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/inf3.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> War Office to F.W. Ogilvie, Whitehall, 11 December, 1939, in “Lord Haw Haw: The Nazi Broadcaster Who Threatened Britain,” *BBC Archives*, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/hawhaw/8924.shtml>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> BBC, “Censorship and Propaganda.”

<sup>16</sup> National Archives, “The Ministry of Information, INF Series and INF 3.”

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 267.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 270.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## Bibliography

BBC. "Censorship and Propaganda." *History of the BBC*. Accessed November 8, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/general/censorship-propaganda>.

Cooper, Duff. *Old Men Forget*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954.

Cooper, Duff. Personal Explanation, 3 October 1938. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 339, cc. 29-40. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1938/oct/03/personal-explanation>.

National Archives. "The Ministry of Information, INF Series and INF 3." *The Art of War*. Accessed November 9, 2016. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/inf3.htm>.

War Office. War Office to F.W. Ogilvie, Whitehall, 11 December, 1939. In "Lord Haw Haw: The Nazi Broadcaster Who Threatened Britain," *BBC Archives*. Accessed November 8, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/hawhaw/8924.shtml>.

Wrigley, Chris. *Winston Churchill: A Biographical Companion*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002.