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# Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War<sup>1</sup>

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## Extract

At the outbreak of war in August 1914, the Germans poured out propaganda in the form of posters, leaflets and pamphlets, in an attempt to explain Germany's entry into the war and discredit the motives of the allies. The British government was greatly disturbed by the virulence of the German campaign, which was specially directed towards influencing the United States of America. At the end of August 1914, the matter was raised in the cabinet: 'Mr Lloyd George urged the importance of setting on foot an organization to inform and influence public opinion abroad and to confute German mis-statements and sophistries.' **On 5 September** the cabinet decided that steps were to be taken without delay to counteract the dissemination by Germany of false news abroad. Though there had been no peacetime precedent, the cabinet accepted the need for an organization to co-ordinate propaganda directed at foreign opinion for the duration of the war.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Asquith, Herbert to the King, 31 Aug. 1914, Cab. 41/35/38, P.R.O.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Asquith+Herbert+to+the+King+31+Aug.+1914+Cab.+41/35/38+P.R.O.>)
- <sup>3</sup> For further detail see Sanders, M. L., p. 17 and footnote 1, and p. 81.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Sanders+M.+L.+p.+17+and+footnote+1+and+p.+81.>)
- <sup>4</sup> See Appendix A - Namier was listed as a journalist at that time.
- <sup>5</sup> 1st report of the work of Wellington House, 7 June 1915, p. 1, Inf. 4/5 (Min. of Inf.), P.R.O.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>8</sup> For a detailed list see Squires, James Duane, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917* (1st edn., Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 16 ff.  
Google Scholar ([https://scholar.google.com/scholar\\_lookup?title=British+Propaganda+at+Home+and+in+the+United+States+from+1914+to+1917&publication+year=1935&author=Squires+James+Duane](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=British+Propaganda+at+Home+and+in+the+United+States+from+1914+to+1917&publication+year=1935&author=Squires+James+Duane))
- <sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Sanders, M. L., pp. 20 ff.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Sanders+M.+L.+pp.+20+ff.>)
- <sup>10</sup> Inf. 4/5, P.R.O.
- <sup>11</sup> F.O. 371/2837, P.R.O.
- <sup>12</sup> Masterman to Robert Cecil, 31 Jan. 1916, F.O. 395/2833, P.R.O.
- <sup>13</sup> Report on Propaganda arrangements by Robert Donald, 9 Jan. 1917, p. 3, Inf. 4/4B, P.R.O.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Idem.
- <sup>17</sup> War Cabinet minutes, 2 Jan. 1917, Cab. 23/WC25, P.R.O.
- <sup>18</sup> Memorandum to the cabinet, 3 Feb. 1917, Inf. 4/1B, P.R.O.
- <sup>19</sup> See Appendix B.
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- 20** This was known as the 'business section' since the idea was to commercially exploit the propaganda it produced.
- 21** War Cabinet minute, Cab. 23/WC75, P.R.O.
- 22** Donald to Scott, 29 May 1917, Inf. 4/7, P.R.O.
- 23** *Idem*.
- 24** Originally the other members were Lord Northcliffe, Scott, C. P., and Lord Burnham, though Lord Beaverbrook soon replaced Northcliffe who was sent on a mission to the U.S.A.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Scott+C.+P.+and+Lord+Burnham+though+Lord+Beaverbrook+soon+replaced+Northcliffe+who+was+sent+on+a+mission+to+the+U.S.A.>)
- 25** Smith, Janet Adam, *John Buchan* (1st edn., London, 1965), p. 209.  
Google Scholar ([https://scholar.google.com/scholar\\_lookup?title=John+Buchan&publication+year=1965&author=Smith+Janet+Adam](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=John+Buchan&publication+year=1965&author=Smith+Janet+Adam))
- 26** *Ibid*.
- 27** Reports on Various Branches of Propaganda Work and Recommendations, Inquiry into the extent and efficiency of propaganda by Donald, Robert, 4 Dec. 1917, Inf. 4/48, P.R.O.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Donald+Robert+4+Dec.+1917+Inf.+4/48+P.R.O.>)
- 28** Reply by Masterman, to reports on Dept. of Inf., Appendix II, 29 Dec. 1917, Inf. 4/5, P.R.O.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Masterman+to+reports+on+Dept.+of+Inf.+Appendix+II+29+Dec.+1917+Inf.+4/5+P.R.O.>)
- 29** For details see Sanders, M. L., pp. 48 ff.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Sanders+M.+L.+pp.+48+ff.>)
- 30** Dated 28 Dec. 1917.
- 31** Buchan to Carson, 28 Dec. 1917, Inf. 4/s. P.R.O.
- 32** See Appendix C.
- 33** Confidential report on Wellington House by Major-General McRae, A. D., 1 July 1918, F/2/307, Beaverbrook papers, Beaverbrook Library.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=McRae+A.+D.+1+July+1918+F/2/307+Beaverbrook+papers+Beaverbrook+Library.>)
- 34** For a detailed analysis of these disputes, see Sanders, M. L., pp. 62 S.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Sanders+M.+L.+pp.+62+S.>)
- 35** II Sept. 1918, F/2a/i/2, Beaverbrook papers, Beaverbrook Library.

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- 36** Inf. 4/5, P.R.O.
- 37** Ibid.
- 38** 1st report House, Wellington, p. 4.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=House+Wellington+p.+4.>)
- 39** Report to Foreign Office, Nov. 1914, F.O. 371/1950, P.R.O.
- 40** 10 Sept. 1916, F.O. 395/51, P.R.O.
- 41** File on Duma visit, F.O. 395/2825, P.R.O.
- 42** The magazine was a failure - see Sanders, M. L., p. 93.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Sanders+M.+L.+p.+93.>)
- 43** July 1917, F.O. 395/74, P.R.O.
- 44** Report from Ernest Maxse to Foreign Office, 23 Mar. 1917, F.O. 395/100, P.R.O.
- 45** Memo to Foreign Office by Mair, G. H., 11 Sept. 1916, F.O. 371/2833, P.R.O.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Mair+G.+H.+11+Sept.+1916+F.O.+371/2833+P.R.O.>)
- 46** Feb. 1916, p. 3, Inf. 4/5, P.R.O.
- 47** 3rd report Wellington House, F.O. 371/2837, P.R.O.
- 48** See M. L. Sanders, p. 101 ff.
- 49** Inf. 4/5, P.R.O., p. 6.
- 50** Barclay to the Foreign Office, 10 Sept. 1915, F.O. 371/2577, P.R.O.
- 51** Report to Foreign Office, 29 May 1916, F.O. 395/37, P.R.O.
- 52** *Film and Censorship in England*, Chap. XI, 'The War Years', Inf. 4/2, P.R.O.
- 53** Bromhead's report to Cinema Committee, June 1916, F.O. 395/25 (see also F.O. 371/2825), P.R.O.
- 54** Report to Foreign Office, 19 Feb. 1916, 371/2831, P.R.O.
- 55** Greene to Foreign Office, 2 Jan. 1917, F.O. 395/92, P.R.O.
- 56** 1st report House, Wellington, p. 3.  
Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=House+Wellington+p.+3.>)
- 57** Allison's report to the Foreign Office, Oct. 1917, F.O. 395/66, P.R.O.
- 58** File on Lusitania medal, F.O. 395/42, P.R.O. - a specimen of the Lusitania medal is kept in the safe of the P.R.O. and is available for inspection. The intention of the original medal was satirical but British propagandists interpreted it as a celebration of the sinking and presented it in this light.

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**59** Butler was appointed following the Balfour Mission in Apr. 1917.

**60** By Major-General McRae, A. D., 1 July 1918, F/2/307, Beaverbrook papers, Beaverbrook Library.

Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=McRae+A.+D.+1+July+1918+F/2/307+Beaverbrook+papers+Beaverbrook+Library.>)

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**1** This article is based on the author's unpublished thesis: M. L. Sanders, 'Official British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries during the First World War with special reference to organisation and methods', M.Phil, thesis, London, 1972.