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Propaganda, Politics and Film 1918-1945

Editors: Nicholas Pronay & D.W. Spring

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The nature of politics, both internal and external, has been transformed in the twentieth century by the arrival of modern means of communications. In this volume British, American, Dutch and Russian authors examine aspects of their role and political impact between 1918 and 1945.

In Part I, "The Projection of Britain", Phillip Taylor traces how the British Foreign Office and Cabinet recognised, with reluctance and distaste but nevertheless to a full extent that, in peacetime as well as war, the conduct of 'propaganda' would have to become a part of the work of governments. Davis Ellwood analyses the development and impact of the British Council -- the first institutional result of the acceptance of the need for 'cultural diplomacy'.

In Part II, "Film Propaganda in Britain and France between the World Wars", Peter Stead surveys the new mass working-class audience created by the cinema, how the cinema affected their expectations and why Hollywood, rather than the British cinema, succeeded in projecting them. Nicholas Pronay discusses how the new medium for the masses and for the new mass electorate, came to be placed under comprehensive political control through the British Board of Film Censors. John Ramsden shows how Baldwin and the Conservative Party appreciated the potential of the new media and how before the other parties, they harnessed it for the needs of the new electoral conditions. Bert Hogenkamp examines the impact of film on the labour movement and the radical left. By comparison, Elizabeth Strebel surveys the role of film both for the left and right in France in the crucial years of the Popular Front.

In Part III, "Film Propaganda in Britain in the Second World War", Pronay discusses the mobilization of the fully developed modern news media in Britain for total war, with newsreels in the front-line. Ian Dalrymple describes the work of the Crown Film Unit of which he was head during the war. Helen Forman describes from her own experience the scheme of the great wartime experiment of the non-theatrical use of film and the late Tom Harrison, the founder of Mass-Observation, drew on the files and his own experience of that pioneer organization of opinion research to survey the complex issue of the effectiveness of wartime propaganda films in Britain.

In Part IV, "The Projection of the Soviet Union", S.V. Drobashenko discusses how the potential of film as a mobilising influence on

the masses was developed in the Soviet Union and how Soviet films of the 1920s and 1930s reflect the various phases of Soviet development. D.W. Spring draws on a unique collection of Soviet newsreels, sent abroad in the Second World War, to analyse the role and character of the Soviet newsreel in mobilising the Soviet population for total war and of the image of the Soviet Union at war, which it was hoped would be created through them abroad.

Nicholas Pronay is Senior Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Leeds, Chairman of the Inter-Varsity History Film Consortium, and a director of the Historical Association for Television and film.

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