CULTURAL COLD WAR

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Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: the CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. New York: New P., 2000. Pp. 528. US$29.95; pb, $18.95. UK title: *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. London: Granta, 1999. £20.00.

Although it has been known since the mid-1960s that the CIA funded many supposedly independent cultural organizations and their publications,[1] the story is told again in Frances Stonor Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War: the CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. Saunders, who is an arts editor with the *New Statesman* in London and a documentary film producer, focuses on the Congress for Cultural Freedom and its major magazine, *Encounter*, which was published from 1953 to 1990. This is relevant to Russell scholars, since Russell was one of the honorary chairmen of the Congress until his resignation in 1956, and was an occasional contributor to *Encounter*.

Saunders is at her best in describing the hopes and illusions of the intellectuals involved with the Congress, as well as their often frenzied and sometimes tragi-comic actions. In a chapter entitled "Marxists and the Waldorf", she recounts a left-oriented conference featuring a major Soviet delegation that was held in March 1949 at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. The American philosopher Sidney Hook organized an *ad hoc* opposition and directed his forces—called Americans for Intellectual Freedom—from the bridal suite of the Waldorf! This opposition focused on unmasking the visiting Soviet artists, including the composer Shostakovich and the writer Fadeyev, by forcing them to acknowledge their political enthralment to totalitarian bureaucrats. Saunders

[1] A *Ramparts* magazine article in March 1967 revealed the extent of CIA support for the National Students Association, and led to a broader re-examination of the CIA's role in other organizations, including the Congress (Sol Stern, "A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, Etc.", *Ramparts*, March 1967, pp. 219–38). Earlier, on 27 April 1966, the *New York Times* mentioned CIA funding for the journal *Encounter* in the context of a series of articles on CIA funding, but this point was buried on page 28 and did not provoke immediate public reaction. CIA agent Thomas Braden admitted all in a 20 May 1967 *Saturday Evening Post* article entitled "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral'". Saunders mentions that Braden went on to become a syndicated columnist and co-host of the CNN program *Crossfire*.

notes that Fadeyev made his avowal of orthodoxy with "his ashen face turned down to study the floorboards" (p. 50).

The cultural confrontation then shifted to Paris, where the anti-communist left organized, with limited success, a counter-conference in April 1949, billed as a "day of resistance to dictatorship and war". A more serious organizational effort led to a second conference, this time in Berlin in June 1950. This, the opening salvo of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, was held just after the lifting of the Berlin blockade. The conference commenced to news of the North Korean invasion of South Korea, which moved the Cold War to its first hot confrontation in Asia.

To establish the Congress on a permanent footing, the CIA provided the initial and much of the continuing financing, while the British Information Research Department (IRD) also helped to a lesser extent. CIA operatives Frank Wisner and Tom Braden acted behind the scenes during the setting up of the Congress, while agents Michael Josselson and Lawrence de Neufville were active within the Congress itself. A large group of intellectuals was recruited, including the musicologist Nicolas Nabokov, who was named as general secretary, and the author and cultural essayist Denis de Rougemont, who became president of the executive committee. They were both stationed in Paris where the organization was headquartered, and from which the magazine *Preuves* was published. A number of national sections were established, the most important of which was the American committee. There Sidney Hook played a leading role, along with others such as the social scientist Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the commentator Irving Kristol, later prominent in the American right, and the political scientist Daniel Bell. German affairs, along with the review *Der Monat*, were initially run by Melvin Lasky, who later became a co-editor of *Encounter*; while in England, the poet Stephen Spender, who eventually joined the New Left, was among the leaders.

Saunders' analysis of these and many other individuals involved in Congress activities is based on interviews and consultation of archival material—though not the Russell Archives. Her book is best viewed as an update of material covered in Peter Coleman's 1989 volume on the same topic: *The Liberal Conspiracy: the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for Postwar Europe*.[2] Of the two books, Coleman's is more systematic, including a history of the conferences, national sections, and journals of the Congress. However, Saunders' is more critical, raising—though not fully answering—the problem of the effect of CIA funding on the intellectual integrity of the Congress participants. For

[2] New York: Free P. Coleman was a member of the Australian chapter of the Congress and editor of its local magazine, *Quadrant*. His book was reviewed by Louis Greenspan in *Russell*, n.s. 10 (1990): 180–3.

Coleman, the Congress was in the end a success, as evidenced by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe; while for Saunders it was a failure, as demonstrated by the tarnishing of the reputations of those intellectuals who collaborated with it. However, three aspects are missing or insufficient in Saunders' treatment of this drama.

Firstly, though Saunders occasionally mentions sums of money involved, she does not produce a general accounting of the total amounts expended by the Congress and, more importantly, by the CIA in its support of the Congress. In this respect, Coleman is more informative. For example, he provides a breakdown by category of the $2,070,000 the Congress spent in 1966, the last year before the true source of much of its financing became public. Given Saunders' original, British title of *Who Paid the Piper?*, more financial details would have been helpful.

Secondly, Saunders does not fully answer the theoretical questions involved in CIA support for the Congress. In her introductory chapter, she does raise the question of the extent to which intellectual independence was compromised by CIA funding, but in the course of the book she focuses almost exclusively on the individual backgrounds, relationships, and actions of the most committed Congress workers. Her book concludes with an "epilogue" on their ultimate personal failures rather than an analysis of the theoretical questions the CIA role raised.[3] For example, she does not seriously examine the scholarly output of the Congress-affiliated intellectuals,[4] or explain in any detail how the ideas they expressed in these works were influenced by the CIA funding of the Congress.

Thirdly, Saunders' treatment of Russell is not complete, although he is mentioned on four occasions. Once the Congress had a stable group of intellectuals in its orbit, what was most needed was sponsorship by first-rate thinkers not associated in any way with its real source of money. Enter Bertrand Russell, who along with six other prominent figures became an Honorary Chairman.[5]

[3] The problem of intellectual integrity was made just after the 1967 revelations by Christopher Lasch in his essay "The Cultural Cold War: a Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom". This was originally published in *The Nation* and reproduced, with modifications, in *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

[4] For example: Denis de Rougemont, *The Idea of Europe* (1968); Melvin Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution: On the Origins of a Metaphor* (1976); Sidney Hook, *Marx and the Marxists; the Ambiguous Legacy* (1955); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days; John F. Kennedy in the White House* (1965); Irving Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea in America* (1972), *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (1983); Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology; On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1960), *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society; a Venture in Social Forecasting* (1973).

[5] The others were Benedetto Croce (1866–1952, Italian idealist philosopher of history), Karl Jaspers (1883–1969, German exile to Switzerland, existentialist philosopher), Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971, American Christian ethicist), John Dewey (1859–1952, American pragmatist philosopher), Jacques Maritain (1882–1973, French Thomistic philosopher), and Salvador de Madariaga

Saunders readily falls victim to the view that Russell's "politics seemed to change with the wind, and he was to cause the Congress and its American backers much heartburn over the years of his patronage, until he finally resigned in 1956" (p. 92). This fails to analyze the underlying issues. Russell joined the Congress and was willing to sponsor it because he approved of its demand for intellectual freedom in the communist-dominated world. This was part of his overall commitment to intellectual freedom everywhere. He withdrew when the Congress, and in particular its American section, refused to seriously criticize limitations on the same freedoms in the United States and the non-communist world. Russell's final comment on the American Committee was terse but telling: "The American branch is in favour of cultural freedom for Russia and China but disapproves of it elsewhere" (Russell to Stephen Spender, 14 April 1956, RAI 580).

When Saunders describes Russell's final break with the Congress (on pp. 231–2), she focuses on the event that set this resignation in motion. In March 1956, Russell published a letter to the editor in the *Manchester Guardian*, critical of the treatment of Morton Sobell, who had been implicated in the Ethel and Julius Rosenberg atomic-bomb spy case. Russell's letter provoked a statement of protest from the American Committee, published on 7 April, also in the *Guardian*, accusing Russell of "lack of objectivity" and implying that he was aiding the Soviet threat by his criticism of US policies. Although the Congress leadership in Paris attempted to distance themselves from the "manner" in which the American section had acted, it declined to censure the committee for what it said, leading to Russell's final break.[6]

Russell, it should be noted, had been wary of the American Committee for some time. In 1953 he expressed doubts about its agenda, and was dissuaded from resigning only when it was argued that the US group was nominally independent of the Congress, and that as an Honorary Chairman of the Congress he was not a member of the US committee or considered one of its sponsors. In 1954 the US committee again roused Russell's ire when it denounced a meeting in honour of Albert Einstein to which Russell had sent a letter of support. In a telegram to Russell in March, the Committee claimed that the sponsoring organization, the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, was "a communist-line cause" for "refusing [to] acknowledge suppression [of] civil liberties [and] academic freedom behind [the] Iron Curtain" (telegram from the American Committee to Russell, March 1954, RAI 580).

(1886–1978, Spanish liberal diplomat). Of this group, Russell was the most radical, as he alone was a socialist, atheist, and pacifist (of the "non-absolute" sort).

[6] Still, Russell continued to be interested in and served as a sponsor of the related Committee on Science and Freedom, chaired by Michael Polanyi, until its closing down by the Congress in 1961.

In addition, Russell was also displeased that the Congress itself in 1956 had condemned only the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt, but not the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal.[7] De Rougement replied that the Congress had received a call for support only from Hungarian intellectuals, but not from their Egyptian counterparts. In his response Russell admitted that that this technical difference existed, and that Nasser was no friend of cultural freedom.[8] But he added, "… I still think that to avoid contact with Western Communists is not wise" and noted that he considered the best approach was to argue with them and through a policy of tolerance wean them from supporting the Soviet cause.

This approach was consistent with Russell's activities leading to his 1955 statement against war, including nuclear war, which he made with Albert Einstein and other prominent scientists. Russell made a special effort to include communist intellectuals in the declaration, specifically Frédéric Joliot-Curie, the French Nobel prizewinner in chemistry and prominent member of the Communist Party of France, and the lesser known physicist Leopold Infeld—a collaborator with Einstein on a popular book on the history and philosophy of physics—whose sympathies eventually caused him to return to communist-ruled Poland. Though Russell remained resolutely opposed to communism, his willingness to work with individual communists—especially scientists—was highly successful, both in 1955 and in the subsequent work of the Pugwash Conference and related ventures. This strategy enlarged the number of those willing to cooperate for freedom and peace, rather than limiting it to pro-American anti-communists. This modification in strategy coincided with the transition in the USSR from the rigid Stalinist to the more flexible post-Stalinist leadership, and reflected Russell's willingness to change as new circumstances required, something the Congress was unable to do. It also enabled Russell to maintain his independence, free to criticize both the Russians and the Americans. Saunders relates part of this story, but just part, and as a result fails to fully analyze the underlying reasons for Russell's behaviour.

Nonetheless, Saunders' book remains a highly informative and readily accessible source for the relationships between the CIA and an important western cultural organization and affiliated group of intellectuals. It brings our knowledge of this episode of the Cold War up to date through recent interviews of participants and through examination of some additional—though non-Russell—archival material.

[7] Russell to Denis de Rougement, 19 Nov. 1956, RA2 750; referred to in a letter of response by de Rougement, 5 Dec. 1956, RA1 580.

[8] Russell to de Rougement, 10 Dec. 1956, RA1 580.