

Ideas & Trends

Continued

Fake Books as International Weapons

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

WASHINGTON—Two years ago, Doubleday & Company Inc., publishers, asked John S. Service, a retired Foreign Service Officer, for his opinion of a book being offered by Soviet authorities. The book purported to provide intimate, if derogatory, information about Mao Tse-tung and his followers during World War II.

Mr. Service, who had been with Chairman Mao in 1944 in Yen-an, on special assignment on an American military mission, recommended against publication because upon examination the book appeared to him to be largely an anti-Chinese fabrication. In a memo to the publishers, he said: "What this book boils down to, it seems to me, is a not very adroit Russian rewriting of history."

Despite Mr. Service's warning, Doubleday last month published "The Vladimirov Diaries," for which it paid the Soviet press agency Novosti \$4,000 for American rights. The book is printed with a mild disclaimer from the publisher: The text of Pyotr Vladimirov's "Diaries," it reads, contains "certain inconsistencies and . . . new 'explanatory' material may have been added."

In short, one of the leading American publishing houses has admitted that a book coming out under its imprint is probably, at least in part, a literary fake. It is not what the Soviet authorities said it was, a diary of a Comintern agent assigned to Mr. Mao during World War II. Novosti had published the book in Russian in Moscow in 1973 under the title, "Special Region in China," and in India under that same heading. People in American intelligence agencies agreed with Mr. Service that the book was less diary and more fabrication.

All this says something about Doubleday's willingness to print such material (the publishing house's rationale is that while the book may not be completely factual, it is an interesting "curiosity item" that helps show what the Russians think today about the Chinese). But the incident also underscores the fact that as part of the war of words of the last thirty years, liberties have occasionally been taken with the historical record to make a propaganda point. Doubleday was not the first to publish such dubious "diaries."

In the early fifties, when the cold war was at its coldest, Andre Deutsch, a British firm, and William Morrow, an American company, printed "Notes for a Journal." The book was presented as the diary of Maxim Litvinov, a former Soviet foreign minister who had died in 1951.

In an article published later in a collection of essays, Bertram D. Wolfe, a writer on Soviet matters, recounted how he had proved beyond question to a potential publisher that the Litvinov diaries were phony. He was even able to show that the author was probably George Bessedovsky, a Soviet émigré who was responsible for a major fake of the thirties, "My Uncle Joseph Stalin" by Budi Svanidze.

No such Svanidze ever existed.

Other books have not been outright fakes. But they were put together in ways that have caused problems for serious scholars. "The Penkovsky Papers" were presented as a synthesis of what Col. Oleg Penkovsky had sent to the West before he was arrested and executed as a spy by Soviet authorities in the sixties. But because they do not have the raw materials, scholars have had to put a question mark around the book.

Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs (in two volumes) originally raised questions when the first one appeared. But because the actual Khrushchev tapes were made available after the Soviet leader's death in 1971, there is less skepticism that he actually said what was printed. What is not possible to say, however, is whether all the Khrushchev tapes were sent abroad, whether what was sent was intact and whether any omissions, or deletions, were important.

A number of unquestionably genuine works have been published out of political considerations as well. The Central Intelligence Agency and the United States Information Agency subsidized secretly the publication of books and magazines for a number of years. Sometimes the subsidy was indirect. American publishers might be told that they could be guaranteed several thousand sales of a certain book for distribution overseas. So some anti-Communist tomes that might otherwise be unprofitable were published with a guaranteed sale.

"The Vladimirov Diaries," however, appear unique. Parts of them seem to have been deliberately fabricated by the Russians, presumably by the secret police, to give an unflattering picture of China's leader.

It is often difficult to prove a "diary" phony, because inaccuracies do not demonstrate conclusively that a text is a fabrication; the diarist could have simply made a mistake. But Mr. Service, turning literary detective, has provided some convincing clues. Among them:

Item: The diary describes parties given by the American team in Yen-an in 1944 and states that Black and White and Johnnie Walker scotch whiskeys were the most popular.

Service: "One rule that Stilwell rigidly enforced . . . was that Hump tonnage was too precious for alcoholic beverages . . . we had none and gladly drank the local brew—just as we smoked local cigarettes."

Item: The diary mentions "the shrill barking of jackals in the hills."

Service: "There are no jackals in China."

Item: The diary mentions as important the "air bridge between the U.S.S.R. and China."

Service: "There never was, nor intended to be, any air bridge."

Item: The diary refers to a conversation that Mr. Service had with Chairman Mao; it includes a statement that Mr. Service told Mr. Mao that Washington wanted a coalition government established in China.

Service: "I never told Mao any such thing because, for one obvious reason, I had no such knowledge . . . my first knowledge of this was not until . . . after I had left Yen-an."

Mr. Service's examples are extensive. His memo raises so many questions that a comment made by a British book reviewer at the time the Litvinov diary was published there seems appropriate: "This book adds to our understanding of Soviet affairs and of Litvinov's personality about as much as a forged banknote adds to our wealth."

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