
Memorandum on British Secret Service Activities in This Country, November 2, 1920.

by W.W. Hicks

Document 9771-745-45; NARS declassification no. 740058, dated April 15, 1987.

From a photocopy in the Rick Spence collection.

1. During the War there was established at 44 Whitehall Street, New York City, an office of the British Mission which was also the office of the British Provost Marshal General. It contained quite a staff and cooperated very closely with the Allied Governments. After the Armistice was signed this staff was considerably increased by British Navy and Army officers who were brought to New York from Canada when port control ceased there. These officers came to New York and established themselves in the United States Customs House. They engaged principally in Port Control matters and cooperated with other intelligence officials. The British force had not been operating long before it became apparent that their object in interrogating incoming and outgoing travellers was for the purpose of collecting trade and other commercial information and while they cooperated loyally with Military Intelligence Division in the matter of suspects thought to be guilty of infractions of the Espionage Act, their greatest endeavor was to collect material. This caused considerable friction between the Immigration Board at New York and this particular office of British Intelligence. The immigration Inspectors were outspoken in stating that the British were here solely to collect commercial material. The Immigration authorities submitted several reports to Washington, one of which contained a serious charge that a commercial passenger from abroad who had been interrogated on two occasions by British officers found that the British had transmitted this information to his British trade rivals who had approached his customers and endeavored to taken them away from him. The Immigration authorities also resented the fact that

the British not only participated in all interrogations but in most instances dominated the Board of Examination, and they point out that under the Passport Act the British had no rights whatsoever. This supervision by the British continued for about a year and undoubtedly the British obtained considerable trade information.

2. This connection was made known to the public by articles in the Hearst papers of February 12th, 1919, and shortly thereafter the force at British Mission was considerably reduced. Major [Norman] Thwaites, who was in charge of the Mission about that time, was formerly connected with the *New York World*, first as private secretary to Mr. [Joseph] Pulitzer, the editor, and also as a police reporter on the paper. In 1914 he was made a Major and assigned to duty with the British Mission. Thwaites was very active in obtaining information concerning radical activities in the United States and during the investigation by the Lusk Committee maintained a considerable force of investigators interested in radical activities, and also had a close liaison with Mr. Raymond Finch, who had formerly been connected with the Department of Justice and was then with the Lusk Committee as an investigator. Finch is an able investigator but is considered by the Department of Justice as unreliable and untrustworthy. During the Lusk Committee investigations he spent many of his evenings at Colonel Thwaites' home and undoubtedly gave him full information on the radical activities. It is believed that Finch has been in the employ of the British since leaving the Lusk Committee. While Major Thwaites was in charge of the New York office, Mr. R. Nathan and Lieut. Col.

Sir William Wiseman frequently came to New York on business and were supposedly in touch with Thwaites. Nathan and Thwaites left New York for Halifax about January 1st, 1920, and sailed for England. Nathan was supposed to go on into Russia but got as far as Riga when he was ordered back to England. He has paid several visits to New York since then and is still interested in radical activities in this country. Sir William Wiseman is reputed to be a friend and confidant of Colonel House and this may explain his frequent visits to this country.

3. After Thwaites returned to England the British Mission office in New York was in charge of Mr. David Boyle, who is a civil servant of the Foreign Office or a "special." Boyle did not use the stationery of the old British Mission, but simply used plain stationery for all his correspondence. He frequently asked for information from our New York office at 302 Broadway. His office was closed, however, when Boyle left for Canada sometime in March 1920. Shortly before Boyle's office closed, Captain DeGraz, who is a special civil servant from the British Foreign Office, opened up a new office in New York which he claimed to be a British library and explained that the object of opening this office was to have information available for British nationals travelling in this country which could not be obtained from their consuls; also part of its purpose was to establish proper social connections for visiting Britishers. This office immediately took over a part of the personnel of Boyle's office and it is believed took over the Foreign Office operatives and any Scotland Yard men who had been attached to Thwaites' and Boyle's office. DeGraz attended both the Republican Convention at Chicago and the Democratic Convention at San Francisco and it is significant that most of these offices are in the industrial areas. The known operatives now attached to the British Secret Service in New York are — Captain C.M. James, who goes under the name of Charles Fox and apparently has charge of all operatives. They report to him at Post Office Box 1232, City Hall Station, New York City. These operatives are — Raymond Finch, who lives at Prince George Hotel, New York City; Mary L. Mellon, alias Peggy Mellon, whose address is 34 W 48th Street, New York City. She has been employed by the British for some time and was with the British Mission when it was located at 44 Whitehall Street, New

York City; R.D. Jonas, who is active in various negro subversive work throughout the country, being principally connected with the Star Order of Ethiopia and the Abyssinian movement known as the Princess of Abyssinia. This man Jonas claims to have been employed by Major Thwaites in New York; Dr. Harry Nosovitsky, a doctor employed on one of the British liners, is a British agent and probably attached to the New York Office. He claims to be interested in radical activities and has gotten himself in with many radical organizations in New York. He has acted as courier in bringing over certain propoganda and papers for the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party in America. Copies of these he has turned over to the British in New York and probably in England.

4. The following significant known facts should be stated in this connection, though there is little evidence to substantiate them. Louis Fraina, who is one of the organizers of the Communist Party in this country and who wrote the platform of the party, was strongly suspected by the radicals of being an agent of the Department of Justice. It is evident that he was distrusted by them and was given a secret trial in New York in which Martens and Nuorteva participated. Fraina had never been an agent of the Department of Justice and he was considered to be an out and out Communist. Shortly after his trial before Martens in New York he proceeded to Canada and went to England on the same ship with Nathan and Thwaites. It is understood that Dr. Nosovitsky managed this affair. Fraina was arrested in England on account of some irregularity in his passport but was immediately released and he and Nosovitsky proceeded to Amsterdam and attended the meeting of the Third International at that place. This meeting was broken up by the Dutch police and Nosovitsky returned to England while Fraina went into Germany. The British Foreign Office asked the United States if they cared to have Fraina returned from Germany intimating that it was in their power to do so. Fraina has since travelled mostly in British-occupied Germany or in the plebiscite areas, which are British-controlled. At the time he left this country he was under indictment for Criminal Anarchy.

5. Santeri Nuorteva, who was secretary to Ludwig C.A.K. Martens, the so-called Soviet Ambassador to the United States, left for Canada about 2 months

ago. It is understood that he was well received there by Canadian officials. He proceeded to England where he was detained by the authorities and it was given out that he was to be deported to Finland, as that is his native country.† Instead of that, he was sent on a British ship to Riga and immediately went into Russia where he is now working in the Soviet Foreign Office under [Georgii] Chicherin and has direct charge of foreign relations with the United States and England. Since he has assumed this position the majority of British prisoners held by the Soviet authorities have been released and returned to England. Nuorteva is a very able man and understands thoroughly the radical situation as well as the economic and political situation in this country. It is generally conceded that he was the brains of the Soviet Bureau in New York and that Martens was a mere figurehead.

6. Ludwig Martens, the so-called Soviet Ambassador in the United States, was in England at the beginning of the World War. On account of the fact that although he had been born in Russia, his parents had registered him with the German Consul as a German, he was interned in England as a German alien. In 1918 the British allowed him to proceed to the United States, where he declared himself on entry to be a German alien. This, in itself, was an unusual proceeding as few registered German aliens were allowed to leave England.

7. Since the Armistice many demobilized British officers have visited this country and have had free

access everywhere. Several have been reported as having been seen in various parts of industrial areas apparently engaging in certain investigations, but no definite information concerning the record of their activities was kept.

8. The latest arrival in this country is Lady Scott, widow of the Antarctic explorer of that name. It was reported to this office that Lady Scott, who is a very attractive woman, acts as an agent for the British Foreign Office whenever she is outside of her own country. Lady Scott was spending the winter in Rome during the Military Attachés' conference of last year. It is the opinion of our Military Attaché at London that she is in the pay of the British Foreign Office or British Intelligence Service and is operating for their interests.

9. The above data would seem to indicate that the British are maintaining a considerable force of secret service operatives in this country and that they are concentrating their efforts on obtaining information on the radical, labor, and economic situations in the United States. No record is known of any attempts being made to obtain military information in an unauthorized way.

W.W. Hicks,
Major, C.A.C.

hjn

†- This would probably have ended badly for Red Finland's official American spokesman Nuorteva. Finland was controlled by a Right Wing government which had put down a revolution by force and conducted mass reprisals against its participants. Nuorteva's deportation to Riga rather than to White Finland may be viewed as a humanitarian gesture on the part of the British or a move made to avert a possible political scandal.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.