

The British International History Group

(under the auspices of the British International Studies Association)

NEWSLETTER

Number 1 - March 1997

At the eighth Annual Conference of BIHG in September 1996 it was unanimously agreed that a news and information service should be provided for members of the group, which would also serve as a communications device for others with an interest in this area.

It is planned that the Newsletter will carry reports of BIHG Conferences and panels at other conferences, such as PSA and BISA, as well as providing information about forthcoming conferences which may be of particular interest to readers.

An important issue for the Editors and Committee of BIHG is the situation of part-time Tutors and Lecturers and post-graduates. Whilst the job market makes it increasingly difficult to obtain full-time permanent posts, many part-time staff find it increasingly difficult to stay in touch with others in their area of research and teaching. To some extent this also applies to post-graduates who have their own particular problems. BIHG is particularly keen to support these two groups of people, offering financial help to enable them to come to the Annual Conference, a platform for presentation of their research, and equally important, an academic and friendly environment in which to work. This Newsletter welcomes contributions from everyone and encourages new and young academics in particular.

Whilst the Newsletter is intended as a vehicle for information, it is also envisaged that a "Discussion Series" will run through the editions; a series which will change in nature and scope through the contribution of the participants. In this first issue Professor John Young, Department of Politics, University of Leicester, begins the discussion on "British Decline in the Twentieth Century". Andrew Gamble, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, will reply in the following issue. The aim is to broaden and expand the discussions in subsequent issues, and the Editors will be pleased to receive any contributions.

Finally, please remember that without your input the Newsletter cannot succeed. We want to know about your forthcoming publications, your completed theses, information on relevant conferences or courses, any good, or even bad, news you think ought to be shared, in fact anything you want to tell us will be gratefully received!

Pauline Elkes

Carolyn Kitching

The BIHG Thesis Prize

The Committee has decided to establish an annual prize for the best doctoral thesis on any aspect and any period of International History which has been awarded a degree by a British University or College of Higher Education during the preceding calendar year. Authors should send 2 returnable copies of their thesis to the Secretary of BIHG by 31 January of the year following that in which their doctorate is awarded. The monetary value of the prize will be £100, but its worth in prestige to the lucky winner will be incalculable! For further details contact Glyn Stone, Faculty of Humanities, University of the West of England Bristol, St Matthias Campus, Fishponds Road, Bristol, BS16 2JP.

New Publications by BIHG Members

Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher (eds), *Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Michael Dockrill and David French (eds), *Strategy and Intelligence: British Policy during the First World War*, (Hambledon Press, 1996)

Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New Look National Security Policy, 1953-61*, (Macmillan, 1996)

Dick Richardson (edited with Susan Baker, Maria Korsis and Stephen Young), *The Politics of Sustainable Development*, (Routledge, 1997)

John Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and Russia, 1951-5*, (Oxford University Press, 1996)

John Young, *Cold War Europe, 1945-91: A Political History*, (Edward Arnold, second edn., 1996)

Post-Graduate Successes

The following post-graduate members of BIHG obtained doctorates during 1995/6. This information is not included to "blow our own trumpets" but to encourage those post-graduate students who feel they will never get there. We know there are more of you out there who have completed - we need you to keep us informed!

Pauline Elkes: *The Political Warfare Executive: A re-evaluation based on the intelligence work of the German Section*, (University of Sheffield, 1996)

Carolyn Kitching: *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1918-1934*, (University of Teesside, 1996)

Thomas Otte: *Great Britain, Germany and the Chinese Question, 1897-1902*, (University of Birmingham, 1996)

Constantine Pagedas: *Great Britain, the United States and the Western Alliance: Anglo-American Reactions to de Gaulle's NATO Policy, 1960-1963*, (University of London, 1996)

Diplomatic Studies Programme

Discussion Papers are available on a variety of subjects which may be of interest to International Historians. These include: 'Healing the Wounds: US-Vietnamese Diplomacy after the Fall of Saigon', Martin Bell, No.3, March 1995, 'The Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, October-November 1955', John W Young, No.9, September 1995 and 'Summit Diplomacy and Alliance Politics: The Road to Nassau, December 1962', Jan Melissen, No.12, December 1995.

Further details are available from the Editors: Dr Jan Melissen and Mr Martin Bell at the Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, University of Leicester, Attenborough Building, Leicester, LE1 7RH.

Twentieth Century International Policy and the Issue of Decline

Professor John Young

The interconnection of Britain's decline and its performance on the world stage dominates the literature on the nation's recent international policy, and seems a natural topic with which to start a series of discussions in the BIHG Newsletter. Overseas commitments are often seen, along with internal (especially economic) failings, as having contributed to the drain on British power whilst, as a corollary, the increasingly obvious nature of national decline has harmed the country's ability to shape its external environment. This first, short contribution to the series simply highlights the point that the scale of decline should not be overstated.

At first sight it is clear that Britain has suffered a marked decline since, say, 1890 when it was the world's greatest Imperial, financial, commercial and naval power. Even if America and Germany were beginning to challenge Britain in the industrial sphere they were doing so on the back of British loans and investment. Today, of course, the Empire is gone, the Royal Navy is a fraction of America's and the City lives on Eurodollars rather than Sterling. Yet the century has witnessed developments which many might consider positive: the Victorians' easy assumption of racial superiority has largely gone, there is a world of independent nations and Britain itself has become a multicultural society. The aristocracy has lost its lingering control of foreign policy making, the media and public opinion have become at least a little more knowledgeable about world affairs and the growth of the intelligence services, propaganda machinery and Cabinet committees has created a much more sophisticated Whitehall structure in the area. In 1997 Britain is as wealthy as ever and more influential than most, accounting for 5% of world trade with only 1% of its population. In one sense the world of the 1990s, with its *laissez-faire* trade system, widespread respect for liberal political values and use of the English language can be seen as fulfilling the Victorian dream of a rational, progressive and commercially-prosperous global system.

Looking over the last century as a whole Britain can certainly consider itself a success on many measures even when compared to Germany, Japan or Russia. A victor in two world wars, vulnerable but never invaded, Britain has strengthened its democratic system and, beyond Ireland, avoided major internal upheavals. Defeat in either world war could have brought precipitate, absolute decline; instead Britain was able to help shape the new international environment after both - in contrast to, say, Germany where 1918 and 1945 saw both international humiliation and the destruction of the existing social and political order. Generally-successful management of Imperial retreat and the idea that the Empire was being transposed into the Commonwealth (rather than simply lost) also helped avoid such a crisis as France faced in 1958.

It should always be remembered that, even in the mid-nineteenth century, Britain was never all-powerful. Its small population, scarcity of raw materials (other than coal) and insubstantial army were all deficiencies. Another mistake is to conflate the relative decline of the country compared to leading competitors, with the absolute loss of Empire: unlike Rome, Britain remained a significant power after Imperial retreat. The End of Empire was one vital aspect in Britain's declining influence and prestige but the relative underperformance of the country since the 1950s in comparison to, say, France has had more to do with domestic economic failings. Those failings have dominated the political debate over the last generation and objective discussion is not helped by political leaders who oscillate between exaggerating Britain's abiding greatness and overstating the scale of its decline.

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John W Young is Professor of Politics at the University of Leicester. His Britain and the World in the Twentieth Century is forthcoming from Edward Arnold. Professor Andrew Gamble, University of Sheffield, will be making the next contribution to this discussion. If you would like to contribute in future editions, please contact the co-editor, Dr Pauline Elkes.

Forthcoming Conferences

April 1997

The International Studies Association will be holding its 37th Annual Convention in San Diego, California between 16 and 20 April 1997.

July 1997

The Institute of Contemporary British History will hold its ninth Summer School from 15-17 July 1997, on the overall theme of the **Cold War**, and would like to invite all those interested in giving papers to send a 100-word abstract to Summer School, ICBH, Room 357, Senate House, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU

September 1997

The 9th Annual Conference of BIHG will be held at the University of Ulster, in Coleraine, between 11 and 13 September 1997. Provisional programmes will be with you shortly, and we look forward to seeing you there, in greater numbers than ever!

A Conference on **"The Origins of Diplomacy"** is being arranged by Raymond Westbrook and Raymond Cohen, to take place at Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy, between 16 and 20 September 1997.

September 1998

The 10th BIHG Conference will be held in September 1998 at the University of Leicester.

The Centre for the Study of Diplomacy is holding a conference, also in September 1998, on the **"History of Diplomacy and Diplomatic Method"**. For further information, please contact Dr Jan Melissen at the Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, University of Leicester, Attenborough Building, Leicester, LE1 7RH.

The Third Pan-European International Relations Conference will be held in Vienna, between 16 and 19 September, 1998.

It appears from the above that September is one of the most-favoured months for conference organisers. Whilst this is understandable, as it fits in with the beginning of the academic year, it has led the BIHG Committee to consider moving both the timing and the type of venue for its forthcoming conferences. This question will be discussed at the AGM in Coleraine in September; if you have any thoughts on either of these points, please come along and make your contribution.

Obituary

The editors regret that this first Newsletter must contain an obituary to one of BIHG's most popular and prolific members. Callum MacDonald died on 24 January 1997, at the age of 49. Callum was professor of history at Warwick University and his work included major studies on the Korean war, war-time Czechoslovakia, and was most recently working on a study on the Sino-Japanese War. He will be greatly missed by his many friends, colleagues and students.

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