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ALLIED PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II AND THE BRITISH POLITICAL WARFARE EXECUTIVE



This collection presents the complete files of the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) kept at the U.K. National Archives as FO 898 from its instigation to closure in 1946, along with the secret minutes of the special 1944 War Cabinet Committee "Breaking the German Will to Resist."

Date Range: 1941-1946

Content: 174,680 images

Source Library: National Archives (U.K.)

Detailed Description:

Source Note: FO 898, Political Warfare Executive and Foreign Office, Political Intelligence Department: Papers.

International interest in propaganda and psychological warfare, or "perception management" as it is now often known, has perhaps never been as intense as it is today. Anyone studying or implementing propaganda worldwide must be familiar with the work of the British Political Warfare Executive (PWE) during World War II. With a significant reliance on both military and civil input, the huge airborne and radio propaganda campaigns from the very first day of the war (the first drops over Germany in 1939 were leaflets not bombs) still serve as the best and most effective lesson in psychological warfare.

This collection presents the complete files of the PWE kept at the U.K. National Archives as FO 898 from its instigation to closure in 1946, along with the secret minutes of the special 1944 War Cabinet Committee "Breaking the German Will to Resist." Included here is all the correspondence, minutes and agents' mission files along with a complete collection of all the airborne propaganda leaflets dropped over mainland Europe during the war by the British and American air forces. These leaflets, single sheets and miniature books are often highly illustrated, sometimes satirical and sometimes intended to boost morale with speeches or addresses from exiled leaders. They were produced in all nine languages of the recipient countries.

Intensively studied at postgraduate level, the PWE files contain the complete story of Britain's development of psychological warfare—described by Richard Crossman as "the only aspect of war at which [the British] achieved real pre-eminence." In Eisenhower's words "the expenditure of men and money in wielding the spoken and written word was an important contributing factor in undermining the enemy's will to resist."