

CONFIDENTIAL

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

JOHN STARNES

by

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FOR DEA HISTORY PROJECT

NOTE: Material in this interview may not be published or attributed to Mr. Starnes without his permission. The sections on security and intelligence must be cleared with the appropriate authorities within the Department before use.

Personnel Security

Security clearances were governed by Cabinet Order 35. This was reconfirmed by the Diefenbaker Government.

During the Diefenbaker period there were quite a few personnel security problems involving "character weaknesses" of various sorts. The chief problem was one of quantity - there were more than in the previous period, over 70 cases while Starnes was Head of DL 2.

Considerable attention was given to homosexuality as a security risk because experience showed that that was frequently a factor. One reason this was a problem was that homosexuality was illegal in Canada at the time. It also has to be remembered that practices which were legal in Canada were sometimes illegal in countries to which External Affairs personnel were posted, and so could get staff into situations there in which they might be compromised.

Starnes does not [REDACTED] Sawatsky's [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] He never attempted to compile statistics, but guesses that maybe 50% of cases involved sexual indiscretion (heterosexual and homosexual) while the remainder arose from other factors - ideological sympathy with Iron Curtain countries, financial problems, loneliness and so on.

A typical case involved a security guard in an Iron Curtain country (probably Poland). With the assistance of the KGB, the Poles arranged a liaison with a lady gymnast. The guard was then blackmailed into microfilming documents on the embassy files. It was not discovered until some years later what he had been doing, when it was learned that he had made use of his skill with the microfilm camera in other posts as well, including Tel Aviv and Moscow. In Moscow, the Russians arranged a party for the embassy staff and the insecure guard was left at the Embassy as the only person on duty, where he let Soviet agents into the cypher room.

Starnes thinks Sawatsky [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This originated not in the Security Service but with Wall in the PCO, with the assistance of [REDACTED] and another psychologist with the Civil Service Commission. It was an experiment which did not work. Starnes is not aware of other mechanisms which were devised in an attempt to identify security risks. Instead, the approach, as it had been in the past, was to deal with cases individually as they arose, and to try to deal with any potential problems that might be indicated through security checks.

Diefenbaker did not know much about security problems and Starnes thinks that, because of his suspicion of the Department, Robertson and Green avoided telling him of specific cases. There was, in any case, no reason for the PM to be involved in the

personnel problems of individual departments. And External Affairs was not unique, for other departments had to deal with similar difficulties.

Green [REDACTED] matters involving personnel security, because he saw matters in very black-and-white terms. His reaction when told of a security risk was that the offending staff member should be dismissed, and it required long and wearying argument to talk him out of his position when such action was not justified.

As Under-Secretary, Robertson was the person who had to take most of the decisions on matters of personnel security and, because of the Minister's attitude, he tried to do it as much as possible on his own. Some earlier Under-Secretaries, such as Heeney, were very rigid in dealing with these questions, and Léger tried to avoid them altogether. Robertson, on the other hand, treated them as being very important, and dealt with each one on its own terms. Whereas he was inclined to procrastinate in dealing with many issues, he did not do so on these questions, because of the human element, and spent a great deal of time on them. Another reason he took them seriously was his earlier experience in intelligence. Starnes [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] does not consider relations with the RCMP to have been better or worse than at other periods in the Department's history. He recognises the problems of support staff at posts overseas, especially in Eastern European countries, but does not consider that they were unique in the Diefenbaker period.

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Building Security

Financial stringency had a serious effect on the recruitment of security guards, for the Department could not hire enough and it could not pay enough to get the people it needed. As a result of this difficulty, there were no security guards in Prague. Later it was learned that the embassy was broken into (three times?) during that period, and access obtained to files and cyphers.

Dispersal of the department among numerous buildings in Ottawa did not cause serious security problems, but it did create inefficiency and also a lack of community feeling.

The government did not appreciate the value of security. Bryce did, however, and may have helped persuade them to see External Affairs' requirements.

Communications

The Head of DL 2 was also Director of Communications Security, which involved the policy aspect of communications intelligence. Robertson showed lively interest in this subject as Chairman of the Intelligence Policy Committee but let Starnes deal direct with the Minister and with Diefenbaker. Starnes decided that Diefenbaker needed a briefing on communications intelligence so that he could assess it properly, and persuaded Robertson to let him arrange one. When the briefing started at the research facility at Confederation Heights, it became apparent that Diefenbaker resented being told by civil servants what was going on. He made it obvious that he was not paying attention, and from time to time interrupted with irrelevant questions about places on the map being used in the briefing. But Ed Drake, the Head of the unit, got Diefenbaker to co-operate by telling him that he (Drake) had been a pupil of Diefenbaker's first wife. After that, Diefenbaker paid attention and showed interest in what he was being told.

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Afterwards, Diefenbaker took a sympathetic view of the communications research activity. It probably also helped that he could see it as a national effort rather than an External Affairs operation. But on one occasion he agreed to maintain a communications station in the north only after he was told that if Canada gave it up the U.S. would move in.

Intelligence

Starnes provided Diefenbaker with intelligence information through Robinson.

Robertson made an important contribution to the government's intelligence work not only through the Intelligence Policy Committee but also through the Visits Panel and the committee on defectors. Neither of these organisations, however, experienced unique developments during the Diefenbaker period.

Green [REDACTED] on intelligence matters because he [REDACTED] This was apparent when Starnes arranged for him to meet the Head of MI6 (Dick White). After their conversation, White told Starnes that he could now understand the latter's problems.

Green would raise difficulties about the exchange of intelligence information with other countries because he did not understand what was involved. When Starnes wanted to tell the British about the U.S. position on Cuba which emerged at the Montebello discussions on defence, he obtained clearance from Robertson but did not go to the Minister, because he thought Green would refuse permission, not understanding what was involved. He thinks Robertson did not tell the Minister either. As it turned out, [REDACTED] and it was very important that they learned of them from a Canadian source.

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Under-Secretary's Office

Starnes did not find the O/USSEA very effective during his service there. [REDACTED] from Robertson's way of doing business. He was not systematic and neither was the office. The relations between Robertson and the government [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

They did not give much attention to administration, although like Gill he found the attitude [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Attendance at the meetings varied, and that meant that they were not consistently valuable in keeping all the Assistant Under-Secretaries informed of the views of the others. He thinks a record was kept, at least of decisions. Robertson, however, was not keen on written records, or on having his executive assistants try to make his office more efficient.

Starnes thinks Gill had been very skilful at working in the unstructured atmosphere of the O/USSEA. [REDACTED] in dealing with Robertson, and would go back to him repeatedly on matters requiring his attention, until a decision was reached.

Starnes did not think that departmental administration in general was very effective. Gill had been much concerned with personnel questions and there were a number of other matters that needed "pulling together". Starnes was not there long enough to do this and [REDACTED] and thinks that it was not dealt with until Bruce Williams handled it under Cadieux.

Ross Campbell seemed to get along well with Robertson, who probably concluded that the advantages of his presence in the Minister's office more than outweighed the risks caused by his

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independent approach. The Assistant Under-Secretaries, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He would change memos before they got to the Minister or send them back for re-drafting, on the ground that the Minister would not accept them. Starnes did not have to deal very much with Campbell and tried as much as possible to keep matters out of his hands, [REDACTED]

Green did not take initiatives in administration but he did show interest when a problem, e.g. regarding personnel, was presented to him. Starnes's recollection is that he could not persuade him to attend Treasury Board.

Bonn

The government's position, [REDACTED] on nuclear weapons was the greatest cause of potential conflict with the Germans. Gordon Churchill visited Bonn while he was Minister of National Defence, [REDACTED]

The Germans did not understand the Canadian government's approach to defence questions. The Conservatives seemed [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to Germany than the Liberals had been, and Starnes [REDACTED]

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