

**Zeitschrift:** ASMZ : Sicherheit Schweiz : Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitschrift  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Offiziersgesellschaft  
**Band:** 174 (2008)  
**Heft:** 12

**Artikel:** Ideological warfare during the Cold War : the West's secret bookdistribution program behind the Iron Curtain  
**Autor:** Reisch, Alfred  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-71525>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 06.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# IDEOLOGICAL WARFARE DURING THE COLD WAR: THE WEST'S SECRET BOOK DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

*During a period of over 34 years, from July 1956 until the end of September 1991, that is the end of the Iron Curtain and of the Cold War, a basically secret book distribution program was run by and from the United States with the participation and assistance of most West European countries, allied and neutral.*

Alfred Reisch

Dr., Visiting Professor at the University of Economics of Izmir, served from 1960 to 1974 as Hungarian Editor and Plans Advisor for the PSPD/IAC book program and is currently writing a book on the subject. Pf.10, H-2015 Szigetmonostor.

This article or excerpts may only be reproduced with the authorization of the author.

Thanks to the archives of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University, California, it is now possible to tell in a scholarly manner the story of this amazingly successful covert program targeting five communist-ruled East European countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, the three Baltic countries, and also the Soviet Union. The archives contain detailed monthly, semiannual and annual reports, complete lists of book titles sent to each target country, excerpts from the many thousands of acknowledgement and request letters received, and reports from the many book distribution centers in Western Europe.

*„In July 1975, IAC merged with Radio Liberty's book mailing program aimed at the Soviet Union.”*

Equally valuable are the Radio Free Europe (RFE) office memoranda outlining the objectives and targets of the program, and evaluating its progress and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

## The Invisible Man Behind the Book Program

Run under the aegis of the Free Europe Committee until the first half of 1970 and afterwards under the successive covers of the International Advisory Council, Inc., and of the International Literary Centre, Ltd., the book distribution program was almost entirely financed by the CIA, starting in 1957 under the supervision of the director of Free Europe Press (FEP), Sam Walker, Jr. In 1959 FEP was renamed Free Europe Organization and Publication (FEOP), with George C. Minden in charge of its entire mailing project which he managed without interruption until its termination in September 1991.<sup>2</sup>

Born in 1920 in Bucharest, Romania, Minden earned a law diploma at the University of Bucharest. He moved in 1947 to England and in 1955 to New York where he joined the Free Europe Committee's Romanian Desk. In 1961, FEC President John Richardson, Jr. appointed him director of the newly created Communist Bloc Operations Department (CBOD) and in 1963, director of FEC's Publications and Special Projects Division (PSPD). Following the 1967 so-called Kallenbach Report and the revelation that FEC and RFE were from the start financed by the CIA, the book program was separated from RFE and put in January 1971 under the cover of an already existing bogus entity in New York City, the International Advisory Council, Inc. (IAC), of which Minden became President. In July 1975, IAC merged with Radio Liberty's book mailing program aimed at the Soviet Union, and took the name of International Literary Centre, Ltd. (ILC). For nearly twenty more years Minden ably managed the vast network of book mailers, book publishers, and book distributors in the U.S. and Western Europe needed to carry out the basic objectives of the program. He was extremely conscious about security, and unlike other Western organizations during the Cold War, his was never penetrated, exposed, or openly attacked even though the East European communist regimes were well aware of the book distribution program. Minden never wrote about or even discussed his own achievements and long career. He passed away in 2006 in New York at age 86.<sup>3</sup>

*„East European communist regimes were well aware of the book distribution program.”*

## Origins and Main Objectives of the Book Distribution Program

The use of radio to penetrate the Iron Curtain with news from the West grew out of discussions held in 1948 between George F. Kennan, then director of the State Department Planning Staff, and other State Department officials.<sup>4</sup> With the covert financing of the CIA, the National Committee for Free Europe was incorporated in May 1949 in Albany, NY and renamed Free Europe Committee (FEC), Inc. in March 1954. The book distribution program was only one of the many non-radio „special projects“ undertaken under FEC auspices. A European Propaganda division was created in 1951 „to

carry out all European propaganda operations by radio, publication, or other means.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by the creation of a „Special Projects“ or „Publication Section,“ later named Free Europe Publication Division with a twofold purpose: „to reach over an ever larger portion of the population of the satellite countries“ and „to contribute towards the fight against Communism in the countries of Free Europe.“ For the first time, the use of printed matter next to the spoken word was considered through the use of a monthly letter-size magazine carried in plastic balloons to Czechoslovakia, and the mailing of 10'000 letters a month from Munich and other West European cities to individual addresses picked from the telephone or population directories in Hungary and Poland.<sup>6</sup>

*A European Propaganda division  
was created in 1951 „to carry out  
all European propaganda  
operations by radio, publication, or  
other means.”*

From three balloon launching sites in West Germany, printed materials in the Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Polish language were dropped behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia in 1953 and 1954, Hungary in 1954-1955, and in Poland in 1955. The balloon-leaflet program elicited many communist media attacks and strong protests from the East European communist governments and from the Soviet Union. Following the crushing of the October 1956 Revolution in Hungary, the operation was suspended in November 1956 and terminated in August 1957. It proved to RFE the value of combining the spoken word of radio broadcasts and of the written word for effective propaganda aimed at combating communist indoctrination.<sup>7</sup>

**Book Mailings Launched in July 1956 to Influence  
the „Controlling Apparatus“ in East Europe**

In April 1956, Sam Walker Jr. and his CIA overseers in Washington came up with the idea of a „Mailing Project“ of selected literature targeting Communist elite members or regime-friendly individuals



[11]

[11] For the first article on the book project, see John P.C. Matthews, "The West's Secret Marshall for the Mind" in *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol.16, No.3, 2003. A two-part Hungarian translation appeared in the December 2007 and February issues of the magazine *Magyar Szemle* published in Budapest. Matthews is a former director of the Free Europe Press (FEP) Munich office.

[12] The program reports from July 1973 through September 1991, when they were sent from New York to Washington, D.C. are still inaccessible and await a decision of the CIA's Agency Release Panel.

[13] George C. Minden Papers, Box 1. Biographic Files, Hoover Institution Archives. Also George Minden's obituary in *New York Times*, April 23, 2006, and author's personal interview with Mrs. Marilyn Minden, New York, February 16, 2008.

[14] Kennan's Policy Planning Staff Memorandum, May 4, 1948, Document 269, in "Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment," U.S. Department of State. The use of cover organizations was in line with National Security Council directive NSC-4 which directed the director of the CIA to "initiate and conduct covert psychological operations to counteract Soviet and Soviet-inspired activities which constitute a threat to peace." For a photocopy of NSC-4, see Michael Warner, ed., *CIA Cold War Records: The CIA Under Harry Truman, Psychological Operations, NSC-4.* (Washington DC: CIA, 1994), p.175-177.

[15] Memorandum to the FEC Board of Directors on the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE) Operating Organization, October 17, 1951; and memo on the functions of the NCFE Educational Relations Division, October 18, 1951. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[16] Memorandum dated November 1, 1951. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[17] Over 50 million leaflets were sent to Czechoslovakia, 16 million to Hungary, and over 260,000 to Poland. For a detailed study, see Richard H. Cummings, "Balloons Over East Europe: The Cold War Leaflet Campaign of Radio Free Europe" in *The Falling Leaf*, No.166, Autumn 1999. Also S. Walker Jr., *Free Europe Press Editorial Program*, February 26, 1957, p.4-7. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[11] In the early times of the ideological war during the Cold War program, balloons were used to drop printed material from the West behind the Iron Curtain.



behind the Iron Curtain in the belief that massive mailings would be more than censors could handle. Mailings of letters and parcels by East European exiles to relatives and friends back home had become common practice by the mid-1950s. A 1954 USIA „action plan“ also indicates that the idea of disseminating books and other printed material to reach Soviet people in an organized manner was not so new.<sup>8</sup>

The FEC Board of Director gave FEP the funds needed to enhance the scope of the Western psychological warfare against communist ideology and propaganda and to carry it into the captive nations of East Europe. Alongside the radio broadcasts, the printed word and the dissemination of Western political ideals and culture was to be used. The mailing project was launched from New York and Munich in July 1956 when censorship was relaxed in Poland. „All materials must appear under ‚sponsorship‘ of a cover organization. There should be no total attacks on communism. Mailings should favor „revisionist“ trends among the new elites. Practical alternatives to doctrinaire Marxist principles should receive high priority. Cross-reporting (i.e. reports on what is going on in the other East European countries) should be used... Negative developments to weaken confidence in the bona fides of their government may be used....Our primary aims should be to demonstrate the superior achievements of the West.“<sup>9</sup>

Another FEC memorandum stated that „the possibilities for overthrowing the communist regimes either through ‘liberalization’ from without or by revolution from within are becoming increasingly remote and the alternative path to freedom in the satellite countries seems to be along a line of transformation of the communist system by an evolutionary process.“ Because frontal attacks on communism and communist practices antagonized those in power within the regimes, western propaganda had to find an „area of discussion which could be viewed sympathetically by both the great mass of the population and by communists and servants of the regimes.“ Western propaganda should identify and appeal to bureaucrats, administrators, and managers to encourage them to „phrase their resistance to the regime in terms of the stated goals of the regime rather than opposition to the regime.“<sup>10</sup>

Five months after the start of the project, Walker reported: „This is a ripple rather than a shotgun approach and is aimed at managers, intellectuals, and various other elites in the target countries, without any attribution to FEC. To date 83 different Western titles have been mailed. They cover cultural, economic, scientific, and a few political topics. One-third of them have been books and articles from learned journals, quarterlies, etc. Most often, they are sent in the original language, usually English or French, although some of the shorter pieces have been translated. There has been some responses directed to the overt mailers (European publishing houses, etc.) and thus evidence that some of them get through.“<sup>11</sup> Another FEC Policy Paper described the aim of the book program as follows: „to ensure the delivery by normal postal means of political, economic, cultural and other printed material to the controlling apparatus of all the captive nations.“<sup>12</sup>

*„Rather than reaching the people of Eastern Europe en masse, it was more important to reach the leadership groups on which the Soviets rely.“*

Walker recommended the indefinite de-activation of all balloon launching sites and the acceleration of the „efforts to influence the ‚controlling apparatus‘ in Eastern Europe by mail and other means of contact. Rather than reaching the people of Eastern Europe en masse, it was more important to reach the leadership groups on which the Soviets rely. If these groups become „infected with the contagion of change, similar groups will be affected in the same manner in the USSR, making the penalty for oppressing Eastern Europe even greater for Moscow than to relieve oppression. Indirect operations should seek to intensify the degree of resistance of the members of the „controlling apparatus“ (government functionaries and Communist Party members, diplomats, and also factory managers, writers and journalists, teachers and even university students) and to pull them away from Soviet objectives and towards... national independence and individual liberties.“ Walker listed four policy objectives: national integrity, self-expression, intellectual curiosity, and decentralization of authority that should be fostered to help create indirect pressures so that Soviet objectives in the area will suffer.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Gradual Start with Rapid Success – Numbers and Contents of the Mailings**

The records of the book mailing program from July 1956 through December 1959 consist of 40 monthly statistical reports and 36 summaries of responses received, averaging 15–20 pages in length. They contain the titles and the number of copies of the books and other publications (magazines subscriptions, catalogues, pamphlets) sent in both original languages and in translation to each East European target country, together with the content, targets, and political aim(s) of the particular item mailed, called „message“ in the reports.

*„Many additional cities would be subsequently used in the U.S., Canada, France, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland.“*

The very first mailings in July 1956 were intentionally small, with the purpose of increasing the volume of mail gradually. Eleven titles with a total of 6'538 messages were sent to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, with emphasis on pushing further „liberalization“ by contrasting the target country with the other captive nations. These messages included various articles and cross-reportings on the Polish thaw with the aim to „make the recipients aware of the greater freedom of expression and discussion permitted in Poland and to increase similar activity in the other captive nations.“<sup>14</sup> The messages were sent from bogus „cover“ organizations from New York and West European cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Athens, Rome, Vienna, and Munich. By February 1957, the book mailers could count on 24 mailing centers in 14 countries in Europe and North America. Many





[2]

additional cities would be subsequently used in the U.S., Canada, France, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland (Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Zürich), and Stockholm and Copenhagen for mailings to the Baltic countries after October 1956. In the next three decades, London, Paris, New York, Vienna and Rome remained the most often used mailing points while existing institutions and book publishers were more frequently used as senders to avoid suspicion.

The mailing project began to gather momentum, and there was a general increase of volume and a greater diversity of media in the form of articles, magazines, books, and pamphlets. The messages emphasized the further possibilities of political, economic, and intellectual liberalization not as much directly as obliquely. This was to be done through books and articles presenting Western literature and free discussion; studies of specific areas of Western progress and thought; books and pamphlets on the operation of Western economies, worker's rights, trade unions, modern capitalism, and Western socialism; Western impressions of Russia and Eastern Europe; critical regime-banned speeches and articles by Communists and former Communists dealing with political events in the area, East European impressions of the West and criticisms of East Europe; and materials dealing with past Soviet and satellite policy and action. The messages also stressed the differences between Communists and Socialists and by using materials from Western sources (Kenneth Galbraith, Massimo Salvadori) sought to provoke comparisons between the realities of communism and capitalism.

[8] USIA Action Plan "Curtain (USSR)" dated December 11, 1954, declassified with deletions, EO-1999-00102, National Archives, College Park, MD.

[9] "Confidential Mailing Plan," FEP Plans and Analysis Department, September 6, 1956. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Box 262, Hoover Institution Archives. The use of cover organizations for the book mailing program was entirely in line with National Security Council Directive NSC-4.

[10] Unsigned RFE memo titled "Proposal for a Research Program to Support Broadcasts to Bureaucrats," October 16, 1956, p.1-8. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[11] Minutes of the FEC Board of Directors Executive Committee, New York, November 27, 1956, p.4. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Box 2320, Hoover Institution Archives.

[12] FEC Policy Group Paper, January 9, 1958, p.1-2. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[13] Memoranda by S.S. Walker to FEC President General W. Crittenberger, February 26, 1957 and April 2, 1957, and Free Europe Press Editorial Program, February 26, 1957, p.1-21. Ibid.

[14] Mailing Project Activities, Monthly Report No.1, July 1957, dated August 1957, p.1-6. Thia and all subsequent reports, courtesy of John P.C. Matthews.

[2] Russian and Eastern European intelligence services tried hard to interrupt the flow of western book distribution, particularly the KGB with its headquarters at Dzerzhinsky square in Moscow (photo: J. Kürsener).



[3]

In the first three months of the project, a total of 42 titles and 21'488 messages had been dispatched, with Poland being the leading recipient country. Materials in the Polish language included George Orwell's 1984, and of Raymond Aron's Opium of the Intellectuals. Outright political materials included Krushchev's Secret Speech, Communism in Crisis by Milovan Djilas, The Captive Mind and The Seizure of Power by Czeslaw Milosz, Marx in Limbo by Sidney Hook, The Rebel by Albert Camus, Man in the Modern World and Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, and articles from Borba, Avanti, World Politics, The New York Times, London Times, Le Monde, and from the Polish press for cross-reporting purposes.<sup>15</sup> 200 copies of the Dover Publications Catalogue were mailed to libraries in Czechoslovakia with a letter from the publisher stating that a sample of any book listed will be sent upon request, followed by 200 copies of the German literary and political monthly Der Monat, with a free subscription offer. 124 Polish professors were offered a one-year's free subscription to The Virginia Quarterly Review. The free offer system was subsequently enlarged and widely used to obtain new names and new addresses, and elicit new requests.

*„Texts used were mostly Western books and magazines on subjects of particular interest to the elite.”*

In its first six months of operations, FEP had mailed a cumulative total of 30 titles and 87'283 messages, with 34% of the latter going to Poland, 26% to Bulgaria, 18% to Romania, and the remainder to Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Responses began to arrive in increasingly large number from Poland but barely trickled in from the other four target countries, clearly indicating where censorship was the most severe. Acceleration now characterized the book mailing

program. Texts used were mostly Western books and magazines on subjects of particular interest to the elite to strengthen the spirit of national independence and popularize Western methods of running a decentralized society. The messages also included critiques of Stalinism and critical analysis of Marxism to Party functionaries, and exposés of Western economic systems and technica progress. A policy of maximum diversification was implemented and the number of titles progressively increased, with greater emphasis on Western cultural achievements in music, art, architecture, literature, and on general works on the history of Western ideas, philosophy and traditions.<sup>16</sup>

A 1957 summary of activities stressed the pursuit of the four policy objectives of national integrity, self-expression, intellectual curiosity, and decentralization of authority. With increasing frequency, intellectuals were given the opportunity to select free of charge books of their choice from catalogues sent to them, establishing the West as the „arsenal of thinking“ and helping independent thought by a variety of stimulating works devoid of direct political involvement.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of the responses it received, FEP concluded that the main thing it was up against was not Marxist obstacles but a vacuum. Instead of being taught how to fight back Communism and shaky Party arguments, East Europeans „needed something that would compensate for the sterility of satellite cultural life... and the ban on encyclopedic education imposed by the Communists...and the lack of humanistic thinking.“ To combat frustration and stultification, the banned Western sources of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic life, and of free information should be made available. To achieve this objective, the book mailing program had to concentrate on four main objectives: correct thinking from intelligent speculation to simple logic and factual information; a minimum basis of Western values through psychology, literature, the theater, and visual arts; sheer linguistic understanding by increasing the share of French



and German material and translation, and of anthologies in the national languages. The West should supply „a feeling of communion in this world, integration into the intellectual and spiritual life of our age, and the knowledge that they (the East Europeans) have not been abandoned.“<sup>18</sup>

The number of titles and of messages sent to the eight target countries continued to climb. By December 1, 1957, a total of 2'008 responses had been received, with Poland leading by far with 1'772 or 88.2%, followed by Czechoslovakia with 103 responses, and 50 or less from each Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and the three Baltic countries. Again, the discrepancies clearly showed where censorship was most severe. The response of the East European population was overwhelmingly positive, most of all from the Polish recipients. Two years after its start, it reached the half-million mark, with 505'157 bulk messages (2'029 titles) plus some 2'400 items sent on request. The number of responses began to grow, reaching a cumulative total of 6'500 by end-1958 and 15'327 by end-1959, with the vast majority of them coming from Poland (10'901), followed by Hungary (2'009), and Czechoslovakia (1'142). Requests started to arrive en masse rising from over 3'000 by end-1958 to a cumulative total of close to 8'500 by end-1959. From July 1956 through December 1959, FEP had dispatched a total of approximately 670'000 books and periodicals in 5'500 titles. The bulk of the messages went to Poland (some 197'000), followed by Bulgaria (128'000), Czechoslovakia (123'400), Romania (98'000), and Hungary (26'500). Latvia received 23'000 messages, Estonia, 21'660, and Lithuania, 16'300.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Responses: Barometer of the Effectiveness and Impact of the Mailing Project

Thanks to the 37 Summaries of Responses to Mailing Operations prepared between December 1956 and December 1959 and George Minden's perceptive studies of the response patterns, it is possible to credibly measure the impact of the book mailings on the individuals and institutions targeted.

*„It is possible to credibly measure the impact of the book mailings on the individuals and institutions targeted.“*

This was achieved by translating into English excerpts (direct quotes or summaries) from the most significant letters sent by prominent personalities and a wide variety of intellectuals, writers, professionals, and students. Next to simple acknowledgements of receipt, the recipients' most frequently expressed feelings were those of appreciation, gratitude, pleasure, joy and happiness at receiving books from the West and at being able „to read something other than communist propaganda.“ Next to accepting the free book or subscription offered in the book catalogues sent to them, many recipients gave the name of a friend or friends and colleagues who would also like to receive books or magazines. Many teachers passed on the information to their fellow teachers and to their students. Many recipients praised the quality and stressed the practical value of the books for their daily work, research, or studies, and many institutions offered to exchange or send books, magazines, and catalogues in return. There were frequent references to being out of touch with the West, to the lack of American and Western publications in general, and the inability or great difficulty to acquire them. There were



[4]

also occasional complaints about the impossibility to travel abroad, and problems with the postal authorities and/or the censors. Reviews of books received, including emigre books, began to appear in Polish, Czechoslovak and Hungarian literary magazines,

*„Many teachers passed on the information to their fellow teachers and to their students.“*

as well as occasional Communist media warnings about „subversive printed propaganda matter“ sent to influence „functionaries in the higher echelons of our Party, the labor unions, the State administration and influential people in general.“<sup>20</sup>

[15] Mailing Project Activities, Monthly Report No.3, August 1956, dated October 18, 1956, p.1-7.

[16] Ibid., Monthly Report No.6, December 1956, dated January 9, 1957, p.1-9.

[17] Mailing Operations. Monthly Report No. 10, May 1957, p.1-19. Mailings to Hungary, suspended in October 1956, were resumed in July 1957

[18] Mailing Operations. Monthly Report No.,14, September 1957, dated October 25, 1957, p.1-18.

[19] Mailing Operations. Monthly Report No.29, December 1958, dated January 5, 1959, and Report No.41, December 1959, undated, p.1-9.

[20] Zivot Strany, monthly magazine of the CPCSC CC, September 1958. According to Article 59 of the Universal Postal Convention of 1952, any country can legally reject material if it does not approve of its circulation within its borders.

[3] There were other ways to reach East Europe than with leaflets and book distribution. Radio Free Europe (RFE) and others were broadcasting information which otherwise would have never reached these countries. Here Czech and Slovak citizen with the support of U.S. Army personnel record a radio play in a RFE studio.

[4] While book distribution was an active measure to spread western ideas into Eastern Europe, intelligence services also used passive means to follow activities in that area of Europe, such as the former listening station on the Teufelsberg in West-Berlin (photo: J. Kürsener).





[6]

**Minden's Concept of the Book Mailing Operations: Je seme a tout vent.**

„The tactical aim of our operation is to place as high a number as possible of books containing vital information in all fields of knowledge in the hands of those best suited by their position to a) receive books coming from abroad and b) act as centers of knowledge-spreading with a minimum risk to themselves. Our ultimate goal, however, is that of reaching the news-eager masses who cannot get the printed word from abroad directly. In other words, what we are trying to build up behind the Iron Curtain is a number of circulating libraries, going from our addressees to the reading public, thus helping the long sequestered East Europeans keep in touch with the Free World's thinking, have the facts that their Russian and national oppressors try to hide from them and, in general, make thought-stimulating and informative material available to them... Books have a knack of finding their way to those eager to read and capable of understanding them... and pass from the more or less 'safe hands' of their initial owners or usurpers (the censors) into those of men and women who can best use them. Whether this happens through orthodox and legitimate means, or through some ad hoc black market, we do not know – but we do not think it matters much.” Minden pointed out the political and propaganda value of good non-political material and characterized the operation with Larousse's celebrated motto, „Je seme a tout vent.”<sup>21</sup>

*„Books have a knack of finding their way to those eager to read and capable of understanding them ...”*

At the end of the third year of the Mailing Project, Minden provided the impressive figures of approximately 130'000 books and magazines and 1'762 titles sent using 135'000 addresses, and 7'000 letters of acknowledgement and 3'452 requests received. Slightly 60% of the titles were European as opposed to roughly 40% American. The majority of the responses received came from Poland, followed by Hungary.<sup>22</sup> Minden noted that the people of East Europe no longer expected liberation from the West but if given a choice, would choose gradual liberation, with the members of the new class favoring the status quo. East-West contacts were valuable to them to the extent they could read what was published in the West, travel freely, and learn Western languages. The mailing project made it possible „to answer some of the East European requirements for general knowledge and objective information while at the same time receiving in the shape of responses to the books sent the wishes and the reactions of East European intellectuals.”<sup>23</sup>

**The Mailing Project Gains Momentum: The Golden Age of the 1960s**

Despite the worsening of the international situation in 1959-1960, the number of books sent remained constant, and twice as many responses as during the previous year were coming in. Hungary firmly established herself on an equal footing with Poland. As of October 31, 1961 a cumulative total of 9'279 titles had been sent in 803'874 copies to the target countries since July 1956, eliciting



[6]

a total number of 55'276 responses, most of them from Poland (32'334) and Hungary (16'469), with Czechoslovakia a distant third (3'156).<sup>24</sup> The meteoric rise of the program in the 1960s is evidenced by a succession of impressive figures: 8'775 responses and 5'642 requests in 1959, 17'077 responses and 15'590 requests in 1960, 29'218 responses and 17'948 requests in 1961, and 20'974 responses and 11'137 requests in the first half of 1962. From July 1956 through July 1962, the number of readers increased from 22'000 odd names to roughly 100'000 intellectuals, newspapermen, artists, and even government and party officials. The original number of 20 American, Canadian and West European publishers and libraries which agreed to send books had grown to over 500 publishers, libraries, organizations, and universities (306 in Europe and 209 in the U.S.). These „sponsors“ mailed roughly 100'000 books a year in their own names, and letters of acknowledgement were flowing in at a rate of over 3'000 a month. This „cover system“ held throughout the years up to communist scrutiny.<sup>25</sup>

The book mailing program continued to snowball, with 40'063 responses and 20'649 requests in 1962, 64'301 responses and 41'237 requests in 1963, 42'830 requests in 1965, 52'962 in 1966, and 60'102 in 1967. The total number of copies mailed to all countries also jumped from 74'861 in 1960 to 70'313 in 1961, 85'674 in 1962 to 108'711 in 1963 (with roughly 51'000 to Poland and 30'000 to Hungary). In November 1963, the cumulative total of copies mailed and distributed since July 1956 reached the one-million mark and rose to 1'010'532 by end of 1963, representing 14'643 titles sent. 87'125 copies were sent in 1964, 96'412 in 1965, 96'605 in 1966, and 132'315 in 1967.<sup>26</sup>

#### Direct Means to Reach the People of East Europe: The Person-to-Person Distribution (PTPD) and the Personal Delivery Programs

The first nine months of 1957 saw some 55'000 persons from the satellite countries visit the West, the vast majority of whom were Poles, providing an excellent opportunity to deliver selected literature, including politically significant items, without the hindrance of censorship. Free Europe Press (FEP) promptly initiated a permanent system for the distribution by hand of books to Polish intelligentsia traveling to Western Europe. The project operated as a branch of the mailing project through a network of Polish cultural institutions, libraries, bookshops, publishing houses, clubs and cultural associations in London (30) and in Paris (11). Between January 1958 and September 1963, the Polonia Book Fund Ltd. in London distributed a total of 101'857 books to 37'025 recipients. Polish exile organizations, art galleries, bookshops and libraries in Paris and Rome

also mailed books to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Lithuania, and gave out books to visitors from other East European countries.<sup>27</sup> In 1962, additional Hungarian book distribution centers were set up in London, Paris, Munich, Vienna, Rome, and New York, and a more modest operation for Baltic visitors in Stockholm, with links to Finland and Estonia.

*„The book distribution program continued to grow during 1965 and a grand total of 187'733 books were distributed.“*

A Czechoslovak network was added in 1963 and Bulgarian and Romanian centers were started in 1965 in Vienna, Rome and Paris. Nine monthly highlights reports for 1963 contain separate references to the program with partial figures, titles of book and periodicals distributed, city of distribution, and names of prominent visitors from Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.<sup>28</sup>

[21] George Minden. Response Patterns of the FEP Mailing Operation Behind the Iron Curtain of September 1958. Free Europe Press, p.1-2. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[22] Memorandum from G.C. Minden to the Director, FEOP, November 24, 1959, p.1-4. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives.

[23] Memorandum by George C. Minden to FEC President A.S. Alexander, December 17, 1959, Minden Paper, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

[24] COB Division, Mailing Operations, Monthly Report No.63, October 1961, p.1-43. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Institution Archives

[25] Unsigned Mailing Project Report from FEC President to The Executive Committee po.1-3, RFE/RL Corporate Records, Box 1738, and Mailing project List of Sponsors, July 25, 1963, p.1-17. Another list dated March 1, 1968 named 201 sponsors in the U.S and 284 in West Europe, 10 of them in Switzerland. Minden Papers, Box 3, Hoover Institution Archives.

[26] Monthly and yearly statistics of the years 1963 to 1968 prepared for the FEC President by George Minden and his staff. Minden Papers, Box 3, and monthly reports and monthly highlights on microfiche at the Hoover Institution Archives.

[27] FEP Project Schedule No.218, Munich Office, December 11, 1957, p.1-4. On Polonia book distribution reports, RFE/RL Corporate Records, Box 262/2, 262/3 and 262/6, Hoover Institution Archives.

[28] Memorandum from George Minden to FEC President: March to December 1963 Highlights Reports. PSPD Mailing Operations, Highlight Reports on microfiche at Hoover Institution Archives.

[6] East European receivers of Western books wrote letters of gratitude to the covert addresses of the distributors. These are two original envelopes sent from Hungary to addresses in Vienna and New York (Collection of the author).





[7]

Therafter, the monthly person-to-person totals were added to the monthly total of responses and requests received as a result of the mailings, and the term book distributed now covered both books mailed and books given directly to visitors from East Europe. The people-to-people (p-to-p) program proved to be extremely successful, with 23'407 copies given out in 1963, 44'075 in 1964, 62'278 copies in 1965, 61'911 in 1966, and 87'568 in 1967. In this manner, it was possible to know with certainty that the books offered had actually been taken by the visitors who came to the various distribution points. Thus the grand total of books distributed comprising books sent by direct mailing, books requested, and books distributed person-to-person in 1964 was an impressive 167'474, with

107,460 acknowledgements for books received plus the 44'075 items distributed p-to-p during the same year (to roughly 21'000 to visitors from each Hungary and Poland and 2'573 from Czechoslovakia).<sup>29</sup> The book distribution program continued to grow during 1965 and a grand total of 187'733 books were distributed to some 50'000 to 70'000 selected individuals and organizations. It was estimated that at least two-thirds of these books or roughly 121'000, had been received (58'643 books mailed whose receipt had been acknowledged by the addressees and 62'278 had been distributed directly). Out of the 96'412 copies mailed in 1965, Poland was the largest recipient with 36'186 books (60%), followed by Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Of the 62'278 items dis-





studying in East Europe for distribution to East European there. After their return to the U.S., the Americans as the ostensible donors would mail further books to their East European personal contacts.

*„... this gave a total of 119'030 books known to have reached targets, ...”*

The 1966 annual report lists a total of 195'703 books distributed. The number of requested books rose to 62'962 from 42'530 in 1965, and requested books mailed numbered 35'288 compared to 28'554 in 1965. These books went to some 50'000 to 70'000 selected individuals and organizations and there was evidence that 60% of the books distributed were received. With written acknowledgements for 57'119 of the books mailed and 61'911 books distributed p-to-p, this gave a total of 119'030 books known to have reached targets.<sup>31</sup>

tributed directly, roughly 30'000 were taken by Polish, 26'000 by Hungarian, and 6'500 by Czechoslovak visitors.<sup>30</sup>

1965 was also marked by the initiation of yet another method of book distribution named „personalized“ delivery and „personalized mailing“, a method already advocated in the late 1950s by U.S. government agencies which felt that American scholars would have a greater intellectual impact on intellectual circles in the Soviet Union and East Europe than could U.S. officials. Through the cover of the International Advisory Council, an already existing New York bogus corporation, Minden began to provide books and periodicals to American professors, students, and journalists who were visiting or

[29] PSPD Book Center Monthly Report No.101, December 1963 High-lights, p.1, *ibid.*

[30] G. Minden, Undated Annual Report for 1965 on PSPD' Book Distribution Program, p.1-11. Minden Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

[31] G. Minden, Undated PSPD Annual Report for 1966 on the Book Distribution Program, p.1-9, *Ibid.*

[7] *Book distribution and leaflets were one instrument to overcome the iron curtain and carry western ideas and information into Eastern Europe. The most and best known symbol of this Iron Curtain was the Berlin Wall, erected in August 1961.*

PSPD distributed in 1967 a total of 273'113 books – a 4% increase over 1966, given to roughly 60'000 individuals and institutions. Poland received 87'890 books or 32% of the total, followed by Hungary with 73'412 books (27%), Czechoslovakia with 50'532, Romania with 38'780, and Bulgaria with 18'823. An estimated 85% of the roughly 60'000 requested books were mailed. This big increase was partly due to book donations from the United States Information Agency (USIA). 87'568 books and periodicals were given directly through the p-to-p program, giving a total of 158'237 copies. The report listed 14'500 addresses for Poland (12'760 individuals and 1'800 institutions), 20'500 addresses for Czechoslovakia (19'000 and 1'500), 7,600 for Hungary (6'000 and 1'600), 9'500 for Romania, and 3'750 for Bulgaria.<sup>32</sup>

Minden called 1968 „the best year,“ with a total of 327'628 books and periodicals distributed to over 70'000 individuals and institutions, a 20% increase over 1967. PSPD now had a total of over 100'000 addresses in East Europe, some 74'000 of which were considered active. The Polish list counted 11'860 individuals and 1'400 institutions, followed by Czechoslovakia with 22'700 individuals, and Hungary with 9'000 individuals and 715 institutions. Romanian addresses numbered 11'860 individuals and 490 institutions, and Bulgaria's list counted 4'900 names and addresses. The 1968 record was due to an unprecedented number of written requests for books, above all from Czechoslovakia and Romania, and the large increase of visitors to the West. Since books sent to libraries, universities, and schools were accessible to many readers, Minden estimated that in the course of a year, these books probably reached half a million persons. In 1968, the receipt of 83'223 books or 38.9% of the books mailed was acknowledged, and 109'049 books were distributed person-to-person, giving a grand total of 192'272 of books or 59% of all books distributed.<sup>33</sup>

Minden's book program contracted in 1969 but the number of books distributed remained high thanks to gift books by the USIA. Acknowledgements of receipt were received for 91'834 books or 55% of those mailed. With an additional 104'630 books and periodicals distributed person-to-person, Minden had direct evidence that of the total of 274'009 books distributed in 1969, 200'463 were received. That year, 82'013 books (30.3%) went to Poland, 64'559 (23.5%) to Czechoslovakia, 56'405 (20.6%) to Hungary, 21'346 to Romania, and 21'346 to Bulgaria.<sup>34</sup>

It is not possible here to present a detailed account of other PSPD programs through cultural East-West Contacts, of the financial support of a large number of Polish, Czechoslovak and Hungarian emigre periodicals and magazines, and of the publication and/or translation with PSPD support of a large number of emigre works in the national language.

PSPD's semiannual report for the period 1 January to 30 June 1970, the last Minden submitted to FEC John Richardson Jr., mentioned the distribution of 110'977 books and periodicals to 38'000 persons and individuals in six countries of East Europe, 14% less than in the second half of 1969. At the same time, the effectiveness of the program did not suffer, and the receipt of 36'594 copies of the 68'137 items mailed (72%) was acknowledged in writing, while a further 41'000 items were distributed person-to-person.<sup>35</sup>

#### **New Metamorphosis: from Free Europe's PSPD to International Advisory Council, Inc.**

The report for the first half of 1970 reflected the financial woes of the book distribution program and the brave efforts made by Min-

den to keep the project afloat and going despite its growing costs. In the late 1960s, RFE was going through very difficult years, fighting back attacks from Senators Clifford Case and William Fulbright. With the backing of President Nixon, the State Department, and the majority of the US Congress, it was finally able in 1972 to secure a new financing arrangement. This led to the elimination of FEC's all non-radio activities and the transfer on July 1, 1970 of Minden's PSPD from FEC's New York office to new premises across Park Avenue. There he became President of International Advisory Council, Inc., an already existing CIA front organization which he continued to manage in a remarkably effective and successful manner. The transfer from FEC reduced the program's visibility to the communists. At the same time, many of the American and European publishers and sponsors must have been aware that the funds came from FEC or some other U.S. government agency.

*„In the late 1960s, RFE was going through very difficult years, fighting back attacks from Senators Clifford Case and William Fulbright.”*

The Hoover Institution Archives only contain Minden's IAC semiannual reports from the second half of 1970 up to the first half of 1973. All subsequent book mailing and distribution reports are missing and presumably kept in some Washington government archive. In the second half of 1970, IAC was able to distribute 109'817 books and periodicals, a figure comparable to that of the first half of the year, and had proof that 68.4% of the books distributed had been received (30'330 of the 65'065 books mailed), 43'586 distributed person-to-person, and 1'166 personalized mailings, or 75'082 out of the 109'817 publications distributed. Hungary received 24'346 books (22.2%), second after Poland with 36'041 (32.8%) and ahead of Czechoslovakia with 20'019 (18.2%).<sup>36</sup>

In the first half of 1971, IAC distributed a total of 116'026 books to its five target countries, including 58 to the Baltic republics, 5% more than in either half of 1970. 43'375 books and periodicals were distributed p-to-p and written acknowledgements were received for 29'465 of the 71'076 books mailed, providing reliable evidence that 74'415 or 64.5% of the total 116'026 books and periodicals distributed were received.<sup>37</sup> In the second half of 1971, IAC distributed 117'818 books and periodicals to its five East European target countries, 1.5% more than in the first half of the year. Of these, 53'142 were distributed person-to-person and 2'177 through personalized mailings. 77% of the books distributed were known to have reached their targets. Many of those not acknowledged may have found their way into second-hand bookshops or the black market, as relatively few were intercepted by the authorities or confiscated altogether.<sup>38</sup>

*„... relatively few were intercepted by the authorities or confiscated altogether.”*

The report for the first half of 1972 mentions a total of 109'961 books and periodicals distributed, 7'800 less than in the previous six months. Written acknowledgements were received for 26'884 of



the 70'595 books mailed. For the second half of 1972, the report lists a total of 120'325 books and periodicals distributed, 9.3% more than in the previous half-year. 11'384 books were received free from the USIA. 55'918 books were distributed p-to-p, an increase of 50% over the first half of 1972. The number of books mailed in response to requests decreased by 17.3% and that of unscheduled books by 14.2%. The last IAC report available covers the first half of 1973 and lists a total of 105'605 books and periodicals distributed, 12.2% less than during the previous half year. The total included 9'671 books donated by the USIA. 42'415 books were distributed p-to-p, a 24.1% decrease over the previous half-year, 23'085 books were mailed in response to requests, 3,497 mailed individually on IAC initiative, and 1'719 distributed. as personalized mailings.<sup>39</sup>

In a one-page summary for FY 1982, Minden gave the following figures for that year: "Soviet Union, 155'000 books and journals, 345'000 /copies/of Russian newspaper, 40'000 copies of Ukrainian journal. Poland: 66'000 books and journals, 96'000 copies of a single journal. 36'000 copies of 18 books published and distributed. Czechoslovakia: 21'500 books and journals, 57'000 copies of two journals. Hungary: 18'300 books and journals, 18'000 copies of a literary journal. Romania: 13'500 books and journals. Bulgaria: 5'000 books and journals, giving a total of 871'300 books and journals and a projected cost of \$278'868 for Fiscal Year (FY) 1983: \$128'996 for the USSR, \$75'624 for Poland, and the rest to the other four East European target countries.<sup>40</sup> This indicates that by then, the book distribution program was giving priority to the USSR following the 1975 consolidation of IAC and of Radio Liberty's' covert Bedford Book Publishing Co. book distribution program run since 1956.

In a 1991 memo, Minden gave a short description of the structure and activities of International Literary Centre, Inc., created through the consolidation with IAC, Inc. According to him, the total number of books and periodicals distributed for roughly 35 years to five East European countries and for some 30 years to the Soviet Union amounted to close to 10 millions. In the past few years, the distribution was close to 300'000 per year, with 55% of the books going to the USSR and 40% to East Europe. The combined Soviet-East European distribution for FY 1990 was 316'020. The report also describes ILC's modest personnel of ten and and cites ILC's budget for FY1990 of \$2'720'677.<sup>41</sup>



[5]

[32] G. Minden, Undated PSPD Annual Report for 1967 on the Book Distribution Program, p.1-33.Ibid.

[33] Undated PSPD Report for 1968 on the Book Distribution Program, p.1-21 and PSPD Book Distribution Center Monthly Reports No.138 January 1968 through No.149, December 1968. On microfiche at Hoover Institution Archives.

[34] George C. Minden, Free Europe, Inc. PSPD, Office of the Director, Annual Report Calendar Year 1969 on the Book Distribution Program, p.1-35, and PSPD Book Center Monthly Report No.150, January 1969 through Report No.161, December 1969. Ibid.

[35] George C. Minden, Semiannual Report, Calendar Year 1970 (First Half). The Book Distribution Program, Free Europe Inc, PSPD Division, p.1-74. Minden Paper, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

[36] George C. Minden, IAC Semiannual report, on Book Distribution, July 1 to December 31, 1970, p.1-51. Minden Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

[37] George C. Minden, Semiannual Report on Book Distribution, January 1 to June 30, 1971, p.1-48. Minden Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

[38] George C. Minden, Semiannual Report on Book Distribution, July 1 to December 31,1971, p.1-44, Ibid.

[39] George C. Minden. IAC Semiannual Report on Book Distribution, January 1, 1972, p.1-64, and IAC Semiannual Report on Book Distribution, January 1 to June 30, 1973, p.1-83. Ibid.

[40] Soviet/East European Literature Distribution Program, FY 1982. Minden Papers, Box 3, Hoover Institution Archives.

[41] G.C. Minden, ILC. A Short Description of its Structure and Activities, September 1, 1991, p.1-3. Minden Papers. Box 3, Hoover Institution Archives.

[5] *U.S. Intelligence Services such as the CIA and DIA – here the crest of the U.S. Armed Forces Intelligence Organisation (Defense Intelligence Agency – DIA) – were part of the operations directed at Eastern Europe.*



### Conclusion

On the basis of this well documented written evidence, it can be said with certainty that this massive quasi-secret book distribution program, which John Matthews aptly called „the West’s secret Marshall Plan for the mind,“ had a significant impact and influence on intellectuals and professional people and thousands of students and youths in East Europe during some four decades of Soviet communist domination. Thanks to the uninterrupted and steady flow of Western books and publications, the total number of which certainly must have reached 10 millions, Western political ideas and Western culture, languages and dictionaries, art and architecture, sociology, religion and philosophy, economics and farming, history and memoirs, and catalogues were able to penetrate the cultural Iron Curtain despite attempts by communist censors and customs to stem the flow. Ultimately, they were forced to admit defeat just like those who tried to jam the radio broadcasts of RFE and other Western radio stations. The intellectuals of East Europe were able to break out of their cultural and ideological prison and remain in touch with their counterparts in the West. In this particular type of psychological warfare, the ultimate victory belonged to the Free World with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War.

*„... this massive quasi-secret book distribution program, which John Matthews aptly called ‚the West’s secret Marshall Plan for the mind,‘ had a significant impact and influence ...”*

In his 1991 memo, Minden wrote that „ILC’s operations have never been part of the Cold War. They have always been targeted, information-directed, and tightly controlled.“ Even so, the CIA-funded and Minden-managed book mailing and distribution programs, covering the long period from 1956 to 1991, played a decisive role by contributing, together with the radio broadcasts, to the West’s ideological victory, at a relatively low financial cost and without the loss of lives.