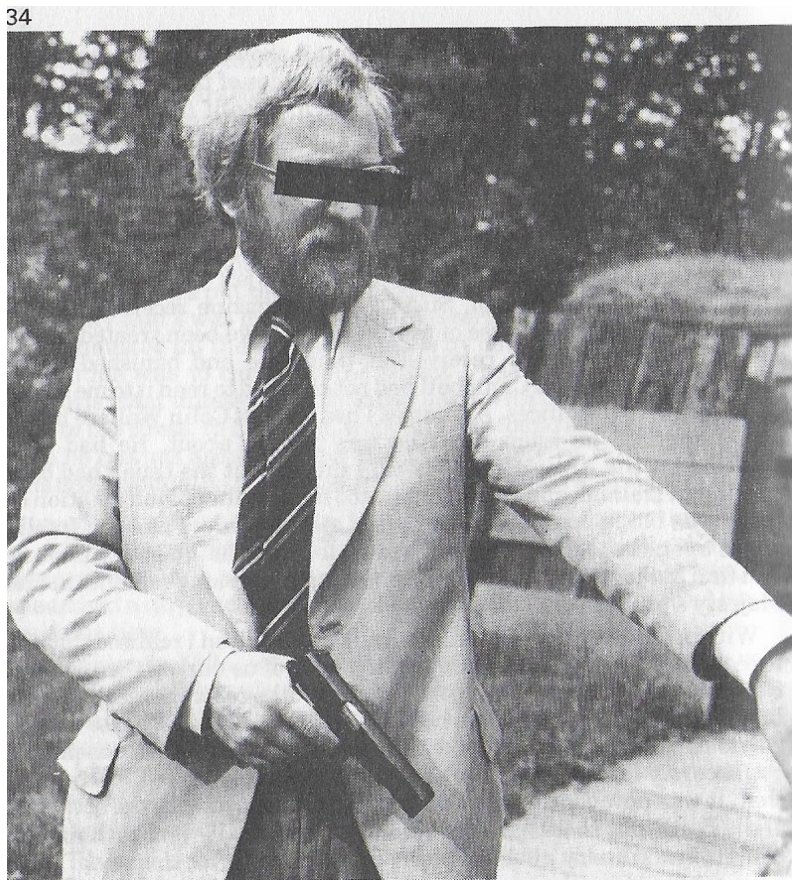


Hugh who?

Robin Ramsay

The man in the picture is the late Hugh Mooney, who died in December 2017.¹ The announcement of his death² describes him as 'Journalist, Diplomat, Barrister, Teacher and Writer'. (caps in the original) The interesting bit is 'diplomat'. Mooney worked for the Information Research Department (IRD), notably in Northern Ireland in the 1970s; and IRD was formally a section of the Foreign Office – hence 'diplomat'. Mooney was also part of the British Army's



Information Policy Unit in Northern Ireland, the psy-ops outfit, as was Colin Wallace.

The thing about bureaucracies is their procedures. When I was briefly a

¹ The picture is from Fred Holroyd with Nick Burbridge, *War Without Honour* (Hull: Medium, 1989) p. 134. At the time of the book's publication there was still a slight chance of IRA action against someone like Mooney – hence the attempt to conceal his identity and the description of him as merely 'a senior member of IRD'.

² <<https://tinyurl.com/y973b83e>> or <<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thetimes-uk/obituary.aspx?n=hugh-peter-mooney&pid=187646639>>

very junior civil servant in the late 1960s, one of my duties was to update the procedures. Every so often a packet of changes to the existing procedures would arrive and I had to get the appropriate files out of the cupboard, remove the old pages and insert the new ones. When the British Army ended up in Northern Ireland, they went to their cupboard and took out the file marked 'insurgency'. Part of the kit was media relations and psy-ops; and the media/psy-ops experts they had to hand were in IRD, which had spent the previous 20 years doing their best to portray as Soviet stooges much of the domestic British left (and any resistance to British rule in what remained of the empire). This, of course, isn't quite how IRD would have put it. Here is an extract from Hugh Mooney's CV.

Statement of Hugh Mooney³

1. My name is Hugh Mooney. I am a journalist by profession I have worked as sub-editor on the Irish Times. As Reuter correspondent in the Middle East I spent six months in Aden in 1966 and in 1967 reported the Arab-Israeli war.

2. In 1969, I left the BBC External Services to take a job as a specialist writer in the Information Research Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. IRD had been set up at the onset of the Cold War to counter Soviet Communist Bloc propaganda, by monitoring, conducting research and providing unattributable briefings to journalists and others.

3. By the time I joined, IRD's terms of reference had widened to include responsibility for monitoring and countering hostile propaganda from any source. For example I spent some weeks in Bermuda advising on countering black-power propaganda and during 1971, I started to visit Northern Ireland, where the Government of the Irish Republic had financed pro-republican propaganda.

4. My first visit (in March/April 1971) was at the request of the United Kingdom Government Representative, Ronnie Burroughs. When my terms of reference were agreed by all departments later that year, the UKREP was Howard Smith. My brief was to assist the Army, the RUC and the Northern Ireland Government Information Service to counter hostile propaganda and improve their public relations activity. I was a member of the UKREP's staff and was not seconded to the Army.

5. The Army's Public Relations branch at HQNI was headed by a retired

³ Unless otherwise stated all the documents quoted in this piece are from the collection of Colin Wallace.

army officer, Tony Staughton and had been beefed up by the appointment of a deputy, Lieutenant-Colonel Tony Yarnold. The public relations disaster of internment in August 1971 had led to the formation of the Information Policy Branch, headed by Colonel Maurice Tugwell, whose deputy was *Lieutenant-Colonel INQ 1873*.⁴ I shared *INQ 1873* office at HQNL. IP's brief was to fight the propaganda war and it guided and supplemented PR branch's work.'

As for fighting that 'propaganda war', a document headed Organisation of Information Activity for Northern Ireland, dated 30 November 1971, states:

'The Information Research Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which specialises in the appropriate techniques, has been specifically tasked inter alia to place anti IRA material in the British and foreign press and media.'

Some of this involved planting false stories in the press and fabricating documents.⁵ In a draft report by Mooney in 1971 he wrote in paragraph 9:

'Some of the material is in fact playbacks of material that IRD have already printed abroad, sometimes on my briefing, while in London. The article Red Menace is real in Ulster which appeared in the News Letter in September, is the result of such an exercise.'

This is the technique known as 'surfacing': get something published abroad then get it picked up – 'surfaced' – in the UK media.

A paper written by Mooney, 'American aid for Northern "refugees" goes to the IRA',⁶ which accused the SDLP politician John Hume of stealing money raised in the United States by the Northern Ireland Resurgence Committee, ended up as a story in the *Christian Science Monitor*.⁷

Another technique was fabricating documents. For example, Mooney acquired a copy of the agenda of the the Sinn Fein conference of 1971, to which he added two resolutions:

'34. That the Connolly Youth Movement, the Workers League, the Irish

⁴ The sections in italics, *INQ 1873*, have been added by hand in the original.

⁵ In 1987 someone anonymously sent me a collection of anti-Labour forgeries from the mid 1970s period. They were reproduced at end of Paul Foot's *Who framed Colin Wallace?*, still available from <<https://www.abebooks.co.uk/>>.

One of those forgeries, smearing Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees, is reported as being in the Information Policy Unit by unit member Michael Taylor. See <<https://villagemagazine.ie/index.php/2017/09/britainted-part-ii/>>.

⁶ Quoted in a letter to Mrs Thatcher from Colin Wallace in 1990.

⁷ <<https://villagemagazine.ie/index.php/2017/09/britainted-part-ii/>> See the section headed 'The smear about John Hume stealing charitable funds'.

Communist Party or National Liberation Front be admitted to membership ; and that Sinn Fein be permitted to actively associate with the above mentioned groups.

35. That a member of the Communist Party or any radical group be admitted to Sinn Fein or allowed to retain membership.'

This was IRD's standard theme: all radical movements are run by Communists (and ultimately by Moscow). An IRD paper, 'Communist strategy in Ulster terrorist campaign' (undated but circa 1971), begins with this total fiction:

'Carefully calculated Communist strategy is behind the newest phase in the Northern Ireland terror campaign which has cost more than 100 lives and caused damage of several million pounds.'

In a report by Mooney, again in or around 1971, he repeated the idea that the IRA was Communist:

'I am also in touch with John Rooks, news editor of the Belfast Telegraph, who should publish a piece shortly giving the long-established Communist links of certain key members of the IRA. I also steered Mr Rooks to the head of Special Branch to make inquiries about the increased activity of the Northern Ireland Communist Labour Party. . . .'⁸

Did any of this matter? How significant were some dodgy smear stories against people who were prepared to starve themselves to death for their cause? Colin Wallace thinks it did matter. He commented in a statement given to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

'The role of the Information Research Department is a significant factor in this story. . . . As a Cold War propaganda organisation, its anti Soviet activities attempted to place the Northern Ireland conflict in the wider global campaign of Soviet subversion. There is no doubt that having the capability to counter real Soviet subversion was important at that time. However, a by-product of the IRD's activities is that they were seized upon by William McGrath and others during 1973 and 1974 to undermine the more moderate Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries who were then willing to explore some form of political compromise. McGrath, by branding those individuals as "Communists", undermined their authority within their respective organisations and they were replaced by hardline militants. It is likely that those anti-Communist activities also helped to colour the population's attitude to the incoming Labour Government, led by Harold Wilson, in February 1974, and hampered that Government's political initiatives.'

⁸ No such party existed.

