

ARTICLE

“Witch-hunt in Washington”: Ronald Prain, Robert F. Kennedy, the McClellan Committee, and the Investigation of International Business in the Cold War

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In February 1956, Ronald Prain—chairman of the Rhodesian Selection Trust group of mining companies, and a significant figure in postwar international business—was subpoenaed and appeared before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation of the U.S. Senate Committee of Government Operations as it sought to determine whether British international business was exporting copper to the Soviet Union. Following the seemingly contrived nature of the proceedings, and because of a hostile interrogation by Robert F. Kennedy, Prain was later to describe his appearance as a “witch-hunt”—a conscious reference to the political paranoia of the period. Using a microhistorical approach, this article examines how Prain understood and narrated his role in an event to which he was a minor actor, drawn into a larger narrative of the political and economic conflict of the Cold War. It evaluates the historical veracity of Prain’s testimony and discusses the limits of memoir and archival sources. It discusses the implications of the event to the historiography of international business, in particular with reference to debates about the “nationality of the company” and the decline of the “Free-Standing Company.” And by examining one personal experience in a wider context, the article also shows that the history of international business and its relationship to the politics of the Cold War should not be seen as remote, monolithic, impersonal, or abstract but as individually lived and suffused with emotion, memory, and personal meaning.

Keywords: International business history, Cold War, Micro-history

This play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian. . . . However, I believe that the reader will discover here the essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history. The fate of each character is exactly that of his historical model, and there is no one in the drama who did not play a similar—and in some cases exactly the same—role in history.

—Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, “A note on the historical accuracy of this play” [1953]¹

1. Miller, *The Crucible*, 11. Miller’s play is usually associated as a dramatized rebuke to McCarthyism and its paranoid conspiracism, which are analogized to a “witch-hunt.” See Arthur Miller, “Why I Wrote The

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At the height of the Cold War in February 1956, Ronald Prain—the chairman of the Rhodesian Selection Trust Ltd (RST) and a significant figure in postwar international business²—was subpoenaed and appeared before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation of the U.S. Senate Committee of Government Operations (known as the McClellan Committee), whose members included John F. Kennedy, Joe McCarthy, and Barry Goldwater as well as other significant postwar American political figures. Senator John McClellan was the chairman; Robert F. Kennedy was the committee's legal counsel. Prain was subjected to a hostile interrogation related to the mining companies for which he was CEO and chairman. The premise behind this interrogation was that copper produced in Rhodesia by these companies was being exported to the Soviet Union. As McClellan explained, the “subcommittee voted to hold public hearings on this matter after it received evidence that merchants of the free-world are helping to build-up Russia's military by furnishing it with items which are indispensable in constructing or maintaining a war-machine.”³ In his autobiography published twenty-five years afterward, Prain described this event as a “witch-hunt” and “the most bizarre incident of my business career,” as he became, briefly, a minor actor in paranoid national and international politics of Cold War America.⁴

In this article, this incident is used as a microhistorical foundation for an exploration of international business during the Cold War. The analytical perspective of the article is to explore the evidence to understand how the historical context helps to explain the event, and then to reverse the process to see how the historical event illuminates and adds to understanding of the historical context.⁵ The story of Prain's interrogation by the McClellan Committee is decomposed using a narratological schema: context, setting, plot, the dialogue between the protagonist (Prain) and his interrogative antagonists on the McClellan Committee, the chief conflict around which the interrogation occurred, and the narratives that can be discerned from Prain's autobiography, his personal archive, and other records that help to understand how Prain intended the incident to be understood, and how the incident can be

Crucible: An Artist's Answer to Politics,” *New Yorker*, “Life and Letters,” October 21 and 28, 1996, 158–164, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/10/21/why-i-wrote-the-crucible>.

2. Sir Ronald Prain (1907–1991) was an important figure in the international mining industry and the politics of Northern Rhodesia and Zambia from the postwar years until his retirement in 1972. Born in Chile to a British family with connections to international business across Latin America, Prain was raised in London and entered the City of London as a metal trader in the 1920s. By the 1930s, he had established himself as a director and then later as chairman of RST and related companies. Along with Anglo-American, he formed two significant copper mining groups in Northern Rhodesia. For a detailed biography, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Prain, Sir Ronald Lindsay (1907–1991),” by Ian Phimister, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/49932>, published September 23, 2010. The structure of the mining industry in Northern Rhodesia is discussed in detail in Mollan, Frank, and Tennent, “Changing Corporate Domicile.” For the importance of Prain to the history of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia, and in particular to the politics of the Copperbelt, see Pilosof and Rivett, “Imagining Change, Imaginary Futures”; Tembo, “After the Deluge”; Butler, “Business and British Decolonisation”; Straube, “Speak, Friend, and Enter?”; Munene, “Mining the Past”; Cohen and Pilosof, “Big Business and White Insecurities.”

3. Senator John McClellan, February 15, 1956, in Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *East–West Trade*, 1.

4. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 196.

5. Methodologically, this articulates with the recent increased importance attributed to context in the more historically sensitive areas of research in Management and Organization Studies, notably McLaren and Durepos, “Call to Practice Context”; McLaren, “Strengthening Capitalism through Philanthropy.”

understood historiographically.⁶ The decision to cast Prain as the protagonist and Kennedy as his antagonist (and in so doing to follow Prain's archive and memoir in this respect) is my choice as the historian-author, and in line with the position Prain was placed in: subject to the power of the U.S. Senate and interrogated by prominent interlocuters.⁷

The article will contribute to understanding the nature of the management of international business in the period.⁸ It will show how the ideological concerns of the Cold War became an increasingly important determinant of the international business environment, and how the organizational form of these businesses was changing in this period.⁹ In particular, it will address the "nationality of the company" debate by observing the changing nature of "British" international business in this period, and the sense in which the "British" nature of RST was in decline.¹⁰ This allows the article to engage with the debate about the disappearance of the British Free-Standing Company in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ The article also contributes to a better understanding of the changing structures of international political economy in the Cold War. It shows how, for very large corporations, government was increasingly important, as indicated by the work of the McClellan Committee itself, and in the role played by the British Foreign Office in supporting Prain as he prepared to face the committee. This is framed by wider changes in the international political economy, specifically the rise of American power, and its inverse—the waning of British influence. The article demonstrates how American developmental aid was used as an arm of commercial and political policy, how this extended American influence in the developing world,¹² and how complexities of business practice fared in the face of Cold War politics. As such, it helps to better understand what the role of the CEO of such organizations entailed.¹³ This article has a secondary purpose, which is

6. The increasing importance of narrative and memory-work to business history has been discussed at length. See Popp and Fellman, "Writing Business History"; Tennent and Mollan, "Limits of the Narratives of Strategy"; Rowlinson et al., "Narratives and Memory in Organizations"; Hansen, "Business History"; Mordhorst and Schwarzkopf, "Theorising Narrative in Business History"; Mordhorst, "From Counterfactual History to Counternarrative History"; Kivijärvi, Mills, and Mills, "Performing Pan American Airways through Coloniality"; Rowlinson et al., "Social Remembering and Organizational Memory." This literature builds on older historiographical debates about the relationship between fiction and history, from which we are reminded that all historical narratives are inherently selective, not just those that acknowledge their selectivity. In particular, the influence of postmodern literary criticism on historiography has been important. See White, *Metahistory*. On selectivity, see Lamoreaux, "Rethinking Microhistory."

7. The commonplace practice of such archival determinacy and its implications for method are discussed in Decker, "Silence of the Archives."

8. Cohen, "Business and Decolonisation"; Stockwell, "Trade, Empire, and the Fiscal Context."

9. Kelley, Mills, and Cooke, "Management as a Cold War Phenomenon?"; Cooke, "Situating Maslow in Cold War America"; Spector, "Harvard Business Review Goes to War"; Cooke, "Cold War Origin of Action Research"; McLaren and Mills, "Product of 'His' Time?"; Spector, "Business of Blacklisting"; Mollan and Tennent, "International Taxation and Corporate Strategy."

10. Kelley, Mills, and Cooke, "Management as a Cold War Phenomenon?"; Cooke, "Situating Maslow in Cold War America"; Spector, "Harvard Business Review Goes to War"; Cooke, "Cold War Origin of Action Research"; McLaren and Mills, "Product of 'His' Time?"; Spector, "Business of Blacklisting"; Mollan and Tennent, "International Taxation and Corporate Strategy."

11. For an introduction to this debate see Wilkins, "Free-Standing Company Revisited"; Mollan, "Free-Standing Company."

12. Helleiner, "Reinterpreting Bretton Woods"; Becker and McClenahan, *The Market, the State, and the Export-Import Bank*.

13. Butler, "Business and British Decolonisation."

to show the limits of historical fact (that is, what can and cannot be historically and factually demonstrated) and the power of historical narrative to reveal something of the “strange and most awful” chapters of history. In this case, just as with Miller’s *The Crucible*, it is the paranoia and suspicion of the Cold War era witch-hunts to which Prain himself was to locate his experience.

Sources and Methods

This article is largely based on archival material collected from the Ronald Prain Papers held at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, which includes substantial holdings in relation to the mining industry.¹⁴ Prain’s papers are comprised of business correspondence in connection to his role as CEO and chairman of various mining companies, and they cover from the mid-1930s to the 1970s. The research problematique for this article was instigated by one file—Box 3 “Subpoena by Senator McClellan, 1956.” This file contains various correspondence and transcripts relating to the McClellan Committee incident. This file is supplemented by a chapter from Prain’s autobiography, which bears a close resemblance to the documents in the file.¹⁵ The title of the chapter—“Witch-hunt in Washington”—is largely hyperbolic because Prain was barely the victim of a witch-hunt. Nevertheless, its purpose was consciously to locate Prain’s experience in the wider context of the Red Menace scares of the period. The fact that the file and Prain’s autobiography broadly share the same emplotment and narrative is of relevance when interpreting the sources. There is an entanglement of autobiographical “memoir” and archival sources whereby Prain’s archive was used to construct the narrative of the autobiography and/or where Prain’s own narrative sense of the incident has been used to shape the archive of his personal papers. Much of the file in question is composed of public records that form part of the archives of the U.S. Senate, and so are retained in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, as well as in the archives of Senator McClellan and Robert Kennedy. As such, then, the Box 3 “Subpoena” file is in some ways an act of historical reconstruction itself, as it is made up of fragments that are also found elsewhere. The conclusion I have reached is that the documentary evidence relating to the incident in the Box 3 “Subpoena” file and the autobiography should be treated exegetically as interrelated sources. Close reading of these two sources also reveals some differences that will be highlighted, notably that Prain’s autobiography allows him license to include remembrances that are not in the file that are exclusively composed of contemporaneously dated documentary sources.

The Prain Papers also include substantial correspondence with Harold Hochschild, the CEO of the American Metal Company (AMCO; later American Metal Climax, AMAX), which have also been used. As will be discussed subsequently, AMCO/AMAX and the RST companies were closely aligned. This correspondence spans nearly thirty years and covers the period

14. Bradford R. Burton, Jennifer C. Sanchez, Ronda Frazier, Ginny Kilander, D.C. Thompson, and Theresa Martin, “Guide to Mining and Petroleum Resources,” University of Wyoming American Heritage Center 2013, http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/_files/collection_guides/mining-petro2014-economic-geology.pdf.

15. Prain, *Reflection on an Era*, see Chapter Sixteen: “Witch-hunt in Washington,” 193–201.

when the McClellan Committee testimony took place. Additional evidence relating to context and interpretation has been largely drawn from existing secondary literature on the various subjects on which this incident touches.

A further substantial source is the published official record of the hearings to which Prain contributed. These are Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *East–West Trade. Hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations United States Senate Eight-Fourth Congress*. Divided into three separate parts and covering 559 pages, the official account includes 35 testimonies.¹⁶ Congressional hearings are an important source of historical data but, as noted, the act of “testifying before Congress is relatively little studied.”¹⁷ I have further sought to trace the threads of this story as far as they will go. In so doing, I have consulted the archive records of Senator John McClellan in Arkadelphia, Arkansas; the papers of Robert F. Kennedy in Boston, Massachusetts; the Senate Records at the Center for Legislative Archives at the Library of Congress, in Washington, DC; the archive of one of RST’s main customers, British Insulated Callender Cables, located in the Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool; and The National Archives in London.

Within business history, microhistory is an increasingly used method.¹⁸ It has not, however, been used in a singular way,¹⁹ and so its use here has been informed by the precepts set out by Magnússon and Szijártó.²⁰ First, the research objective of microhistory is the “intensive

16. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *East–West Trade*.

17. Hulden, “Labor and Business at Congressional Hearings.” Where congressional hearings have been used, they tend to be mined for the content of the testimonies, not the experience of testimony itself. See, for example, Wood, “Strategic Use of Public Policy.” Not only this, but the perspective of the hearings tends to be that of the committee (i.e., an institutional rather than an individual experiential perspective). While this can convey the drama of the hearings themselves, it may reduce the witnesses to the role of walk-on parts. See, for example, Vietor, *Energy Policy in America Since 1945*.

18. Microhistory is often understood as a method that examines something on a small scale over an extended period. See Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 124. However, as Carlo Ginzburg makes clear, it can also apply to a “microscopic” examination of short-run events, exemplified by the 300+ page investigation of a twenty-minute Civil War battle in *Pickett’s Charge* by George Stewart. See Ginzburg, “Microhistory”; Stewart, *Pickett’s Charge*. Ginzburg referred to microhistory as “a method of clues”; Matti Peltonen described it as a research that is “starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained. This peculiar event or phenomenon is taken as a sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure. A strange detail is made to represent a wider totality.” Peltonen, “Clues, Margins, and Monads,” 349. Use of microhistory in business history and related fields includes Popp, “Broken Cotton Speculator”; Williams, “Lifting Stones”; Quinn, “Glorious Revolution’s Effect”; McKinlay, “Birth of the Modern Career”; Lamoreaux, “Rethinking Microhistory”; Lee, “Letter from a Teenage Accounting Clerk”; McKinlay, “Banking, Bureaucracy and the Career”; Popp, “Broken Cotton Speculator”; Mills, “Getting Down and Dirty”; Smith, “Microhistory of the Global Empire of Cotton”; Yu and Mills, “Cultural Learning Process.”

19. For example, McKinlay (“Birth of the Modern Career”; “Banking, Bureaucracy and the Career”) does not mention explicitly microhistory, but his use of fragmentary evidence and the importance of context is indicative of a micro-historical approach. Mills (“Getting Down and Dirty”) joins micro-history to the broader methodological project of ANTi-history, while Lee (“Letters from a Teenage Accounting Clerk”), Popp (“Broken Cotton Speculator”), Quinn (“Glorious Revolution’s Effect”), and Smith (“Microhistory of the Global Empire of Cotton”) all use the method to explore topics of interest to their concerns, touching variously on accounting practices, the cotton industry, and the Glorious Revolution. Williams (“Lifting Stones”) and Lamoreaux (“Rethinking Microhistory”) consider the application of microhistory to accounting history and economic history.

20. Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?*

historical investigation of a relatively well defined smaller object, most often a single event.”²¹ Magnússon and Szijártó observe that, as with classical Greek dramaturgy, microhistorical studies are “where we can find a threefold action of place, time, and action.” Thus microhistory “creates a focal point, collecting the different rays coming from the past.”²² In this article, the dramatic quality of the investigation and testimony of Prain is the focal “single event.” Second, as Charles Joyner, a historian of American slavery, wrote, microhistory is the “search for answers to large questions in small places.”²³ This is the sense in which a microhistorical study can reveal new aspects of the history of broader structures, movements, and epochs by focusing on previously unheralded evidence. The purpose of this study is to use the event, its context, and its actors to reveal the complexities of international business management and the international political economy of business and development in the 1950s. And third, microhistory can explore history at a human level, helping historians to understand the individual lived experience of an event that itself existed in, and constituted part of, the broader sweep of history. As Magnússon and Szijártó observe, “for microhistorians, people who lived in the past are not merely puppets on the hands of great underlying forces of history, but they are regarded as active individuals [and] conscious actors.”²⁴ Drawing on its origins in cultural history, this operation “convey[s] the lived experience to readers directly on the micro-level of everyday life.”²⁵ By attempting to “get close to reality,” microhistories “give the reader the opportunity to learn”²⁶ about the diversity of contexts within which individuals live their lives and experience events, both momentous and prosaic (or, in this case, arguably both). Here this means, simply, that the history of international business and the politics of the Cold War should not be seen as remote, monolithic, impersonal, or abstract, but as individually lived, and so suffused with emotion, memory, and personal meaning.

The Cold War Context

The gradual return to normal economic conditions after World War II encouraged Western European nations to seek to increase trade with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Following a decision in 1948 by the United Kingdom to sell jet engines to the Soviet Union that were subsequently reversed-engineered and then manufactured in large numbers for use in Soviet MiG fighters, the U.S. government passed the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, which placed conditions on the receipt of official development aid in order to prevent trade with communist countries.²⁷ The Foreign Assistance Act and the Export Control Act (both in 1949) were designed to prevent the Soviet Union from being able to import strategically important goods and commodities. The creation of the “Consultative Group” and the Coordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) in 1950 were intended to regulate and

21. Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?* 4.

22. Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?* 5.

23. Quoted in Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?* 5.

24. Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?* 5.

25. Szijártó, “Four Arguments for Microhistory,” 210.

26. Szijártó, “Four Arguments for Microhistory,” 210.

27. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls,” 175.

enforce the embargo on trade with the Eastern bloc.²⁸ This created a list of embargoed goods of high strategic importance. These measures were further bolstered by the Mutual Defense Assistance Act (1951), also known as the Battle Act, which gave the United States the power to withdraw military and economic aid to any nation exporting items of strategic importance to the Eastern bloc.²⁹ There was a mild thawing in East–West relations from 1953 to 1954,³⁰ which led to a tension between Western nations as to whether trade with the Eastern bloc was to the greater advantage of the strategic position of the Soviet Union or the economic interests of Western Europe, and whether constructive engagement and mutual trade was a better guarantor of peace than frosty economic warfare.³¹

The COCOM mechanism for the regulation of the embargoes was a venue for discussion and disagreement between allies.³² Of particular relevance to this article is the role played by Harold Stassen in the 1954 negotiations relating to the terms under which dual-use items might be exported to the Eastern bloc. Though Stassen is probably best known for his rather eccentric commitment to run for U.S. president over a long period of time—he did so nine times between 1948 and 1988, with diminishing success—in the 1950s, he was a serious politician, holding internationalist and moderate Republican positions.³³ He served in the Eisenhower administration as head of the Foreign Operations Administration, and in that capacity represented the United States at COCOM. The 1954 negotiations turned on a disagreement between the United Kingdom and the United States as to which dual-use items should be controlled. Stassen was firm in holding that COCOM should not de-list dual-use commodities such as petroleum and (of importance here) copper.³⁴ In reaching agreement in the summer of 1954, the British government’s negotiating team, led by Peter Thorneycroft, “received the green light to concede to Stassen’s demands.”³⁵ Nevertheless, the British managed to get copper *wire* freed from the embargo after arguing that “it was extremely unlikely that exports of copper wire would be large enough to frustrate the embargo over copper itself.”³⁶ This concession is of relevance because the Stassen Agreements of 1954 form part of the questioning of Prain, and Stassen’s own testimony to the committee later in 1956 exposes most clearly the spillover of U.S. domestic politics into the proceedings involving, perhaps inevitably, Joe McCarthy.

The position of Britain as an international trading and investing nation in the early Cold War is an under-researched topic in international business history. Though Britain had been

28. McGlade, “COCOM and the Containment of Western Trade and Relations.”

29. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls.”

30. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls.”

31. Jackson, “Eisenhower Administration, East–West Trade and the Cold War.”

32. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls”; McGlade, “COCOM and the Containment of Western Trade and Relations.”

33. Kaplan, *Harold Stassen*; Albin Krebs, “Harold E. Stassen, Who Sought G.O.P. Nomination for President 9 Times, Dies at 93,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/05/us/harold-e-stassen-who-sought-gop-nomination-for-president-9-times-dies-at-93.html>.

34. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls,” 186.

35. Bar-Noi, “Process of Relaxing Strategic Export Controls,” 188.

36. CAB 129/85 memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, “Exports of Copper Wire to Russia,” February 5, 1957, TNA.

the world's leading foreign direct investor before 1914,³⁷ the outflow of capital had dried up in the interwar years.³⁸ By the 1950s, the drain on the capital account, decolonization, and the growing dominance of American multinationals had led to the decline of British international business, especially in the form of the "Free-Standing Company."³⁹ How this occurred remains an open question, but the acquisition of "British" capital/firms by American corporations provides part of the answer, as does changes in headquarter domicile to ease the burden of taxation and, in the context of decolonization, for political expediency.⁴⁰

In this case, AMCO had initially invested in RST in the 1930s, and by the 1950s had acquired a majority stake. The formation of the Central African Federation (previously Northern Rhodesia, which later became Zambia) and the change in corporate domicile of RST—both in 1953—were part of the context for the investigation of Prain and RST.⁴¹ Further, the U.S. government had direct political and economic interests in the Northern Rhodesian copper-belt via loans given to fund the hydro-electric Kariba Dam project by the U.S. Export-Import Bank, the U.S. government's credit export agency financial institution.⁴² Better known as the Ex-Im Bank, it was at the forefront of channeling finance to support American companies in line with the strategic needs of the Cold War, in particular to promote economic development and obtain strategic materials, such as copper.⁴³ In the case of the Kariba Dam, the financial support was in the region of US\$22 million and, since the electric power was to be used by the copper-producing mines, gave a direct connection between the production of copper by RST and the accusation levied at Prain that his companies were potential suppliers of copper as a dual-use commodity to the Soviet Union.

The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations' decision to hold proceedings on the issue of copper and East–West trade was ostensibly because "it received evidence that merchants of the free world are helping to build up Russia's military potential by furnishing them items which are indispensable in constructing and maintaining a war machine."⁴⁴ Senator McClellan wrote to Sinclair Weeks, the secretary of commerce, stating that the "subcommittee is deeply concerned over the effects of the downgrading of these [control] lists and wishes to

37. Pollard, "Capital Exports"; Davis and Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire*.

38. Michie, *London Stock Exchange*.

39. Wilkins, "Free-Standing Company Revisited"; Mollan and Tennent, "International Taxation and Corporate Strategy."

40. Wilkins, "Free-Standing Company Revisited"; Mollan and Tennent, "International Taxation and Corporate Strategy."

41. The structure of RST in relation to AMCO/AMAX and the change of domicile for RST is discussed at length in Mollan, Frank, and Tennent, "Changing Corporate Domicile."

42. Investigation into East–West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 388, Folder 34-199 CC, Bulky Exhibit, Subfolder "Rhodesian Copper," memorandum from Jerome S. Adlerman to Robert F. Kennedy, "East–West Trade-Rhodesia Copper," February 10, 1956, Center for Legislative Archives, Washington DC (hereafter, Investigation into East–West Trade, memo from Adlerman to RFK, "East–West Trade-Rhodesia Copper," Center for Legislative Archives).

43. Little has been written about the Ex-Im Bank and its role in supporting American business interests and U.S. strategy in the Cold War. The significant exception is Becker and McClenahan, *The Market, the State, and the Export-Import Bank*; see in particular Chapter 3: "Cold War and the Needs of a New Era, 1948–61," 77–109.

44. Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 21, File: Press Releases 1/56: press release, February 15, 1956, Robert F. Kennedy Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Museum and Library, Boston, MA (hereafter Pre-Administration Working Files, File: Press Releases 1/56, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library).

ascertain the basis for each such action with a view to determining whether there is a necessity for future legislation.”⁴⁵ This coincided with concerns on the committee that U.S. government officials were beginning a process of negotiation with China to liberalize trade.⁴⁶ In addition, it was also noted that British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was to visit Washington in February 1956 to push this agenda.⁴⁷ There was, therefore, added piquance in interrogating Prain at that particular moment in time. However the origins of the East–West trade investigation stem from the transfer of the chairmanship of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations from Joe McCarthy to John McClellan in January 1955. At the first meeting under McClellan’s chairmanship, the committee discussed unfinished work, and it was McCarthy who raised the issue of East–West trade and suggested it be investigated.⁴⁸

There is no doubt from the personal papers of Senator John McClellan that he shared the basic assumptions of McCarthy in hostility to East–West trade and antagonism to the Eisenhower administration on this issue. Indeed, McClellan was wont to respond to intemperate letters on the subject with equally intemperate replies.⁴⁹ Like McClellan, Robert Kennedy was also opposed to increasing trade with the East at that time; but, as a biographer noted, once his

45. Investigation into East–West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 375, Vol. IV: Letter from Sen. John McClellan to Hon. Sinclair Weeks, Secretary of Commerce, December 14, 1955, Center for Legislative Archives.

46. Pre-Administration Working Files, File: Press Releases 1/56: press release, February 15, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

47. Pre-Administration Working Files, File: Press Releases 1/56: press release, Saturday January 28, 1956, 7:00 pm, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library; Investigation into East–West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 375, Vol. IV: Article by Irene Corbally Kuhn, “The Way Things Are” “For Release Tuesday, February 7, 1956,” Center for Legislative Archives.

48. Range: R: 210, Box 210, Folder/File “Minutes of the Investigative Committee” [178:8], “Stenographic Transcript of Hearings Before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Committee on Operations, United States Senate: Confirmation of Personnel,” January 24, 1955, John McClellan Collection, Special Collections, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkansas.

49. Range: R: 175, Box 175, Dates: 1955–1957, file “Investigating Subcommittee 1955–1956 [144:6 A-6 D], John McClellan Collection. An example is that of J. Raymond Bell, of the Colombia Pictures Corporation of New York. On February 27, 1956, shortly after Prain’s interrogation, he wrote to McClellan: “Congratulations, Sir, on your alertness in pointing out to the nation the shocking manner in which American funds are being used to sharpen the knives potential enemies plan to use to cut American throats.” McClellan replied: “It is my position that the American people are entitled to know the truth regarding our so called allies [*sic*] (NATO countries) trading with Communist countries, and also whether our government by secret agreement concurred in the decision to lift the embargo on many strategic items.” Box 175, Dates: 1955–1957, file “Investigating Subcommittee 1955–1956, Folder 144:6A,” Letter from Raymond Bell to John McClellan, February 27, 1956; and Letter from John McClellan to Raymond Bell, February 28, 1956, John McClellan Collection. Reading the extensive correspondence in this collection gives an insight into the anxieties of some ordinary Americans about Communism. Many of those correspondents also signaled how Communism was connected to other perceived threats to the American way of life, including Jewish bankers, Zionists, the Federal Reserve, trades unions, cooperatives, and what one correspondent referred to as “Vaticanism.” In response to one particularly eccentric individual who attacked McClellan for not seeing the true risks of Roman Catholicism to the United States, McClellan wrote back that his committee would “not under my Chairmanship and with my approval conduct any an investigation (or hold public hearings as you demand) of any religious denomination as such—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or otherwise.” Box 175, Dates: 1955–1957, file “Investigating Subcommittee 1955–1956, Folder 144:6B, Letter from John McClellan to Brig. General Herbert C. Holridge, United States Army (Rtd), Sherman Oaks, California, July 1, 1956, John McClellan Collection. Holridge was a relatively well-known crank, it should be noted. However, what the correspondence reveals is how these letters must have bolstered and lent support to McClellan’s trenchant, but in some ways much more moderate, anti-Communism.

brother became president, “Robert Kennedy was at the forefront of those arguing for increased trade with the Communist bloc.”⁵⁰

Behind the scenes the McClellan Committee had begun assembling information on the extent of copper exports from fall 1955 onward.⁵¹ Jerome (Jerry) Adlerman did most of the research and background preparation for the committee’s hearings, including that for the testimony of Ronald Prain.⁵² This included preparing the witness sheet that Kennedy then used as the basis for his questioning of Prain in committee.⁵³ The McClellan Committee’s interest in copper products was made public in a series of press releases around the time of Prain’s testimony, which drew attention to the Soviet Union’s shortage of copper, the strategic use of copper in weapons and munitions, and the potentially large amount of copper shipped to the Eastern bloc from the United Kingdom.⁵⁴ In addition, Robert Kennedy wrote a number of letters to *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *The American Metal Market* backing the position of the subcommittee that East–West trade was in effect aiding the Soviet bloc and that the government was not being honest with the American people in revealing the extent to which the embargo had been relaxed.⁵⁵

The timing of this hearing is also important in relation to McCarthyism and the second Red Scare. Anticommunism in 1950s America was complex, incorporating a range of imbricated ideas, from opposition to the Soviet Union and its allies on the grounds of ideology and/or geopolitics to what has been described as internally directed “imperial anticommunism” that was a thin veil for conservative and reactionary political repression directed at African Americans, Jews, liberals, and others within the United States, in the name of a largely imagined domestic communist threat.⁵⁶ Though the second Red Scare had arguably peaked with the infamous Army–McCarthy hearings in 1954, the noxious effect it had on American politics—and the paranoia it engendered—were more lasting.⁵⁷ While the history of the role of American business after 1945 is often associated with its role aiding U.S. political and economic interests

50. Pre-Administration Working Files, File: Press Releases 2/56: Press release, Saturday January 28, 1956, 7:00 p.m.; press release, February 15, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library; Lasky, *Robert F. Kennedy*, 95–96.

51. Investigation into East–West Trade, memo from Adlerman to RFK, November 15, 1955, “Subject: Illicit Shipment of Strategic Material to the Soviet bloc”; Letter from Sen. John McClellan to Hon. John Foster Dulles, secretary of state, November 30, 1955; memo from Adlerman to RFK, October 11, 1955, includes memo dated September 23, 1955, “Summary of Diversion Case”; memo from Adlerman to RFK, January 24, 1956, “Re Interview with Dr. Robert M. McCormack, Specialist Non-Ferrous Metals, Office of the Material Branch, Program Review and Analysis Division Defense Department,” Center for Legislative Archives.

52. Investigation into East–West Trade, memo from Adlerman to RFK, “East–West Trade–Rhodesian Copper,” Center for Legislative Archives.

53. Investigation into East–West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 388, Folder 34-199 CC, Bulky Exhibit, Subfolder “Rhodesian Copper,” “Witness Sheet: Roland [*sic*] Prain,” Center for Legislative Archives.

54. Pre-Administration Working Files, File: Press Releases 1/56: Press release, Saturday, January 28, 1956, 7:00 p.m.; Press release, February 15, 1956; Press release, February 23, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

55. Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 20, Personal Correspondence, File Letters to Editors 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

56. Munro, “Imperial Anticommunism”; *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, s.v. “McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare,” by Landon R. Y. Storrs <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.6>; Storrs, *Second Red Scare*.

57. Fried, *Nightmare in Red*.

in the Cold War struggle, the anticommunist political right, in particular, could be indifferent or even hostile to the needs of international business and capitalism as a whole, something that is often overlooked.⁵⁸ This article sheds light on this tension, adding depth to the understanding of the complex politics of this period.

The Setting of the Interrogation of Ronald Prain

On February 3, 1956, Ronald Prain received a phone call from Jerome Adlerman in Washington, DC, on behalf of Senator John McClellan and the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. In a memo about the incident, Prain wrote: “They understand that Rhodesian copper companies had received substantial US government loans and [the committee] would like to hear from me how they were going.”⁵⁹ Prain evidently immediately set up a meeting with the Ex-Im Bank, something not revealed in either his own memoir or his personal papers but in the preparation that Jerry Adlerman undertook with the Ex-Im Bank prior to Prain’s testimony. This source reveals that on February 7, Prain called on two Ex-Im Bank executives, R. H. Rowntree (head of the economics division) and Lynn Stanbaugh (a director of the bank).⁶⁰ Rowntree reported that “the call was in the nature of a courtesy call, and Mr. Prain mentioned he was interested in getting additional finance both for development of new ore bodies and to complete the [Kariba Dam] power development.”⁶¹ The day after (February 8), Prain consulted the British Embassy:

On February 8th at 8.00am I visited the British ambassador by appointment. We discussed various matters dealing with the US government’s interests through the World Bank, EX-IM bank etc. Towards the end of my interview I reported that I had agreed to see Senator McClellan based on Adlerman’s call. I asked Sir Roger Makins what I should do if the Senator wished me to testify before the committee. Sir Roger replied that he advised against it. He agreed, however, that I had done the right thing in agreeing to meet the senator as a matter of courtesy.⁶²

Prain therefore had consular access and took advice from the British government as well as previously having had high-level access to the Ex-Im Bank. Later on February 8 at 2 p.m.,⁶³ Prain presented himself at the Senate Office Building for the meeting with Adlerman:

58. Kolozi, *Conservatives against Capitalism*, especially Chapter 4: “The New Conservatives: The Cold War and the Making of Conservative Orthodoxy,” 106–139. For a recent study of the role of American business in the Cold War, see Hamilton, *Supermarket USA*.

59. 8753-84-09-17, Box 3, Subpoena by Senator McClellan, 1956, memo from Ronald Prain: “Subpoena by Senator McClellan” (dated February 24, 1956), Ronald Prain Papers, American Heritage Centre (AHC), University of Wyoming (hereafter 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC).

60. Becker and McClenahan, *The Market, the State, and the Export-Import Bank*, 64, 115.

61. Investigation into East–West Trade, memo from Adlerman to RFK, “East–West Trade–Rhodesia Copper,” Center for Legislative Archives.

62. 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC. The subpoena also appears in the records of the subcommittee itself. See Investigation into East–West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 376, Vol. V: Subpoena: Ronald Prain to appear before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on Tuesday, February 14, signed by Senator John McClellan, February 8, 1956, Center for Legislative Archives.

63. Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 21, *Desk Diaries*, 1955–56, Wednesday, February 8, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

Adlerman started talking and referring to notes he had, dealing with the loans by US Government agencies to the Rhodesian Companies and in particular to the EX-IM Bank loan of \$22.4m made in 1953 to the Rhodesia Congo Border Power Corporation. He went on to discuss trade in copper with the Soviet bloc. I gathered that the Senate Committee was worried about the possibility of Rhodesian copper going to the Soviet bloc and he asked me what I knew about it.⁶⁴

This was the thrust of the eventual testimony at the committee. What is of interest is that at this juncture—well before appearing before the committee—Prain indicates that he was aware of the issue by rehearsing the international arrangements under which copper exports could be officially undertaken. That is, exports to the Soviet Union were legal and permitted.

I told him that, based on the Stassen Agreements with various European countries in 1954, trade with the Soviet bloc had been permissible in these countries since August 1954 for copper in the form of wire of a diameter of no more than six millimeters; that I understood that this trade was continuing on the basis of export licenses and that the Governments concerned made regular reports to a coordinating committee on which the USA was represented.⁶⁵

At this point in Prain's contemporaneous narrative, Robert Kennedy entered the room. In this account, Prain rehearses his own rebuttal to the charge that RST companies were exporting copper to the Soviet bloc.

Adlerman told Kennedy that I knew about European Copper wire exports to the Soviet bloc. Kennedy asked me how much of it was our copper and I said none. Kennedy asked how I knew. I explained where our copper is sold in England and Kennedy asked how I knew it was not going to Russia. I explained that as a result of our marketing policy introduced last May we were in a position to insist to our customers that our copper should not be sold except in the United Kingdom or to the Commonwealth subsidiary companies or our customers, and that as a result I was in a position to say that our customers had given us affirmative assurances that none of the copper produced by our mines had been utilised for fabrication into any products which may have been exported under Board of Trade license from the United Kingdom to any countries in the Soviet bloc.⁶⁶

Assuming that this account is faithful, there are a number of rhetorically interesting points. First, by rehearsing that copper exports were both legal and permitted, Prain established an "even if" argumentative position. Though he states that his companies do not export copper to the Soviet bloc, he creates a caveat that "even if" they do, it is legal. This implies that Prain might have suspected that they had some evidence (of which he might or might not have been aware) and would be asked to rebut when giving testimony. Second, Kennedy and Adlerman (and therefore the committee) knew *before* Prain's testimony what his testimony was likely to consist of. This makes the inquisitorial nature of the testimony puzzling from the perspective

64. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

65. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

66. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

of establishing facts: Prain's information could have been made via deposition without requiring his appearance at the committee. Indeed, this nearly happened. In his autobiography, Prain makes it clear that he did not like Kennedy, and this initial interaction (as narrated by Prain) may well explain, at least in part, why:

Adlerman then asked me to appear before the Committee on February 14th and I said I could not do this as I had planned to return to London on the 12th, where I had important engagements. Adlerman then asked me to appear the next day (February 9th) and I said I could not as I had important engagements in New York. Kennedy then told Adlerman to get a deposition from me then and there *which I refused to give* [Prain's emphasis]. Kennedy then said that they would have to subpoena me and that if I failed to appear it would be treated as contempt of the senate. . . . I therefore said that all of their proposals were objectionable and highly inconvenient but that if they intended to subpoena me I would prefer to appear on the 14th and rearrange my London schedule. Kennedy then walked out of the meeting telling Adlerman to subpoena me accordingly.⁶⁷

Robert Kennedy was notoriously brusque, and perhaps this is an example of that tendency. Prain then narrates how Adlerman explained the purpose of the investigation of the committee. In Adlerman's view, the committee "felt that Russia would start a third world war once she felt she had attained industrial parity with the United States" and that "the main shortages preventing this were copper and cobalt, and that naturally since the United States had made loans to Rhodesia for the purpose of producing copper and cobalt, they were worried about the whole situation."⁶⁸ This is confirmed by both the witness sheet that Adlerman compiled for Kennedy and the memo that Adlerman wrote to Kennedy about his interview with Prain. This noted that "Mr. Prain states that he is very distressed and is opposed to copper going to the Soviet Bloc . . . [and] is alarmed at the fact of Russian brokers buying copper through brokers [that] has caused inflation in the copper market."⁶⁹ This memo then listed the considerable evidence that Adlerman had garnered from Prain in the interview of February 8, including Prain's concerns about Russian use of Swiss brokers to buy copper, the consequent withdrawal of Prain's companies from the London Metal Exchange to avoid indirect supply to the Soviet Union and to depress the price (supposedly) to avoid industrial switching to alternative metal products, as well as detailing RST's main customers and assuring Adlerman they did not ship copper to the Soviet Union. Prain told Adlerman "that he [Prain] has no specific knowledge of which individual companies are shipping copper wire to the Soviets and hesitates to mention names, but generally, all the wire companies are shipping copper wire of one-quarter inches or less since controls were relaxed."⁷⁰ Prain did, however, point the finger at "France, Belgium, West Germany, and practically all European nations."⁷¹ This memo reveals that although

67. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

68. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

69. Investigation into East-West Trade, Case 34-199, Box 388, Folder 34-199 CC, Bulky Exhibit, Subfolder "Rhodesian Copper," memo from Adlerman to RFK, "Interview with Mr. Roland [*sic*] Prain, February 8, 1956, Center for Legislative Archives (hereafter, "Interview with Mr. Roland [*sic*] Prain," Center for Legislative Archives).

70. "Interview with Mr. Roland [*sic*] Prain," Center for Legislative Archives.

71. "Interview with Mr. Roland [*sic*] Prain," Center for Legislative Archives.

Prain *may* have refused to give a formal deposition, he was willing to give extensive and detailed evidence in an interview with Adlerman, which was then used in his interrogation before the subcommittee.

There then followed some confusion about the enforcement of the subpoena. Prain contacted his legal counsel in the United States, Arthur H. Dean, of the legal firm Sullivan and Cromwell. Dean spoke with the British ambassador in Washington, who in turn agreed to speak to the State Department. On February 10, Dean advised Prain that the subpoena had been canceled and that he was free to return to the United Kingdom. According to Dean, he had spoken with Thurston Morton (assistant secretary of state), who had called Senator McClellan who had agreed to cancel the subpoena. According to Prain, via Dean and Morton:

[McClellan] apparently did not previously know that the subpoena had been issued in his name and he thought that Kennedy had exceeded his authority in serving it on me. I inquired how it was that the subpoena has been signed by him, and it appears that he had signed a set of blank forms for use by his office. Senator McClellan understood to telegraph the Committee saying he had cancelled the subpoena.⁷²

Prain then offered to appear before the committee voluntarily, and seemingly was advised not to do so by both the British Embassy and the U.S. State Department because, “apparently the Senate Committee’s aim is to embarrass the State Department with this particular issue, and I was the only outside witness to be subpoenaed, all other others being representatives of various U.S. agencies.”⁷³

This would, then, explain why Prain’s eventual testimony merely repeated what Prain had told Adlerman and Kennedy on February 8: the purpose was domestic political grandstanding rather than a genuine investigation by the committee.

Believing that he had been released from his obligation to appear before the committee, Prain traveled to Canada where, on February 14, he was telephoned by Arthur Dean. Dean explained to Prain that Washington (in point of fact, Robert Kennedy) had called to ask why Prain had failed to appear before the committee. Dean established via Morton that it was McClellan himself who had failed to inform his own committee of the cancellation of the subpoena, and this is consistent with a letter that Robert Kennedy sent to the members of the committee on February 13, stating that they were expecting to hear a witness (presumably Prain) relating to East–West trade on the afternoon of February 14. Prain returned to New York on February 14 and was advised by Dean that he should appear before the committee on the morning of February 16. Prain contacted the British Embassy again; they, in turn once again advised that he should not appear in front of the committee. On the evening of February 15, Prain met with embassy officials and they together agreed that, given the situation, he should testify, which he did on the morning of February 16.⁷⁴

72. 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

73. 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

74. Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 21, File: Subcommittee Notices 1956, Letter from Robert Kennedy to All Members of the Subcommittee, February 13, 1956; see also Box 21, *Desk Diaries*, 1955–56, Tuesday, February 14, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK

After his appearance before the committee, Prain had lunch with Lord Harcourt (UK treasury adviser in Washington), Taylor (an embassy official), and Arthur Dean, where they discussed the public relations implications of the incident. They agreed that it “might be desirable to make one statement upon my return to London which would put the whole matter in its right perspective by emphasizing that the importance to Rhodesian companies lay in the loan aspect.” This statement was never released.⁷⁵

The Interrogation of Ronald Prain

Senator Stuart Symington led the establishment of relevance for the testimony.⁷⁶ This turned on the fact that RST had received some US\$14 million for equipment costs, though this was not elaborated. The interrogation then established that the RST-related companies had shipped over 200,000 English tons of copper to the United Kingdom and nearly 50,000 English tons to the United States between August 1954 and December 1955. Symington then turned to the central issue.

- Senator Symington: When you ship it to the United Kingdom what is the main company that you ship it to?
- Mr. Prain: The main company is called British Insulated Callender Cables.
- Senator Symington: Did you happen to know if that company that you ship the raw copper to ships any worked copper or refined copper to the Communist bloc?
- Mr. Prain: No I know that they do not. I know that they do not.

Prain explained that the company had assured him that they did not ship copper to the Soviet bloc. When asked by Symington whether Prain considered that it would be wrong to export copper “from the stand point of the security of the Free World,” Prain replied that “[f]rom the point of view of security, I think it is—I will put it this way: as a commerce man I wouldn’t personally condone any shipment of that sort,” but added that “if I had to take the responsibility for a public decision, I should want to know a great deal more about the situation.”

Presidential Museum and Library. See also 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

75. 8753-84-09-17, “Subpoena by Senator McClellan,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

76. All the data discussed in this section are from the same source: a stenographer’s transcript of the testimony. One transcript file is located in 8753-84-09-17 Box 3. Subpoena by Senator McClellan, 1956, “Testimony of Ronald Prain, Salisbury, Rhodesia Accompanied by Counsel Arthur H. Dean, 48 Wall Street, New York, New York,” Ronald Prain Papers, AHC. An identical transcript is in the official record of the East–West proceedings. See Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *East–West Trade*, 84–93. The third copy of the transcript is in Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 35, Testimony and Reports, File: East–West Trade Parts 1 and 2, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

There then followed a somewhat comical but revealing dialogue between Kennedy and Prain. This is given in full because it forms the crux of the interrogation.⁷⁷

- Mr. Kennedy: What are the companies in England that ship to the Soviet Union?
Mr. Prain: I don't know.
Mr. Kennedy: Have you kept a check to find out if any copper is going to the Soviet Union?
Mr. Prain: I have with my customers.
Mr. Kennedy: You have?
Mr. Prain: Yes.
Mr. Kennedy: Continuously?
Mr. Prain: Yes.
Mr. Kennedy: When was the last time?
Mr. Prain: About three days ago.
Mr. Kennedy: They say that none of the copper that comes from your mines goes to the Soviet Union?
Mr. Prain: No, or any other copper that they use.
Mr. Kennedy: No copper that comes out of your mines goes to any of the companies that ship to the Soviet Union?
Mr. Prain: That is right.
Mr. Kennedy: What are some of the biggest wire-making companies in Great Britain?
Mr. Prain: I can only give you an opinion, because you realize I am connected with the Rhodesian industry and not the British. But I think it is without doubt that the biggest copper user in the United Kingdom is the British Insulated Callender Cables Company, and they draw wire for their own consumption in their own cables. They are the biggest cable manufacturer.
Mr. Kennedy: Do they sell to brokers?
Mr. Prain: No.
Mr. Kennedy: They do not?
Mr. Prain: No.
Mr. Kennedy: None of the wire from them goes directly or indirectly to the Soviet Union?
Mr. Prain: That is right.
Mr. Kennedy: What is the next?
Mr. Prain: I am afraid I just don't know the order of dimension, but there are some big companies. There is a company called London Electric Wire, another one called Fredrich Smith.
Mr. Kennedy: Do you know if London Electric Wire ships wire to the Soviet Union?

77. This interchange—which is rather like the dialogue of a play—is indispensable for readers to read for themselves how the interrogation occurred, rather than have it abbreviated, redacted, or summarized.

- Mr. Prain: I know nothing about their business.
- Mr. Kennedy: What are the companies that you ship to?
- Mr. Prain: I ship to British Insulated, which I have mentioned. My next biggest customer by a long way is the Enfield Rolling Mills, which is associated with the Enfield Cable Company. Then my third biggest customer is the Imperial Chemical Industries, ICI, and after that there are three very small customers.
- Mr. Kennedy: What are their names?
- Mr. Prain: The Yorkshire Copper, Birmingham Battery.
- Mr. Kennedy: Birmingham what?
- Mr. Prain: Battery. And a firm called Radcliffe. These last two are not war manufacturers.
- Mr. Kennedy: Does the Enfield Rolling Mills ship directly or indirectly to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: No.
- Mr. Kennedy: Does the Imperial Chemical ship any copper directly or indirectly to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: No.
- Mr. Kennedy: And you have talked to them?
- Mr. Prain: Yes.
- Mr. Kennedy: And they told you that none of their products that come out of that company—
- Mr. Prain: They don't even sell their wire. They use it in their own plant. They are primarily not wire people. They are primarily sheet and strip people.
- Mr. Kennedy: Let me know about the Yorkshire. Does any of the wire that comes out of that company go to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: No, sir. They make no wire. They are copper tube people.
- Mr. Kennedy: What about Birmingham Battery?
- Mr. Prain: Birmingham Battery. They are not wire people either.
- Mr. Kennedy: What about Radcliffe?
- Mr. Prain: No. They are sheet and strip.
- Mr. Kennedy: Does any of the wire that comes out of these companies go on the public market where it can be purchased in the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: No, no. I think it goes into their own cable manufacture, or is shipped to their subsidiaries in the British Empire like Australia and South Africa.
- Mr. Kennedy: Why do not [*sic*] these companies ship any wire to the Soviet Union? What is the reason for that?
- Mr. Prain: I don't know.
- Mr. Kennedy: They have such large accounts going.
- Mr. Prain: I am not connected with them. I don't know.

- Mr. Kennedy: Who does ship the wire to the Soviet Union, if these wire-making companies do not?
- Mr. Prain: I have no information, Mr. Kennedy. But the British Government would have that, as I understand it, through the system of export licensing. They have to give somebody a license, and presumably they know, they have the records of who has shipped the 33,000 tons Mr. Adlerman mentioned. But I don't know that, and I am not sure it is public information.
- Mr. Kennedy: Could any of the copper coming in from, for instance, Chile, could some of that, part of that, go to these companies that ship to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: Yes.
- Mr. Kennedy: But you do not know that for a fact?
- Mr. Prain: I don't know.
- Mr. Kennedy: You know nothing about the shipments of copper wire to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: No.

A few moments later, Kennedy renewed his line of attack, pressing Prain on statistics and production figures before his peroration:

- Mr. Kennedy: And yet none of that copper is used for the copper wire going to the Soviet Union?
- Mr. Prain: I am satisfied on that.

No recording of the proceedings exists that I have been able to find. Nevertheless, in his autobiography, Prain describes the following extract as being "petulant":⁷⁸

- Mr. Kennedy: It must all come from the 65 or 70 percent coming from other countries such as Canada, Belgium, the United States, Chile, and West Germany which has only a very minor amount. So it has to be from Chile or the United States or Canada; or the Union of South Africa, which has a small amount. One of those countries, really, coming down to the United States, Chile and West Germany, must be the countries from where this copper is coming to go into the Soviet Union?

Similarly, Prain appears to be obtuse in his reply, before once again being unable to assist Kennedy in his search for the source of Western copper exports to the Soviet Union:

- Mr. Prain: May I add scrap? Some could come from scrap metal.
- Mr. Kennedy: How much is the scrap metal?

78. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

Mr. Prain: I am sorry, I don't have a figure on that, but it is public information which I will be glad to send you if you would like it.

Eventually Kennedy tried one final time while discussing non-RST mines in Rhodesia:

Mr. Kennedy: Do you know if any of the copper from these other mines is going directly or indirectly to the Soviet Union?

Mr. Prain: I have no information on that.

Mr. Kennedy: None at all?

Mr. Prain: No.

Mr. Kennedy: What?

Mr. Prain: No information.

In a letter from Harold Hochschild to Ronald Prain on March 6, 1956, about routine board-level business matters, Hochschild added a handwritten post-script:

Arthur Dean says he never heard anyone testify as clearly and effectively before a Congressional Committee as you did. I understand that CBS is planning to approach you and Senator McClellan to do the whole thing over again on TV.⁷⁹

This is the only mention of the incident in the substantial Prain-Hochschild correspondence. Nevertheless, it indicates that the event was discussed among the managerial elite of the firm, and that Arthur Dean had evidently discussed the matter with Hochschild. The joking reference to television comports praise and approval from Hochschild to Prain, a subtle affirmation of friendship and working collegiality.

Chapter Sixteen: "Witch-hunt in Washington"

"Witch-hunt in Washington" was Prain's own narrated version of the events above. The reference to a witch-hunt is a clear attempt by Prain to locate his experience at the hands of the McClellan Committee in the context of 1950s McCarthyism, not least of all that Joe McCarthy was on the committee and in attendance when Prain was interrogated. The association of McCarthyism with the notion of a witch-hunt is theatrically critiqued in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. First performed in 1953, the play was a direct attack on McCarthyism. Its allegory to the Salem witch trials of the 1690s was to demonstrate the mendacity of public hearings where fact and truth were traduced by political performance. In this connection, then, it is probable that Prain was also alluding to groundless and fabricated accusations, the operations of a paranoid and prejudicial court, and also—possibly—forced testimony begetting a (false) confession, and indeed the staged nature of the hearings, designed to showcase a particular worldview; in this case, a critique of Eisenhower's foreign policy and a pernicious representation of

79. 8753-84-09-17, Box 1, File AMCO, Harold K. Hochschild Correspondence, 1955–56, Letter from Harold Hochschild, American Metal Company Ltd. to Ronald Prain, Hardwicke House, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, March 6, 1956, Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

“British” international business. A further comparison that I wish to draw is the historicity of Prain’s account and the extent to which the chapter glosses the event.⁸⁰

Prain begins the chapter by explaining the managerial responsibilities of a CEO, which he chiefly identifies as being toward the shareholders as owners. He also noted that from 1950 to his retirement in 1972, he was both chairman and chief executive officer of RST.⁸¹ In discussing the multifaceted nature of the role of CEO, Prain stated:

Where, as was the case of RST, the company is located in a developing country and most of its management team and large proportion of its skilled workers are expatriates, the task becomes highly complicated, calling not only for administrative expertise but for tact and diplomacy. In such circumstances, the “top man” has to strike a very fine balance between all the responsibilities that a modern industry must accept, including to its employees, the government, the general community in which it works, and the customers for its products.⁸²

In doing so, Prain is not only locating himself as a business leader but also is locating the role in wider social and political contexts, something that is consistent with his involvement in Northern Rhodesian and Zambian politics over time.⁸³ Noting that the RST companies were registered in Lusaka, Zambia (they had switched domicile from London in 1953),⁸⁴ Prain notes that the firm had decided to hold “informal” annual general meetings in both London and New York, so that shareholders had “a chance to identify more closely with the companies in which they had invested,” though he noted that these meetings did not convey legal validity and shareholders could not put forward resolutions or vote.⁸⁵ As will be discussed below, though incidental, this observation has implications for how the corporate governance of the firm should be understood. Prain was attending one of these informal shareholder meetings when he was summoned to the McClellan Committee.

Discussing the incident itself, Prain once described the scene, communicating his literal and metaphorical backers and his closeness to British power:

I sat below the platform and behind me were the British Ambassador; Lord Harcourt who was Head of the UK Treasury Delegation in the US and adviser at the Embassy; and Arthur Dean.⁸⁶

He also conjures an image of a (movie) theatre in the era of the classic Hollywood stars, another oblique reference to the McCarthyite Red Scares:

The atmosphere was more like a film studio than a court for there were television cameras, radio men and Press reporters—the Americans are firm believers in giving the public their money’s worth on occasions like these.⁸⁷

80. This was a criticism made of *The Crucible*: historical facts were conflated, stretched, or in some cases simply incorrect. Morgan, “Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*”; William J. McGill, “Crucible of History.”

81. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 193.

82. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 193.

83. Butler, “Business and British Decolonisation”; Cohen, “Business and Decolonisation.”

84. See Mollan and Tennent, “International Taxation and Corporate Strategy.”

85. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 194.

86. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

87. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

His description of the interrogation largely matches the transcript, with one exception—he gives Joe McCarthy a speaking role that does not appear in the official record:

Apart from Kennedy, the interrogation was largely conducted from the chair and by Senator Symington, with McCarthy contributing some typically aggressive interjections such as “. . . and so our Government is advancing money to Rhodesia to make copper which is being sold to the Soviets and which is coming back as bullets in the hearts of our American boys.”⁸⁸

Whether or not McCarthy said this is at one level largely irrelevant because it is at least *plausible* that McCarthy *might* have spoken in this way during Prain’s testimony. Later, in the interrogation of Harold Stassen, McCarthy comes very close to this kind of verbal harangue. What is important, however, is that Prain wants his readers to think that this occurred. In so doing, Prain further situates himself as the protagonist hero who faced one of the great political bogeymen of the Cold War. Prain narrates his testimony in broad terms as a success:

I think I was able to convince the Committee that this was not the case. I was asked in great detail about the business of each of our six customers in the United Kingdom, and I was able to satisfy the senators that none of them was exporting to Russia.⁸⁹

He went on to write, “Bobby Kennedy obviously found this rather disappointing. ‘Then this copper must come from other countries such as Canada, Belgium, the United States Chile and Germany,’ he declared petulantly at one juncture.”⁹⁰

Prain concludes his account by stating that he enjoyed his appearance before the committee, noting that “most of the senators were cordial, courteous and co-operative—if one discounts Joe McCarthy’s remarks but he, of course, had a reputation to maintain.”⁹¹ Prain remained, however, hostile to Kennedy, even twenty-five years later, even after the assassination of both Kennedy brothers:

I am unable to say the same [i.e., cordiality] about Bobby Kennedy; I could not forgive him for the way in which I had been persuaded under false pretenses to go to Washington in the first place, nor for his aggressive manner throughout the whole of this protracted incident. I was really angry about his behaviour and when the hearing was over I took the opportunity of telling him how I felt. Finally, he apologized, and before I left he asked me if there was anything he could do for me. I looked out of the window on to a city that was being soaked with cold February rain. “Yes,” I replied, “you can call me a taxi.” I never saw him again.⁹²

88. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

89. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

90. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 201.

91. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 201.

92. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 201. Robert Kennedy’s diary for February 16, 1956, confirms that after the hearing in the morning, both Prain and Arthur Deane (Prain’s lawyer) came to see him. Pre-Administration Working Files, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1953–1956, Box 21, *Desk Diaries*, 1955–56, Thursday, February 16, 1956, RFK Papers, JFK Presidential Museum and Library.

Prain's willingness to position himself against one of the most well-known figures of mid-twentieth century American politics is also noteworthy. Kennedy was for Prain, and perhaps also in fact, the chief antagonist in a largely fabricated and artificial process. Prain was temporarily caught on the edges of a greater struggle bound up in the personalities, politics, and ideological conflicts of the era. Indeed, Prain observed in his memoir: "I am still convinced that their real interest lay in trying to discredit the Republican Administration through the financial assistance they had given to Rhodesia."⁹³ But that he was—years later—still firm in an implicit rejection of the later vision of Kennedy as progressive social crusader who was assassinated on the verge of the American presidency might give testimony to courage and acumen, or of the enduring slight he felt he had suffered. That Prain has Kennedy apologizing to him is the narrative denouement, the final part of the victory of the protagonist over his antagonist, reduced to calling for a taxi—a moment of apologetic supplication, on the one hand, and victory, albeit ungracious, on the other. Whether or not it happened does not matter so much as it locates Prain in his role, and Kennedy in his, which achieves the historical archetype that Prain seeks. As Arthur Miller wrote (quoted fully in the opening epigraph), "there is no one in the drama who did not play a similar—and in some cases exactly the same—role in history."

The final question to consider here is why Prain agreed to appear before the committee when, arguably, it was possible for him not to have done so. In both the memo that Prain wrote in February 1956 and in his memoir of 1981, Prain identifies a number of reasons why he chose to attend. First, he was worried that if he did not appear, he would not be allowed back into the United States, which would stop him from undertaking work.⁹⁴ Second, Prain wanted to leave open the possibility of future financial aid from the United States, and also to protect other business parties to those interests:

I was anxious to ensure that Rhodesia's name should not be under any cloud that might prejudice its case for further loans—particularly for the costly Kariba hydro-electric scheme. Moreover, I thought that if I did not answer the subpoena personally, it might well be served on any other officer of our group of companies who might be visiting the States, or even on our largest shareholders, the American Metal Company, whose position had to be protected.⁹⁵

This latter point, about "protecting" the American Metal Company, will form part of the discussion of the wider implications of this incident (discussed below). In the memo from 1956, Prain indicates that he appeared before the committee to preemptively correct any misstatements, to avoid prejudicing the loans made in Rhodesia, to avoid the impression that he had something to hide by *not* appearing, or that his nonappearance would "lead to the subpoena being served on some officer of the American Metal Company."⁹⁶ The account of Prain's meeting on February 7 with the Ex-Im Bank confirms that he was interested in securing

93. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200.

94. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 200–201.

95. Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 201.

96. 8753-84-09-17, "Subpoena by Senator McClellan," Ronald Prain Papers, AHC.

further funding from U.S. government sources, and so would presumably not have wanted to become *persona non grata* by defying a subpoena.⁹⁷

Prain's Claims

I now turn to the issue of whether Prain was accurate in his testimony. There are many ways in which Prain might have been inaccurate: that he did not know the answers, that his understanding was partial or inadvertently inaccurate, or that he outright lied. The importance of the relative accuracy of the testimony will reveal something of the power of those proceedings to reveal facts (if not truth), and the ability of government investigation to penetrate international business processes.

Prain indicated that the main company RST shipped to in the United Kingdom was the British Insulated Calendar Cables (BICC). The archive of this company is maintained at the Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool. Though the BICC archive is substantial, it is accessible to the public only one day per month. The research task was therefore to seek to *disprove* the negative claim. My research strategy was to search for any evidence that BICC exported to the Eastern bloc by selecting the most likely boxes and files available, within the time constraints of the archive itself.

First, Prain's relationship with the senior management of BICC appears to have been relatively close. On June 2, 1955, Prain attended a dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London with directors of the firm, alongside other "friends" of BICC drawn from the contemporaneous British corporate and government elite.⁹⁸ It is therefore conceivable that Prain could have checked with the firm prior to giving testimony relating to the firm's export trade, and that given his status that this information might have been both forthcoming and accurate.

The first source I used to investigate the trade issue was a collection of photographs from trade fairs through which BICC marketed their products during the 1950s. Should there be any doubt as to the Cold War strategic importance of copper cable products, this is dispelled by the photographs. While a lot of the marketing was geared toward general industrial production, there was also considerable emphasis on the military technology application of the products. One stand from an exhibition held in April 1959 advertised "polypole couplers" for which "typical uses [were] remote control, television cameras, guided missiles, ultra high [*sic*] frequency links, radar."⁹⁹ Another exhibition from April 1958 shows a large poster/backboard with the tagline "Consult BICC when you need cables and wires for social requirements." It is

97. Investigation into East–West Trade, memo from Adlerman to RFK, "East–West Trade–Rhodesia Copper," Center for Legislative Archives.

98. Box V/7/31, British Insulated Callenders Cables Ltd., Programme: Dinner at Savoy Hotel, London with foreign visitors, June 2, 1955, British Insulated Calendar Cables Archive (hereafter BICC), Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

99. Box VII//9/1, Photographs from Exhibition Stands: "BICC Stand No. 63 at the R.E.C.M.F Exhibition Grosvenor House, Park Lane, London, 6th–9th April 1959," BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

set against the backdrop of a rocket or missile [Figure 1].¹⁰⁰ Given this, the McClellan Committee's concern about dual-use products is brought into sharper relief.

This collection also contains five photographs that capture a delegation of Russian engineers to the BICC exhibit at a sales convention in March 1956—one month after Prain's testimony.¹⁰¹ This evidence is inconclusive because it does not confirm an ongoing business relationship, or indeed any business relationship at all. Nevertheless, it does suggest that Russian engineers (and by extension Russian industry) were at least interested in BICC products in this period, and that BICC thought the Russian visit noteworthy enough to photograph, though this might simply have been the novelty of a visiting Russian delegation. The photographs also captured an exhibition stand from May 1956 that advertised BICC's previous success in supply products for the electrification of railways in Australia, Brazil, India, Great Britain, South Africa, and Poland.¹⁰² Other sources reveal that BICC were involved in the electrification of Polish railways between 1934 and 1938 (i.e., before Poland became part of the Eastern bloc following World War II). Nevertheless, a source from c.1960 states that "the Polish State Railways have since undertaken further extensions using equipment of the same design and BICC are supplying many hundreds of tons of catenary and contact wire for this purpose."¹⁰³ This would indicate that at least by 1959 or 1960, BICC was trading with the Eastern bloc (albeit Poland). This does not, however, prove that they were doing so in 1955 or 1956 at the time of Prain's testimony. In an internal publication called *World-wide Activities, April 1960*, BICC advertised that it provided power, telecommunications, submarine cables, and oil and gas works, and overhead equipment for electrical supply to over forty countries, none of which were in the Eastern bloc. The same source confirms that BICC did export railway electrification products to Poland, and also traded with China for products related to masts, towers, and bridges—but there is no mention of Russia or the Soviet Union. It seems clear from other sources that BICC traded primarily with Western European, Commonwealth, and nonaligned countries.¹⁰⁴ While BICC had agents in China, they

100. Box VII/9/1, Photographs from Exhibition Stands: "BICC Stand No. 31 at the R.E.C.M.F Exhibition, 14th–17th April 1958," BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

101. Box VII/9/1, Photographs from Exhibition Stands: "BICC Stand No. J.11 at the Fifth Electrical Engineers Exhibition, Earls Court, London, 20th to 24th March 1956"; Item 32826, "Russian Engineers visit to BICC Stand at ASEE Exhibition, 22 March 1956" (photo of five men in conversation); Item 32825, "Russian Engineers visit to BICC Stand at ASEE Exhibition, 22 March 1956" (photo of woman going through catalogue); Item 32823, "Russian Engineers visit to BICC Stand at ASEE Exhibition, 22 March 1956" (photo of men from Item 32826 and woman from Item 32825 in conversation; two men are pictured with lit cigarettes, one of which might have a cardboard filter of the kind common in Russia at the time); Item 32822, "Russian Engineers visit to BICC Stand at ASEE Exhibition, 22 March 1956" (photo of three men inspecting examples of cables); Item 32820, "Russian Engineers visit to BICC Stand at ASEE Exhibition, 22 March 1956" (photo of one woman and four men, with one man holding a catalogue; all appear to be looking at something off camera), BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

102. Box VII/9/1, Photographs from Exhibition Stands: "BICC Stand No. 506 at the British Electric Power Convention Exhibition, Torquay 23rd to 29 May 1956," BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

103. Box VI/5/42-46, Publications: "Railway Electrification" (n.d., but c.1960 as the pamphlet makes reference to events in 1959 and other works scheduled for "completion in 1961"), 24–25, BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

104. Box VI/5/42-46, Publications: *World-wide Activities, April 1960* (1960); *Cable Testing and Maintenance Service* (n.d., but likely c.1960); *Railway Electrification* (n.d., but c.1960); Box VI 36/5/ 2-66, Folder: "Foreign Language Publications," all in BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums



Figure 1. British Insulated Callender's Cable Exhibition Stand, 1958.

Source: Box VII/9/1, Photographs from Exhibition Stands, "BICC Stand No. 31 at the R.E.C.M.F. Exhibition, 14th–17th April 1958," BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

Liverpool. There is no evidence of BICC producing Russian language publications, though publications for Yugoslavia are present.

were actually in British Hong Kong, not in Communist China. No agents were maintained in Poland or any other Eastern bloc country.¹⁰⁵ The conclusion I draw is that BICC probably did not trade with the Soviet Union or other Eastern bloc countries, except in the case of Polish railways, where they had an ongoing relationship starting before 1939. Certainly, no evidence came to light that would suggest that Ronald Prain was substantially misadvised by BICC in relation to their trade, or that he gave evidence that was (knowingly or otherwise) factually incorrect.

So, if not BICC, then which firms were exporting copper from the United Kingdom to the Soviet Union? UK government sources state that in 1955 and 1956, two British firms exported copper wire under license to the Soviet Union: Aberdare Cables and Crompton Parkinson.¹⁰⁶ Aberdare Cables was a multinational cable manufacturing company, with significant business operations in South Africa.¹⁰⁷ Crompton Parkinson was a Leeds-based electric products manufacturer and electrical engineering firm with subsidiary firms operating in India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁰⁸ Both these firms had substantial business dealings with the Soviet Union. In 1953, Aberdare Cables had secured an order for 200,000 meters of copper cable from Russia.¹⁰⁹ In 1954, Crompton Parkinson's sales director took a business trip to Russia, and in a letter to *The Times* wrote glowingly that "anyone who has recently visited the Soviet Union will confirm there are many things which can and should be praised."¹¹⁰ Aberdare Cables continued to have extensive dealings with Russia throughout the 1950s, including an attempt to establish a company to import Soviet petroleum products.¹¹¹ These links with the Soviet Union were reported in the British press (and so were public), and evidently a cause of concern for the British government in relation to British–American relations. When Aberdare Cables sought an additional export license in early 1957, the secretary of state for foreign affairs wrote that granting the license would "without doubt get known and cause much ill-will between us and all sections of the United States Administration."¹¹² It is noteworthy therefore that Prain's testimony not only did not reveal anything relating to RST/AMAX but also the relevant information as to which firms were exporting to the Soviet Union—which Prain had been coy in naming—were in the public domain anyway. Nonetheless, the confirmation of the firms that *were* exporting copper to the Soviet Union is consistent with Prain's claims that his firms and their clients did not export to Russia.

105. Box V/7/287, Overseas Group Companies Addresses, "Overseas Representation, February 1957," BICC, Archives Centre, Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

106. CAB 129/85, memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade, "Exports of Copper Wire to Russia," February 4, 1957; memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, "Exports of Copper Wire to Russia," February 5, 1957, all in TNA.

107. Aberdare Cables (Holding) Ltd was a UK holding company for Aberdare Cables Africa Ltd, a South African-registered company that itself had several subsidiaries. *Stock Exchange Official Yearbook 1956*, 1616–1617.

108. *Stock Exchange Official Yearbook 1956*, 2065; Mellanby, *History of Electric Wiring*, 166–167.

109. "Possible £10M. Orders From Russia," *The Times*, September 10, 1953, 8.

110. J. B. Scott, "Trade With Russia," *The Times*, February 24, 1954, 9.

111. BT 11/5674, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/United Kingdom trade: proposal by Crompton Parkinson Ltd. to establish British company to handle and distribute Soviet petroleum product, 1958–59, TNA; Scott, "Trade With Russia," *The Times*.

112. CAB/129/85, memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, "Exports of Copper Wire to Russia," February 5, 1957, TNA.

Epilogue

The final report of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on East–West trade was published in July 1956.¹¹³ One conclusion that it drew was that copper—particularly copper wire and copper cable—was “one of the most strategic items of modern-day warfare” and that it should not have been taken off the embargo list.¹¹⁴ The report was critical of Stassen for misreporting (as they saw it) the embargo status of copper wire, and identified the United Kingdom as the leading exporter of copper wire to the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵ The report was sharply critical of the Eisenhower administration, and concluded that “the executive branch of Government has violated the spirit, if not also the letter of the [Battle] Act since its enactment in 1951. [. . .] It appears that in this matter the executive branch has disregarded the clear intent of Congress.”¹¹⁶ The report did not mention Ronald Prain or his testimony.

The Historiographical Contribution and Conclusions

Using a microhistorical approach, this article has explored the factual veracity of the interrogation of Ronald Prain during the Cold War. Though the testimony was ultimately unimportant and was based on set of false assumptions about the nature of the firms that Prain managed, the incident allows a number of issues to be explored.

First, in relation to the international business history of mining in this period, the article gives an additional perspective on the “nationality of the company” debate, in relation to Northern Rhodesia, and to some extent the United Kingdom and the United States as well. Three historians, working from a labor history tradition, have argued with different degrees of emphasis that RST was an American company.¹¹⁷ This claim largely derives from the fact that RST’s majority shareholder was American Metal Climax/American Metal Company. In this interpretation, the origin of the ownership is important in expressing the character of the capitalist business. The evidence discussed here suggests that the position of RST in a matrix of international relationships was much more complex. While AMAX was the major shareholder, there were enough shareholders in the United Kingdom to hold an “informal” annual general meeting in London (as well as the formal one in New York), and the RST firms were, from 1953, registered in Lusaka. Further, the consular support from the British government indicate that the RST companies were strategically important to the United Kingdom, that Prain had high-level access, and—in the interpretation of the Stassen Agreements—was subject to the oversight of British regulation. It is also clear from the evidence that Prain gives to rebut charges that his firms were directly or indirectly supplying the Soviet Union, the main customer of the RST group was with British firms. As such, RST was embedded into British

113. *East–West Trade: Report of the Committee on Government Operations Made by Its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations* (hereafter *East–West Trade: Report*).

114. *East–West Trade: Report*, 12.

115. *East–West Trade: Report*, 14, 22, 24–25.

116. *East–West Trade: Report*, 46.

117. Phimister, “Corporate Profit”; Phimister, “Workers in Wonderland?”; Cohen, “Business and Decolonisation”; Butler, “Business and British Decolonisation.”

supply chains and British markets. This is not to say that there was not a strong American influence, not least in the shared counsel (Arthur Dean) and the desire by Prain to keep AMAX away (“to protect”) from the committee’s investigation, though it is not precisely clear why he wanted to do this. The absence of a substantive discussion of this incident in the substantial Prain-Hochschild correspondence (and yet the simultaneous mastery of business detail that Prain was required to have before the committee) indicates that, at least operationally, RST and AMAX were separate. Nevertheless, as that correspondence makes clear, there was substantial strategic cooperation between Hochschild (for AMAX) and Prain (for RST).

This provides greater clarity on the ways in which the British Free-Standing Company gradually disappeared from view in the twentieth century: the gradual greater influence of non-British investors, apparent—if incomplete—organizational embeddedness with a larger (in this case American) corporation, and a reduced or eliminated role for London as the headquarters and domicile of the firm.

Building on this, the second historiographically important issue is in relation to the evolving structures of international political economy during the Cold War. British dominance of international trade and investment that had been established in the period before 1914 was finally and terminally being washed away by the rise of American power, both economic and political.¹¹⁸ International businesses increasingly had to deal with the mediating power structures of the Cold War (such as the Stassen Agreements and COCOM), which regulated the trade in mineral commodities such as copper, and the U.S. government’s use of the Ex-Im Bank to finance strategic investment in primary commodity production. The position Prain found himself in captures this moment of inflection. Despite British consular advice to ignore the McClellan Committee’s subpoena, Prain was drawn into the wider political theatre of the Cold War because he feared if he did not comply there might be repercussions in relation to ongoing U.S. assistance for RST-related firms. Put simply, for RST, the United States mattered more than the United Kingdom by the 1950s just as, more broadly, the United States was beginning to dominate international trade and investment, just as the British had done half a century earlier.

The third contribution of this article is in relation to both the factuality and the interpretative meaning of the incident narrated above. Prain’s testimony appears to be factually accurate: inasmuch as the evidence allows a firm conclusion to be drawn, RST and related firms did not export copper to the Soviet Union. The microhistorical “method of clues” allowed me to trace the threads of the testimony in various archives, and so reveal in partial fragments the story of Prain and his “witch-hunt in Washington.” In doing so, the incident captures historical actors in a moment in time and, in the case of Prain, see something of both what he was and, later, how he would like to be understood. This allows us to reflect on the contemporaneous historical actor before posterity. Dealing with known historical figures is not unproblematic, as they may be treated as eternal archetypes, unyielding to the eddies and flows of time. Real individuals, however, are changeable, and so are different and incomplete manifestations of their historically rendered selves. This, then, provides an insight into the function of memoir for those (like Prain) who self-apprehend their significance to history.

118. Schenk, *Decline of Sterling*.

Prain's memoir-narration is his attempt to express his own sense of his role in these events. There he was valedictory, exonerated, and to some extent even triumphant, in the face of the "false pretences" that caused the incident in the first place. In this article, Prain has been cast as protagonist, but also as a bystander and marginal participant in grander narratives largely beyond his personal experience. Robert Kennedy (the chief antagonist here) was, unarguably, a more significant historical figure than Prain. In this episode, Kennedy was not yet the figure who ran his brother's campaign for the presidency in 1960, was alongside him during the Cuban missile crisis, endured his assassination in 1963, became a social reformer and civil rights activist, or who himself was assassinated in 1968. The commonplace heroic and tragic depiction of the historical figure of Robert Kennedy contrasts with the figure we see here.¹¹⁹ His petulance and grandstanding, his questionably competent lawyering, and his association with Joe McCarthy show moral and aesthetic ugliness, revealing the complexity and temporal changeability of real people. All of this shows the fragility and partiality of historical portrayal—in its memorial, factual, narrative, and interpretive forms.

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