

Please cite this article as “‘Russia Wins Space Race’: the British Press and the Sputnik Moment, 1957.” *Media History*, 19, 2 (May 2013).

*‘Russia Wins Space Race’: the British Press and the Sputnik Moment, 1957.*

*Abstract: This article traces the development of the British press narrative from the launching of Sputnik in October 1957 to the Soviets’ second satellite, containing a dog, in early November. It argues there was an initial outpouring of surprise, combined with celebration of humankind’s achievement. There was also a sense of loss of national prestige, due to Britain’s lack of an equivalent space programme and the decline of her empire. The launch of the dog prompted widespread commendation, mixed with frivolous popular coverage. The article provides an insight into how this moment impacted on British society and understanding of national identity in the 1950s with imperial superiority, religion and perceived decline being recurring themes.*

In his State of the Union address in January 2011, Barack Obama referred to a ‘Sputnik moment’, to describe America’s need to create new jobs through scientific research. The speech invoked America’s collective memory of the Cold War moment when, at the height of tensions, on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, Sputnik 1. The American response to the launch has received much historical attention in recent years (Boyle; Bracey; Brzezinski; Cadbury; Dickson). The frustration and anger directed towards President Eisenhower has remained within America’s historical consciousness, allowing the current incumbent to utilise the assumed technological lag to motivate the nation and justify his policy. This paper extends the examination of the Western reaction to the launch to the British press, an area which has received little attention. Britain’s position was more ambiguous than the Cold War superpowers. Like much of Europe, she was separated from

the USA by a cultural and ideological tradition, which, when combined with a growing opposition to America's growing cultural dominance, meant that many British people felt aligned to neither the USA nor the USSR (Genew-Hecht 435).

Dominic Sandbrook sees the British reaction to Sputnik as muted in comparison to America. His interpretation focuses on the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan who noted that the public appeared more concerned about November's launch, which contained a dog (Sandbrook, 219). This article examines the reaction of the press and public on a broader level, identifying some common popular reactions. Peter Salisbury's examination of Carl Giles's Cold War cartoons demonstrates how ostensibly non-political items of culture reflected innate British ideologies (Salisbury). It extends this analysis of newspaper content beyond hard-news articles to advertisements, cartoons, letters and competitions which emerged during Britain's Sputnik moment and reveal a diverse and sometimes humorous engagement with the conflict. It examines a variety of media whose ideal readerships cover a range of educational backgrounds and political positions. Adrian Bingham notes how newspapers in this period gave their, sometimes critical, support to the mainstream parties (Bingham, 23). The Conservative view was represented by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Sketch*; Labour by the *Daily Herald*, and *Daily Mirror*; and the Liberal viewpoint by *News Chronicle*. More nuanced, less party-political positions emerged from *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and *New Statesman*. This article engages an expanding field which examines Cold War mentalities and follows David Caute's encouragement to analyse culture on a broad basis through public sources as opposed to focusing mainly on the state's role (Caute *Dancer* 616-7, *Politics*; Piette; Wright). Early cultural examinations of the Cold War focused on the role of government agencies in supporting anti-communist cultural institutions (Stonor-Saunders, Defty). Hugh Wilford has claimed, however, that anti-communism would have become

prevalent without government support, opening the way for scholars to focus more on the role of ideology and cultural representation in Western understandings of the Cold War (Wilford 3). This article augments this area by focusing on press representations which, whilst often informed by official sources, emerged on a day-to-day basis by following their own novel agendas and by reportage of the reaction of the British public and the political establishment.

Sputnik's launch exacerbated pre-existing British fears that the Soviets were becoming more technologically advanced and leading the Cold War. This analysis of press reaction examines several short-lived developments in the ephemeral Sputnik moment, which contributed to a change in mindset about the development of the Soviet Union, and also humankind's capabilities. I show that whilst the launch was reported with shock, several areas of the popular press created an air of excitement. The article deals with three main themes which emerged during the Sputnik moment. First, the launch provoked huge interest in space exploration; the concept, formerly confined to a few experts and the imagination of science-fiction writers, was now a reality. Second, there was a reappraisal of the relative international positions of the Soviet Union and Britain. The launch highlighted Britain's insecurity emerging from the decline of empire and confirmed the downgrading, although not complete removal, of her international status. The initial launch, although combined with overt fear of how the Soviets might use the technology, became a propaganda coup for Communism. The third theme reveals how the second launch, with its canine cargo, reversed this earlier gain, by being read through the underlying British love of domestic animals. This subtle change during the early space age returned the Cold War to being a battle of ideology and moral responsibility.

## **Sputnik, Language and the British Press**

Recent histories of Britain in this period by David Kynaston, Dominic Sandbrook and Brian Harrison have emphasised the conflict between modernity and tradition, the desire to embrace postwar technology while remaining anxious about its impact on established ways of life, and the presentation of Sputnik's launch clearly engaged these discourses (Harrison 67-69; Kynaston 664-670; Sandbrook xviii, 29-34). The reaction to Sputnik demonstrated a degree of fetishism surrounding modern technology. With many British adults reading at least one newspaper per day, the shock expressed through the press would have reached most people (Bingham 2). The launch became the key front page story almost universally, with both the *Daily Herald* (5 Oct:1) and *News Chronicle* (5 Oct.) opting to frame the ascent in terms of the Cold War: 'Russia wins space race'. These shock headlines illustrate the tendency, which Martin Conboy has identified, for the popular press to remove complexity and produce simplistic compressions of events (Conboy *Language*, 8). The launch remained at the forefront of the press agenda for the rest of the week, most notably with the *Daily Mirror*, which commemorated the modernist aspect of the launch by printing a Sputnik next to its masthead and changing its tag-line to 'The Biggest Daily Sale in the Universe' (9 Oct.). The paper was at its popular apogee and the constant coverage of the space age over the next few weeks demonstrated its obsession with modernity and direction towards a youthfully-minded audience (Curran and Seaton 86-7).

Parts of the press lauded the breakthrough in human endeavour by demonstrating an intertextual link to science fiction. Tony Shaw identifies an upsurge in sci-fi productions throughout the 1950s and this popularity was evident throughout several newspapers' presentation of the launch (Shaw *British Cinema* 126). The *Daily Mail* employed Arthur C. Clarke, who aimed to dispel myths and inform its readership about the new possibilities created by space travel. The use of an author known predominantly for science fiction to elucidate real events begins to blur the lines between the two. The sudden movement of space travel from fantasy to reality prompted readers to question science's potential. The *Daily Herald*, meanwhile, created a serialised tale about human space travel. Peter Phillips, a journalist and occasional sci-fi writer, created a fictional narrative written through various news releases and bulletins, which echoed the real story of Sputnik, prompting readers to consider the future (Phillips 14-19 Oct.). The story's improbable scenario is that two Soviet space travellers become trapped and are saved by a manned American rescue craft, which leads to a new age of international co-operation, culminating in a jointly manned space station. As content this serialisation prompted the *Daily Herald* readership to consider not only the dangers of space but also its possibilities as an engine for peace, something which had already been expressed in several readers' letters.

As gravity's limits were seemingly removed, journalists and public continued to create their own celebratory culture; frequently the fact that the Soviets had achieved the first orbit was implicitly lauded. One reader penned a song which was published in the *Daily Herald*, its message being that the West had underestimated Russia, but also that anything imaginable was now achievable. The song informed readers that: 'No more we'll scorn because in the Kremlin soon, they'll talk of salt mines on the moon' (14 Oct.). The tone is indicative of other *Herald* correspondence which mocked America's loss of face or celebrated the reversal

of Cold War positions. The lyrics were to fit the title music of the previous year's multi-Oscar-winning film of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* (Anderson). Verne's scenario had long been surpassed, yet - like the spacecraft's orbit - was a realisation of humankind's dreams. The famed 80 days to circumvent the globe was instantly reduced to 80 minutes and the public imagination was still accommodating this. This frivolous and almost celebratory presentation was echoed in a number of press features including adverts, cartoons and competitions. Amongst the more notable items is a Guinness advertisement in *The Times* (10 Oct., fig 1). The advertisement is light hearted, using a pun on the word 'space' and showing a scientist observing space through a telescope. It uses the Sputnik moment to promote its enduring brand myth: the seemingly ubiquitous slogan 'Guinness is Good for You' was well established by the 1950s (Yenne 97-8). The Guinness lifestyle is thus associated with novelty and innovation, despite the obvious drawbacks of drinking alcohol at lunch-time. This jocular image promotes the drink as healthy, and as a catalyst for scientific discoveries.

Alongside the popular fascination with space, religious language was frequently used to present humankind's new position in the Universe. Shaw has explored how British cinema sometimes presented the Cold War as a conflict between Christianity and Communism and it is not surprising that the popular press found religious language a convenient means to frame the conflict (Shaw *Martyrs*, 214-217). When the *Daily Herald* invited readers to name the craft in a competition its title revealed the dichotomy of meaning surrounding the launch: 'We call it THE BLEEP. Some call it SATAN' (5 Oct.: 4). This phraseology, whilst not necessarily to do with religion, invites readers to fear the unknown. The enormity of the event and potential threat to mankind is highlighted by the use of religious terminology. Several entries such as 'Nemesis', 'Red Pimpernel' and 'Red Peril' reveal an engagement with Cold

War thinking. Other readers, however, submitted apocalyptic names such as 'Heaven's Usurper' and 'Harbinger of Hell', from R. Welham, who speculated: 'Maybe the Russian moon will lead to discoveries that man will wish he'd never known'(11 Oct.).

The resort to religious language shows its prevalence as a traditional remedy at moments of uncertainty and anxiety. Despite Harrison's argument that established religion was suffering from decline and indifference by the 1950s, this indicates, linguistically at least, an undercurrent of religious and apocalyptic thought (Harrison 341). It is consistent with Lorenzo DiTommaso's argument that apocalypticism has remained in the Western mindset and is still a key feature of popular culture (DiTommaso 223). Moreover, this usage shows that, amongst the *Herald* readership who, as Adrian Smith argues, were often socially conservative, some fear of secularisation existed, which was exacerbated by the fact that scientific advances were made by the atheistic Cold War other (Smith 182). The reaction, however, was tempered by several more positive entries such as 'Hope', 'New Dawn' and 'Saviour', whose author chose the name 'because it will end all war ambitions and give mankind eternal peace'. This demonstrates an outpouring of positivity alongside the anxiety. In contrast to some of the other uses of religious terminology, however, here it is likely to indicate religion's prevalence in everyday language rather than a spiritual hope that space travel would save mankind. Both positive and negative uses of religious language indicate some existence of a secularised apocalypse myth, which, whilst often associated with destruction of the earth, also indicates that things will be corrected following the end of days (Rosen xii).

### **Britain's Comparative Decline**

Another key reaction to the launch was to emphasise Britain's international position and apparent post-war decline. Whilst Paul Dickson has credited the orbit as a catalyst for closer relations with the USA, the diversity of reaction from a range of press institutions demonstrates that was this by no means inevitable (Dickson 6). In America the technological gap with Russia was blamed on the emphasis on consumerism at the expense of scientific progress (Dickson 139). By contrast British newspapers emphasised the perceived failure to compete with the superpowers due to loss of international influence and economic power. The British establishment had, by the end of the 1950s, begun to worry about imperial decline and Sputnik exacerbated feelings which became prominent amongst many politicians following the previous year's Suez debacle (Harrison 106). Whilst Macmillan's speech of July 1957 was reported as suggesting that Britain was booming, the reaction to Russia's space programme further demonstrates Sandbrook's claim that the post-war boom was limited and also that insecurity about Britain's role had risen within several areas of the press (Sandbrook 75). Allen McLaurin has established that in the previous decade Britain had reacted to declinist jibes from America with a cultural re-assertion of its comparative position through political cartoons (McLaurin 695). By the late 1950s, however, this attitude had changed and whilst there were offerings of atavistic assertion of imperial grandeur by the *Daily Mail's* Lesley Illingworth, most other cartoonists expressed bewilderment and portrayed the West as falling behind the Soviet Union (4 Nov.:6).<sup>1</sup>

Illingworth's cartoon, published following the launch of a dog inside Sputnik II, celebrates Western explorers, but in doing so it connects with waning feelings of superiority because of the declining British Empire. It shows a gallery of famous explorers with the latest Eastern



addition of 'Curly' placed by a tiny Khrushchev in the corner. The image indicates a clear dichotomy between West and East which is emphasised by the dog's inclusion. Many of the explorers - Cook, Livingstone, Scott and Hillary - are exemplars of Britain's colonial glories. Peter Hansen has ascertained that news of Hillary's ascent of Everest in 1953 was withheld until the day of the Queen's coronation, allowing the effort to be seen as a 'great British achievement' and generating a continuity of Imperial discourse (Hansen 66). Roy Greenslade sees the two events as being combined in the press and presented as a British victory which hailed a new 'Elizabethan era' (Greenslade 84-5). Illingworth's cartoon connects with this late-imperial ideal, expressed through the spirit of discovery and adventure. There are no human explorers from behind the Iron Curtain; the demotion of the Soviet Union's most recognisable figure to picture hanger reinforces this. The cartoon returns to the idea of Russian inferiority: while the other figures are symbols of discovery and Western adventurism, all the Soviets can offer towards human advancement is an animal.

The *Daily Mail* had already linked Britain with the space age by printing an article claiming, 'The leading brain behind the Soviet satellite is Cambridge trained professor Peter Kapitza' (6 Oct.). Whilst the Nobel Prize winning scientist was educated in Britain, claims that he masterminded the Soviet space program were erroneous. Two days later the paper reinforced its claim with a full-page article on Kapitza, which emphasised his hasty return to the Soviet Union in 1935 and subsequent celebration in the Russian media (8 Oct.). This ongoing narrative, which emphasised international decline and retreat from empire, contradicted the need to portray British eminence and inherent brilliance. The association with British education connected Soviet achievements with national prestige in an area neglected by the austere post-war economy. In reinforcing the Soviet Union as the Cold War other, the newspaper could not admit that they had gained their advantage using their own scientists.<sup>2</sup>

The general secrecy of the USSR allowed the British press to speculate whenever a story relating to the country appeared. Newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* were quick to use this freedom and linked, however tenuously, Britain's supposed superiority over the Russians with the space race.

Often the British press unambiguously portrayed the early space advantage as a Soviet attempt at world domination, giving many articles a sense of fear. The *Daily Herald* reported: 'Russia is in a position to dominate the World [...] Russia is now within finger-tip reach of a weapon that could devastate the world's great Cities' (7 Oct.). The unquestioned claim correctly linked the space program to development of Inter-continental Ballistic Missiles but wrongly assumed that orbiting the earth meant the Soviets could re-enter the atmosphere with a nuclear warhead. Here the assumptions about space and missile technology combined with underlying fears over Communism to speculate on Soviet Cold War objectives. The *Daily Mail* also speculated on the use of a future manned satellite which could 'dominate the world' and 'deposit h-bombs where necessary' (7 Oct.). The sensational reporting indicates that a range of newspapers presented Soviet intentions as a great threat to life in the West. Stories such as this demonstrate that, whilst there was a vein of celebration of the achievement, newspaper narrative continued to reflect the underlying anxiety created by the Cold War arms race.

Narratives invoking fear of nuclear war became widespread. Often newspapers used headlines which could have featured in a science fiction novel. On 8<sup>th</sup> October the *News Chronicle* starkly claimed that, 'Russia has clearly tested an H-bomb rocket in deep space' (8 Oct.). Such an unambiguous presentation was frequently employed across Western news

media and acted to sensationalise the issue of Soviet nuclear weapons. Whilst Russia had tested a nuclear weapon, the story fed off the Soviets' press release which stated that, 'the explosion was conducted at a great height'. The use of this point to make exaggerated claims can be considered a rational action by western journalists, who might have questioned what else the Soviets' statement could mean. The report was made more believable by the words placed ahead of the title: 'In the vacuum miles above the earth, sound is not transmitted, light is not scattered – the blast would shine like a star, then flicker and fade.' This heavily rhetorical sentence acts to create a broader narrative for the reader. Readers familiar with the ongoing Cold War narrative would have felt a sense of anxiety that space was now the domain of the enemy seemingly seeking to dominate the world. The exaggeration of Soviet missile capability continued across several other British newspapers including the *Daily Mirror* who reported the warhead with the phrase 'Red Shock', reinforcing the sense that the world was changing in front of readers' eyes (8 Oct.).

Belief in Soviet technological advancement gathered an ideological edge when the narrative turned to the forthcoming anniversary of the October revolution. The generally anti-Soviet *New Statesman* enveloped its editorials about the early launches with vindications of Bolshevik ideology and central economic planning. Following the first launch, it printed an editorial about the Soviet Union:

The new technological civilisation Stalin created is being forced, by the very magnitude of its achievements, to leave the silence of the Iron Curtain and display its products for all eyes to see [...] The satellite[...] crowns the growing pyramid of evidence that over a

wide sector of scientific knowledge the Russians are advancing further and faster than the West (12 Oct.).

This comment is indicative of the broader British reaction to the launch. The Soviet Union's progress in some kind of ambiguously defined contest is not questioned. The *New Statesman*, however, sees the launch as a legacy of Stalinism, contradicting the general attitude of many on the social democratic left, including much of the periodical's own readership, who wrote numerous anti-Soviet letters following the 1956 invasion of Budapest. This partial vindication of Stalin's ends, if not his means, adds to the belief that new technology might actually cause the end of the Cold War rather than heightening tensions. The Soviet Union is presented as the creator of scientific advancement in opposition to the West. The article finally asserts that as far as science is concerned the Communists are able to make progress because of their ideology, but that Britain's failure to follow their lead will ultimately lead to enslavement or domination by the Soviets. The Soviets are portrayed as an example of modernism; Britain's decline is characterised by its failure to enter the modern era and some sort of rapid change is required in order to maintain freedom. Paradoxically the West has the choice of either failing to catch up and being dominated by the Communists, or remaining free by adopting their ideology.

The attitude of the *New Statesman* further demonstrates Darren Lilleker's argument that most on the left were anti-Soviet because of the Soviets' irrational system of terror, forced labour and imprisonment, but also indicates that there remained a utopian hope that the ideology which had overthrown aristocratic domination might further human progress (Lilleker 2). The advances of the five year plans are clearly supported and there is little doubt that this progress

was dependent on a centrally planned system of scientific development. The article demonstrates the underlying utopian hopes that a planned system could work and that the USSR was progressing faster than traditionalist Britain if not the rest of the West. This attitude of comparative decline was echoed in other newspapers with the Conservative supporting tabloid *Daily Sketch* asking ‘And what of Britain? Well. We never even started’ (5 Nov.: 3). In this stark tabloid narrative, Britain is portrayed as failing and has no chance of recovering. Across the political spectrum and press the launch reminded Britons that the nation’s international position had declined and that in the age of the superpowers there were areas that the UK simply could not afford to maintain a presence. This indicated the continuation of the evolution of a myth of national decline, which, from the 1960s, would come to characterise British political discourse.

### **The ascendancy of the USSR**

Alongside the British reassessment of their international position came an examination of their seemingly ascendant Cold War opponent. The British press printed fantastical, speculative stories about the Russians’ next move, especially concerning the forthcoming 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bolshevik coup. The unease was so great that it was credibly touted by the *Daily Herald* that a Soviet rocket would reach the moon (19 Oct.). The fear was echoed in the *Daily Mirror*, and taken seriously enough by the *Manchester Guardian* to print an article dispelling the rumour that the Russians planned to use a powder canister to colour the moon red to demonstrate their advancement (*Mirror* 5 Nov., *Guardian* 4 Nov). The development of this rumour shows how speculation gathered momentum. The Soviets’ satellite created an atmosphere which the press exploited to portray them as so technologically advanced that all

limits were shattered. Newspapers also focused on the propaganda element of the space race. Sputnik was regularly hailed as Khrushchev's propaganda victory and stories such as this helped to reinforce the idea that propaganda was ubiquitous for the Cold War other, but the West was too scrupulous to follow suit.

The launch of a dog inside Sputnik II in early November further exacerbated the sense of a moral distinction between Britain and the USSR. The British press reported how, following the BBC's news of the launch, animal rights charities and Soviet embassies were inundated with complaints. The predominant Western view of domesticated animals is clearly visible; the dog symbolised the Cold War division between East and West and its treatment was used to demonstrate the barbarity of Communism. In this respect the press engaged with a spontaneous public expression of sympathy. Appealing names attributed to the dog, such as 'Fluffy' or 'Curly', added negative feeling to the launch by contributing an outpouring of sympathy and anthropomorphising the animal. Often, however, the newspapers stopped short of condemning the Soviets directly, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions. The episode is another illustration, as Colin Seymour-Ure has suggested, that the press during this period interacted with popular sentiment to maximise their readership (Seymour-Ure 14).

Dickson has revealed the Western outpouring of concern for Laika, as the dog was finally named by the Soviets. However, he downplays the dog's symbolic representation of the Cold War division (Dickson 144). The British press coverage of the dog furore showed an almost hysterical attitude from some newspapers and their readership. Laika reached far beyond the front page and featured in letters and comment pieces. The *Daily Sketch* ran a competition to win a husky and was followed in this venture by the *Daily Herald* (*Sketch 5 Nov.:1 Herald 6*

Nov.). The *Herald* asked readers to decide what an appealingly photographed Husky was thinking. Amongst the suggested answers was a pun on its accepted name: ‘Laika? I love ‘er!’ This humorous presentation demonstrates that the Cold War was not something that simply produced fear, but that the press were willing to present the conflict as part of mundane life. The *Daily Mirror* published an anthropomorphising poem about fear for the dog’s life by the popular novelist Denise Robins (7 Nov.). The poem aimed to capture the hearts of the public and questioned the dog’s feelings and thoughts whilst in outer space.

The public outcry about Laika, which fed into the ongoing press narratives, led to a mixture of bemusement and interest in dogs generally. The *Herald* reported that, ‘Dog lovers of the world united’, this pun on the Marxist slogan reminding readers of the ideological battleground of the Cold War (4 Nov). The *News Chronicle* took a more serious approach to the dog in its editorials. It attempted to temper the public outrage, whilst understanding its basis. On the 4th November, its leader stated that ‘The great majority is bound to wish this conscript a safe return. If the wish is not fulfilled one of the achievements of the latest scientific triumph will be to prove the strength of one of the oldest emotions – pity for the helpless’ (4 Nov.). This approach prioritised scientific advancement above the dog’s life. But, it also appeased the potential anger of many readers by speaking of the safe return of the dog, therefore making humanitarian rather than scientific concerns central.

The *Daily Mirror* maintained the most coverage of the story and turned Laika into a star. There were daily reports on her well-being, despite the fact that she died within hours of the launch, and special mentions in its celebrated feature, William Connor’s *Cassandra* column, which had helped the newspaper reach its 1950s peak in readership (Conboy *Journalism*,

112). Emphasising the ideological confrontations of the Cold War, Connor parodied the Soviet purges by imagining the dog being interrogated and confessing to false crimes as so many others had done:

I am wholly responsible and solely guilty for the failure of Sputnik Experiment Two. I freely admit that my dogma has been deviationist and my attitude towards space-rocketry has not been in accordance with the principles laid down by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Guy Fawkes (*Cassandra* 5 Nov.).

Whilst humorous, the false confession is part of a key representation of the East: Laika is portrayed as a loyal communist who has fallen prey to the irrational purging that was perceived to have percolated into the Khrushchev era.

When the Soviets announced Laika's death, the *Mirror* closed its narrative with the back page headline 'The Death of a Dog'(12 Nov). A centre page *Cassandra* column took the form of an obituary to 'Curly'. The column attacked the Soviet system of forced labour, giving it the air of a typical Cold War column (*Cassandra* 12 Nov.). Towards the end, Connor returns to an outpouring of sympathy, 'No gaol, no solitary cell plunged in darkness was ever like this. One small beating heart, two luminous eyes, a plump little body and four paws were buried alive in the heavens.' This evocative description forms part of the comparison of Laika's treatment to the Soviets' cruelty. The author continues to present the dog as another victim of Soviet purges, imprisoned against its will for the good of Communism. The piece contains religious connotations with the launch presented as though it were a sacrificial ceremony of modernity. The dog's 'plump body' makes it appear as a family pet, not a



scientific subject. The sentence closes by allowing the reader to draw their own conclusion about what happened to Laika when she was ‘buried alive’; but this is already a loaded term which invokes thoughts of cruel punishments and represents the entire Soviet system. Connor again invokes the images of sacrifice and punishment of an innocent, referring to the dog in her ‘spinning metal grave travelling at a prodigious speed around the earth’. The Soviet Union is made crueller because, despite the reinforced attribution of the dog with human qualities, the reader recognises it as an unintelligent and innocent creature that has been mistreated by the Cold War other. The obituary finishes with a more directly Christian quote from the well-known hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. Connor emphasises the Cold War dichotomy: the West is the representative of Christianity against the atheistic Soviet Union, ruthless in its pursuit of a godless Communism.

The following day Connor reported an onslaught of telephone calls from Communists who questioned his ‘assertion that the dog died “slowly and painfully”’ (*Cassandra* 13 Nov.). Connor claimed this was ‘a classic example of the calculated communist technique of acting in concert under a direct command from a central source’. The narrative of Laika refused to die for several weeks after she actually had. The *Cassandra* column became a central part of the left’s attack on Communism, whose ideology is reduced to being a centralising hierarchically controlled system. The piece contrasts with the reports of the masses of callers to animal welfare organisations, the BBC and Soviet embassies, which accompanied the second launch. These callers, although influenced by Western ideology, were never accused of acting in concert by the popular press.

The issue of the first living being in space prompted a number of letters across all newspapers, which demonstrate the ability of news media to evoke emotion. The public reaction indicates that the generally anti-communist attitude of the press, which John Jenks suggests was partially influenced by self censorship and the need to maintain relations with official sources, was augmented by the need to react to public responses, the two becoming a mutually reinforcing discourse (Jenks, 2). One reader wrote to the *Daily Herald*: 'I can't get that dog out of my thoughts. I feel terrible about it. If they must send up living things why not collect a few child murderers' (6 Nov.). Besides the exaggerated perception of crime, this reader equates, like Connor's later columns, the scientific test with the punishment of an innocent being. The letter shows the power of news events to evoke emotive responses from the audience and this was something which carried across the spectrum of opinion on the launch of Sputnik II.

The *Daily Mail* helpfully quantified the response of its readership and stated that 55% of all correspondents 'condemned the Russian action without qualification' (7 Nov.). This followed a similar announcement in the *Manchester Guardian* whose total showed that 52% of all letters received had related to the dog, 66% of which were critical of the launch (6 Nov.). Particularly striking amongst readers' letters was John Graham's which, evoking the supposed Cold War moral divide, wrote: 'let the Americans now demonstrate the moral superiority of the West by not using any animal in such experiments'. Graham's letter demonstrates his belief in a Cold War bipolar world divided into two homogenous entities. He views America and Britain as essentially the same and as morally superior. He neglects to point out, however, that the USA and Britain both routinely engaged in similar animal testing. America did not refrain from launching animals into space because of moral superiority; it simply had not launched any kind of satellite. Graham shows the unquestioning

approach to the Cold War world by many who accepted the narrative about the clash of civilizations between two superpowers. The idea of superiority, although mentioned in terms of morals, extends to the portrayal of the Eastern bloc as inferior and uncivilised. By extending the press image of Soviet Russia to the entire bloc he allows the Cold War discourse to inform his attitudes to the East in general.

## **Conclusion**

The effect of the Soviets' propaganda victory following the launch can, to a certain extent, be ascertained from Gallup opinion polls. When asked in December 1957, who was winning the Cold War, 36% chose 'Russia' against only 9% who selected 'The West' (Gallup 435). The ascent into space increased belief in the capabilities of the Soviet Union. In terms of response to the vast amount of scaremongering about the Soviet Union's newfound potential, it is interesting that 59% believed that 'Russia' and 'The West' could live in peace with only 18% believing there would be war. This suggests that, despite the amount of press coverage which had the potential to provoke fear, the majority were not frightened by the Soviets' illusory rocket lead.

The British reaction to the first two satellite launches was certainly not uniform. Exaggerated claims of world domination by the Soviets were printed alongside more light-hearted and even celebratory articles. The launch engaged several themes in British culture of the 1950s including the role of religion, Britain's imperial decline and fear of Communism. Alongside pre-existing anxieties relating to the Cold War, the launch evoked a sense of positivity about

humankind's potential. The press reaction revealed much about British national identity from a culture still rooted in imperial pride and struggling with the project of modernism. The reaction showed that fear and celebration could co-exist, and the belief that a new spirit of international co-operation could emerge hinted that the Cold War was not necessarily perceived as a permanent consideration in people's lives.

When the second Sputnik, containing Laika, was launched, the reaction revealed British attitudes to animals alongside other considerations such as curiosity and a less than comfortable relationship with modernity. The dog was used to reveal the Cold War dichotomy between the two countries. This episode used compassion for Laika to highlight Britain's moral and cultural differences from its war opponent and was frequently turned into a lesson about how the Bolshevik ideology was not compatible with the British way of life. Sputnik II was certainly celebrated less by the British press. The immediate public outrage prompted the press to revert to a narrative in which Communists were portrayed as evil and the Cold War as Manichean. It was this second launch which caused many in the UK to lessen the celebratory stance and revert to what might be seen as the traditional Cold War narrative of ideological bipolar global conflict.

## **Notes**

1. British Cartoon Archive: ILW2816.
2. The Soviet state remained so secretive of its scientists that father of the Soviet satellite, Sergei Korolov, was not publically credited for his scientific achievements until after his death in 1966. Brzezinski p273-4.

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