

**BOULT, RUSSELL, AND THE LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**  
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This is a paper exalting tittle-tattle, or, as it's known at the University of Sussex, oral history. I'm well aware that I'm commending the speaking voice over the written text in the presence of my peers who deal with nineteenth-century musical events that lay unvoiced, or find valuable information analysing yearbooks and ledgers. But I needed tittle-tattle, apocryphal hearsay, gossip, oral history to make fuller sense of the absurd and perhaps tragic story of the sacking in 1952 of the viola player Thomas Russell as chairman and general manager of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, of what led to this and the virtual financial and artistic bankruptcy of that orchestra which followed - but in particular the sinister part undertaken by British music's Witch-finder General, the conductor Sir Adrian Boult.

I've said 'story', which may indicate to you an account that's partial and relativistic. But again I turn back to the University of Sussex and Professor Alan Sinfield there who distinguishes between stories or 'representation' and formal record. The formal statements of the London Philharmonic Orchestra – in the order of board and Council papers, minutes, financial accounts and correspondence kept in a Dorking warehouse inside a crate marked Blue 16 – access to those papers was finally denied me by the LPO's current general manager after three months of increasingly circuitous, Kafkaesque correspondence. I hope other researchers have better fortune than I've had in prising open Blue 16, or at least in prising open the general manager.

Of Thomas Russell's documents elsewhere I could find little, but Boult's papers are strewn casually around the archives of the nation: for example, the British Library, the Royal College of Music, the BBC Written Archives Centre and the British Council files at the Public Record Office. The period of the early 1950s is notably under-represented in these, which suggests they've been held back or destroyed, but it was possible to piece together through the separate archives a chronological account of matters. They were enhanced by the papers and minutes of London County Council's General Purposes (South Bank) Subcommittee and the LCC General Purposes Committee itself, the British Council's Music Advisory Committee and the Arts Council of Great Britain's papers and

minutes held at the National Art Library. There was a great deal of coverage of a key part of the story in *The Times* during 1950 and 1951 – why this should be so is a subject I'll return to.

Two books also refer to the incident. Edwin Pirouet is the honorary archivist of the LPO and wrote its history with the title "*Heard Melodies Are Sweet*", printed up in 1998 by a vanity publisher. It's a confusing account which attempts to carry detail but mixes up years, committees and chronology while missing key facts. This is especially disappointing as it's written by someone who must have had access to Blue 16 – in fact, more than access, I believe he put it together in the first place. Michael Kennedy's biography of Adrian Boult devotes a tiny but useful chapter to the Russell Affair in which Kennedy admits that – I quote – "the motive for Boult's uncharacteristically devious role remains speculative". Not for much longer this evening, I hope.

Above all, two valuable aids were oral accounts of the period from Mary Glasgow, the first Secretary-General of the Arts Council, and Frederick Riddle, the LPO's distinguished viola principal of the time and the orchestra board's vice-chairman, a tape which can be found at the *Music Preserved* archive in the Barbican Library. Riddle was caught up at the climax of the affair and slandered by Boult, as we'll hear. But to reach that climax we must go back to the conclusion of the Second World War and the Cold War climate that spread out of it like a dismal fog.

While the USSR ended the War liberating Berlin and doing so as a military and social ally of Britain and the USA, the subsequent Soviet Zhdanov and American Truman doctrines of 1947 divided the world into two hostile blocs. Capitalists feared that communism within Europe was not necessarily the instigator of trouble but certainly the *exploiter* of it, and so European governments were moved to increase their surveillance of the legal Communist parties. This was not difficult for the British Labour government of 1945 to 1951 under Clement Attlee, which considered the Communist Party of Great Britain more dangerous than Churchill's defeated Tories.. There was a recurrent round of unofficial strikes such as a large one at London's dockside in 1948 where members of the Communist Party were presumed to be the agitators. A subsequent report by Scotland Yard informed ministers that this was untrue, and that (quote) "the (strike) organisation is a very mixed bag indeed and includes people who are not extremists". This led the

Labour ministers to conclude that surveillance must be spread wider, and from then on two classes of communist were commonly identified: *card-carriers* (members of the Communist Party of Great Britain) and *fellow travellers* (Marxist sympathisers but not party members), both of whom were reported on by the Security Service (MI5) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). By 1949 the government's fear of communist expansion and infiltration into positions of power was such that plans were made to intern British communists and fellow-travellers in the Isle of Man concentration camps used to house 'enemy aliens' during WWII.

The Fabian centre Left, which had a large say in Attlee government policy was at this time led by Herbert Morrison, the deputy prime minister. Morrison was implacably opposed to the Communist Party to the point of fixation. This is explained by the opposition he'd encountered from Communist councillors when he rose through the membership ranks of London County Council to become the Labour leader of the LCC between 1933 and 1940 (from when he moved into the wartime coalition government). Morrison was an astute delegator, and as he left the LCC he made sure he had his anti-communist, pro-Fabian placemen in chairmanship positions, and it is these characters who are a key set of subjects of our story. That Morrison was also the government instigator of the 1951 Festival of Britain, which involved the South Bank development and the Royal Festival Hall of that year, adds to his influence in the narrative.

His "enemy within", the Communist Party of Great Britain had been founded in 1920 in the wake of the Russian Revolution and had a mixed fortune in membership – losses under the early reign of Stalin but gains during the Spanish Civil War of 1936, including at that time two of our subjects, the composer Alan Bush and the viola player Thomas Russell. By 1950 official Communist membership had risen to 43,500, with an additional estimate of 200,000 fellow travellers. These figures can be found in Prof. Peter Hennessy's new book *The Secret State – Whitehall & the Cold War* (and I'm grateful to Penguin for supplying me with a review copy for the purposes of this paper. I do recommend a read of it, and I'm only sorry if you have to buy yours to do so).

In the domain of British classical music, a significant number of successful musicians and composers were card-carriers. This history is usefully covered by Richard Hanlon and Mike Waite in their essay, "Notes from the Left" to be found in the book, "A

Weapon in the struggle” of 1998. Among the musicians were many pianists such as James Gibb, the lutanist Diana Poulton and Edward Dent, then recently retired as the music professor at that hothouse of 1930s communist intrigue, the University of Cambridge; among the composers, Humphrey Searle, Bernard Frankel and Bernard Stevens, Berthold Goldschmidt and Rutland Boughton as well as Alan Bush. Fellow travellers of the time included the Trotskyite Michael Tippett, Elisabeth Lutyens and Alan Rawsthorne. Benjamin Britten would certainly have been considered a fellow traveller in the 1930s, and indeed his *Peter Grimes* librettist, Montagu Slater, was a card-carrier right our period of study.

The treatment of these British artists in the ‘first phase’ of the Cold War period (as Professor Hobsbawm would have it, himself a communist) - that is, 1947-1956 - the treatment of these artists by the Establishment was generously (or perhaps incompetently) half-hearted in contrast to the treatment their associates faced in the USA. It was in February 1950 that Senator Joe McCarthy – whose name appears in this paper’s title - made his speech which unleashed that miserable McCarthyite reign of terror where among celebrities and film stars, composers such as Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein were hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

At Westminster the Tory MP Sir Waldron Smithers called unsuccessfully for the creation of a Commons Select Committee on Un-British Activities. There was certainly a degree of animosity from those in authority to the British artistic card-carriers and fellow travellers, but this was in part a hangover from the War, where, for example, Britten and Tippett had refused to fight.

At the BBC Written Archives Centre I came across a 1943 memo in a file marked “Alien Composers – File 4”. The memo came from Adrian Boult’s assistant conductor at the BBC, Clarence Raybould and was addressed to the Assistant Director of Music: “Subject: Michael Tippett. The above gentleman has a work down for a broadcast by me on Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. In view of his notorious tenets as a conchie coupled with his recent sentence to go for refusing to abide by the conditions of his exemption, do you think we are officially justified in including this work at the present time? If Mr. Tippett’s work must remain in the programme, I should prefer that it was not in one of mine.” The reply

reads, “Dear Clarrie, His work has been postponed until some time in the future when the present to do has died down.”

This exemplifies the orthodox Establishment attitude throughout the 1940s and 50s, of avoiding public confrontation over the issue of ideological affinity, and it must be said that the complex combination of anti-communism, anti-pacifism and homophobia in the cases of both Britten and Tippett make it difficult to distinguish what was being charged against them. It seemed to be a mush of bigotry. Indeed, it might be argued that in the British Isles homophobia supplanted McCarthyism as a repressive ideology, but that’s another paper.

Only rarely did anti-communist gestures take place in front of the musical public. One such exception occurred in 1938 when Adrian Boult conducted his BBC Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of Alan Bush’s epic *Piano Concerto* and cut off the enthusiastic applause afterwards with an unexpected rendition of the National Anthem. In 1940, while he was the BBC’s Director of Music, he had Bush’s music banned from the airwaves, which duly created embarrassment when the Soviet Union joined the Allies and Boult found himself programming and conducting works by Soviet party members such as Khachaturian, Mossolov, Khrennikov, Shostakovich, Klenovsky and, most notably, Prokofiev’s “*A Toast to Stalin*”.

In order to emphasize the British way of dealing with card-carriers, I should mention the Festival of Britain’s Covent Garden Opera Competition of 1949, organised by the Arts Council, where four scores were to be selected for production at Covent Garden. The competing scores were sent under anonymous cover and so the organisers were horrified to learn that two of the winning works were those of active communists, Berthold Goldschmidt and Alan Bush, whose nom-de-plume was the suavely punning “Dudley Underwood”. The full scores were duly paid for, but they never touched the Covent Garden stage.

So it’s all the more surprising that in November 1952 Thomas Russell could be sacked in a high-profile and vindictive fashion from a job he ran successfully, as chairman and managing director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, simply because he was a communist. That the orchestra stumbled towards bankruptcy in consequence indicates how strongly his skills were missed after he was thrown out. These talents were

first displayed to the full at the beginning of World War Two when the LPO's founder, Thomas Beecham abandoned his musicians for the safety of America. Beecham had initiated the ensemble in 1932 as a rival to Boult's BBC Symphony Orchestra which had been created two years earlier as Britain's first permanent, national orchestra – permanent meaning the main body of players received salaries and a year-round schedule.

Russell, as a member of the LPO viola section from 1935, took up the challenge in wartime to keep his orchestra in work as an independent, player-governed, permanent, metropolitan-based ensemble with a pre-eminent standard of performance to offer. Enjoying the full support of the player board he eventually added the role of chairman to his job as managing director. The board knew he had been a member of the Communist Party since 1936, but that this was a private issue which was not reflected by him in his work or behaviour, and it appears that everyone who met Russell in his orchestral capacity endorsed this view of him (it must be added that Russell was not the only card-carrier in the ensemble; it was said that there were two others).

What Russell *did* exploit were opportunities to gain government subsidy, which was being made available initially as a wartime measure. To do this he reformed the business aspects of the organisation to allow it to handle not-for-profit grants, and in 1947 he added to its constitution an advisory Council chaired by the popular writer JB Priestley. He introduced a house magazine which he edited and ran a fund-raising society known as the Friends. His innovations became the standard mechanisms for subsidised orchestras which remain in place today.

From the end of the War the LPO became the first London orchestra annually designated to give concerts (I quote) 'in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain'. In fact the LPO is by far the oldest sustained Arts Council client under any artform. In comparison, the London Symphony Orchestra refused to take up a not-for-profit status and didn't receive regular subsidy until 1956 when it agreed to reform. John Cruft, once an oboist in the LSO and later Music Director at the Arts Council, told me that, while Russell had gained an office and staff to help him run a permanent ensemble efficiently, the LSO was managed by a double-bass player who kept two books in his jacket pockets – one on his left recording cash paid on the nail to the players, and one on the right listing their addresses and phone numbers and those of their - many - deputies. At this time the

LSO was in poor shape, and survived on farming itself out to choral societies and provincial festivals.

It was partly the low standard of its chief rival and the skill of Russell to find ways of building audiences (such as children's concerts and suburban series) that gained him the local authority support of the London County Council in the form of grant-aid: first of all £10,000 for the financial year 1946-7, and then a considerable increase to £25,000 in 1947-8, which was maintained for four years until McCarthyism closed the cheque book.

To explain this dramatic retraction we must start in July 1949, when Edward van Beinum was the LPO's conductor-in-chief. Russell told the LPO board of fellow players that he'd been invited to visit Moscow as part of a British deputation. This was accepted by the board but, after insistence by the anti-communist Eric Bravington (the LPO's principal trumpet), only on condition that the visit was considered to be a private one. There was an LCC assessor who sat in on board meetings who commented on this occasion that the visit (I quote) "might disturb some of your friends at County Hall". The deputation left in two groups, the latter on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1949, and this was recorded by the Communist Party's daily newspaper, the *Daily Worker*:

"The Dean of Canterbury flew to Moscow yesterday to lead a British delegation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet National Peace Conference. With him travelled the scientist Mr. JG Crowther.. Other members of the delegation have already arrived at the Soviet capital. They are Professor JD Bernal, Mr. Ivor Montagu, Mr T Russell, chairman of London Philharmonic Orchestra Ltd., and Mr. EV Tempest, Bradford businessman."

This implication, that Russell was representing the orchestra, allowed trouble to ferment, especially in a group focussed around the board member Bravington, although we must also remember that the LCC assessor's warning predated this press announcement.

At the LCC it happened that the exalted Labour Leader of the Council was also the chairman of the General Purposes (South Bank) subcommittee, a subcommittee of the General Purposes Committee concerned with the South Bank development. This otherwise ponderous scheme was being pressed to open in 1951 by the *former* LCC Leader and now deputy prime minister Herbert Morrison. The current Leader was Morrison's placeman Isaac Hayward (very much a Morrison clone in the sense of what a

'Blair clone' is deemed to be today). Hayward's subcommittee generally dealt with the annual LPO grant because the arts otherwise fell out of the committee system at that time. In 1949 Hayward, a former Fabian trades unionist, was swept up in the anti-Soviet apprehensions of the period and was increasingly seeing "reds under the bed" at the LCC. As arts subsidy was anyway always difficult to justify - even after the Local Government Act of 1948 encouraging it - he didn't welcome this "disturbance", as the LCC assessor put it to the LPO board.

Hayward's disapproval was actively supported by subcommittee member and Lambeth Cllr. Guy Boys, a former building society executive who had a passion for folk singing and, as a committee member of the English Folk Dance & Song Society, was waging a similar anti-communist battle there against A.L. Lloyd and Ewan McColl, who were both card-carriers. Boys directly told JB Priestley that he wouldn't vote for one penny to the LPO while the communist Russell remained managing director.

The subsequent Autumn meeting of the LCC subcommittee was normally the time at which it built its roster of grants for the financial year 1950-51 in order to submit them up the Council's authorising ladder. It was here at subcommittee level that Hayward had worded a clause to be added to any future grants agreement to the LPO. The clause had six inflammatory points (I quote):

The board of directors of the orchestra to give the Council the following assurances:

- (a) That there will be no use of the orchestra or its organisation for the purposes of political propaganda.
- (b) That there shall be no discrimination on political grounds in favour of or against any employee, musician, soloist or conductor [notice here no reference to composers].
- (c) That there will be no discrimination on political grounds in the choice of music.
- (d) That the Council's payment of a grant shall not be represented either at home or abroad as implying the Council's acquiescence in any party allegiance on the part of individual members of the orchestra or the organisation as a whole.
- (e) That the responsible officers of the orchestra shall use reasonable discretion in exercising their private political activities.



- (f) That the placing of advertising matter shall be governed purely by commercial considerations, and shall not be influenced by the political affiliations of the advertising media

The six conditions were approved and added to the LPO's formal offer in January 1950, the very month that Soviet spy Klaus Fuchs was arrested at the Harwell Atomic Energy Establishment.

As I've been denied access to the LPO files I cannot tell you the immediate recorded reaction of the orchestra board, except through later press reports it was clear that both the board and the advisory Council were horrified by this intrusive *proviso*, and actually a pointless one, as no suggestion of political favour or manipulation by Russell had ever been raised up to this time, least of all by the LCC; even Bravington found the clause offensive. Eventually the formal offer containing the six conditions was signed with an added disclaimer that the LPO did not accept the *implications* of the particular clause.

But there was a far larger issue at stake here, and that was the orchestra's relationship with the Royal Festival Hall, due to be open the following year. Even among LCC staff Russell had been the favourite candidate to take up the running of it, with the LPO its orchestra-in-residence. Hayward promptly dropped Russell out of consideration, and the subcommittee started to discuss holding a leisurely competition between the existing orchestras or indeed creating a new orchestra. It did so at the very time in the spring of 1950 when Sir Adrian Boult joined the LPO as conductor-in-chief following the resignation of Van Beinum for reasons of ill-health. Boult had joined the body on the assumption that it would be the principal orchestra for London with a new South Bank home. Due to Russell's private Moscow trip, it seemed, this was now beginning to fall apart.

Yet matters got far worse. Hayward's subcommittee decided in the next round of meetings, to drop next year's LPO grant entirely, after five years of support. This withdrawal would cover the financial year 1951-52, the year of the Festival Hall's opening. Instead, it would pay - for "an experimental year" - only the fees of the orchestra's children's concerts and its Finsbury Park season, amounting to an annual £10,000 - not only a 60% loss of cash but also a cashflow calamity for the LPO. The

LCC conveyed this decision to the Arts Council as early as July 1950, well before it did so to the orchestra. By this means it hoped that the Arts Council in a *quid-pro-quo* would also drop its grant, and force the resignation of Russell, but the Arts Council's Music Director was then John Denison, a former horn player with the LPO, and he stood by his colleagues. Later Denison would himself become manager of the Royal Festival Hall.

JB Priestley thought that matters could be saved by threatening to expose the fetid political nature of the "cooling off" of support from the LCC. A chronological dossier was prepared and Hayward was advised that it existed. But the LPO did not expect the LCC's shrewd response. The existing £25,000 grant was issued by the LCC in instalments, and by the autumn of 1950 a final £10,000 remained to be sent. Hayward instructed his clerk, Sir Howard Roberts, to issue a new condition that the LPO (I quote) "expresses its belief that the South Bank Subcommittee has acted in good faith in withdrawing the annual grant from the orchestra, and that neither the Orchestra's Board nor Council will publish any facts to the contrary." Sir Howard added that unless these assurances were given, relations between the LCC and the LPO would be broken off forthwith and the current £10,000 withdrawn. To gain this vital sum, the LPO gave its coerced assurance.

A quiet period of reflection followed, tranquil only because the orchestra's Board and Council were gagged by their assent for the remainder of the financial year. This quietude was broken only by a bizarre incident involving Boult.

It was summarised neatly in a *Daily Express* item, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1950 (which incidentally displayed the sort of background statistics the *Express* readers needed in those days with their news). It ran:

**BOULT – I WON'T BE THERE.**

Sir Adrian Boult, former conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, said last night he would not serve on a committee to welcome a Peace congress to Sheffield next month. 61-year-old Sir Adrian was said to have agreed to serve on the committee for the communist-inspired congress.

At his seven-acre home at Wokingham, Surrey, he said: "I am not a communist.. I spend precious time working for the Federal Union. That is far from communism, but it does support peace. I am out for peace."

Sir Adrian, 6ft 1ins tall, added that he was sent a document asking him to support the principles of the peace congress. “I signed a tear-off portion which, as far as I remember, only said I was in agreement with the committee’s aims. I did not know it had a communist tinge.”

The rather legal “as far as I remember” suggests, as his secretary elsewhere confirmed, that he had probably misread the tear-off portion he had signed. For this mistake he nevertheless blamed Russell, who he felt had misused his name, and the “cooling off” between Boult and Russell, who had offered him the LPO post in the first place, began here, at the 6ft 1ins man’s seven-acre estate.

At the beginning of April 1951, the new financial year, the LPO felt itself free of Hayward’s muzzle. On 30<sup>th</sup> April his subcommittee met an LPO deputation comprising Boult, JB Priestley, Sir Arthur Bliss and Sir Steuart Wilson. Wilson, a flamboyant former tenor soloist, had been in quick succession Music Director of the Arts Council, Director of Music at the BBC and now Assistant Director at Covent Garden. At the BBC he’d kicked Boult out on a retirement ruse, and it’s felt in part that he did so because when Wilson divorced his wife in 1933, Boult married her and took in the children; Boult bought himself Wilson’s family. But Wilson, right wing and impetuous, was here to support Russell.

Wilson warned Hayward that the dossier which had been gathering dust for a year would now be released to the press, while in contrast Boult – ‘out for peace’ – asked how detente may be achieved. The result was inconclusive. But we can see from this a movement in two directions, with Boult dreaming of his orchestra’s contingent security as the grant-aided orchestra-in-residence at the LCC’s Royal Festival Hall, which would open just two days after this deputation. Nevertheless, Boult did agree that the LCC nonsense must be publically exposed, and he arranged this through *The Times* where he had many connections, his one-time boyfriend, Robin Barrington-Ward, being the former editor there. A spate of letters appeared in June together with a sympathetic article by the music critic, followed in July by two large news items, both entirely supportive of the LPO’s line that this was ‘pure political meddling by the LCC’. Russell was quoted (I quote):

“It has been said that this is a ‘Red orchestra’ and that there is a whip-round every week for the *Daily Worker*. This is absolute nonsense. I am a communist but the 70 people working with me are not communists or are anti-communists”. Hayward replied that the LCC was not influenced by political considerations, and the decision to discontinue the grant (I quote) “was taken on purely musical and financial grounds. The County Council holds in its possession a written assurance given on behalf of the orchestra that they accept this as a fact.”

To Hayward’s dismay the exposure strategy won much support for the orchestra, which ran a auspicious fund-raising campaign. But the LCC now picked Boulton out for grooming. One of the Tory councillors on the LCC subcommittee was the Hon. John Fremantle, who would become better known to the arts community as Lord Cottesloe. Fremantle and Boulton enjoyed something in common apart from the arts – rifle shooting. Fremantle invited Boulton for a shoot and pointed out two things, that the LCC might well look favourably at the LPO as its chosen resident orchestra if Russell was got-rid-of, and that the new Secretary-General of the Arts Council, William Williams – otherwise known as Pelican Bill due to his publishing affairs - was taking an anti-communist interest in the affair over the head of his Music Director.

Boulton arranged lunch first with Pelican Bill and then with his former boss at the BBC, Director-General Sir William Haley, who had announced he was stepping down from the BBC to take up the editorship of *The Times*. But Haley indicated to Boulton that he – Boulton - was a victim of his own success in the affair, because *The Times* coverage had won the moral case for Russell and the LPO; Hayward looked foolish, and despite the recent success of the Royal Festival Hall opening, a number of teething troubles had been blamed on the LCC’s lack of experience and delegation. (I should add here that to make things worse for Hayward, a general election in October 1951 brought the Tories back to power under the election slogan “Set the People Free”.)

Meanwhile the press exposure helped Russell find new concert engagements and a second recording contract – the one I believe where the orchestra was renamed for contractual reasons the *Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra*. The LPO survived a second LCC- grantless year from April 1952 onwards, but, as one director pointed out to Boulton, (I quote) “Our individual incomes from LPO sources are higher this year than at any time

since 1939". However, to achieve that, they had a great deal of coach travelling to put up with. JB Priestley retired from the Council and the chair was taken by Eric Hall, which the small anti-Russell faction around Bravington saw as a new opportunity.

But unexpected fortune graced them on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1952 when Russell told the board that he had been invited to join a delegation to China. If this sounds like a curious repeat of the 1949 Moscow visit, it *was*, with the delegation once more led by the Dean of Canterbury. China under Mao Zedong had been recognised by Britain since 1950, but by this time Mao's forces had entered the communist side of the Korean War, and thus the delegation's visit was diplomatically contentious.

Russell informed the board that he was using his annual holiday leave to undertake this trip. Eric Bravington – with 1949 in mind – warned him that this must be an entirely private endeavour and that any mention *anywhere* of the LPO in connection with it would lead to Russell's dismissal. Bravington then telephoned Boulton and Pelican Bill at the Arts Council to advise them of this fresh situation. Perhaps Bravington had in mind that if Russell were sacked the LCC purse strings would loosen once more, but it was certainly the case that he coveted the chairmanship. As Frederick Riddle said of Bravington, "Some people *are* rather anxious for power". We know about the various telephone conversations between the Arts Council and the LPO office because the office receptionist grew suspicious and listened-in, eventually telling Russell about it after his return. It would be this rather operative detail that turned events around.

The arrival of the delegation in Beijing was noted in a news item on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September in *The Times*, which was now edited by William Haley. The members were listed but Russell was the only one to have his job title recorded. Bravington had acquired his fatal ammunition. [You have a photocopy of this news item].

Russell returned at the start of October. On the 21<sup>st</sup> an inquorate meeting of the Advisory Council - with, surprisingly, Boulton present - heard Russell defend his position against a memorandum written by Bravington, in which Bravington avoided any mention of China but wrote of Russell's "absences". An Emergency General Meeting of the shareholders – that is, the players was called at St. Pancras Town Hall on the 14<sup>th</sup> November. In advance of that Boulton – who had actually no right to do so - sent a letter to all the shareholders claiming, without any evidence offered, that (I quote) "your future is

more than precarious if Mr Russell resumes control". Pelican Bill also wrote a careful letter to the board displaying the Arts Council's concern that ( I quote) "the unity of the orchestra was threatened by the current situation". In the meantime Russell had to stand down as chairman while Frederick Riddle as his deputy took the chair.

Riddle now adds another layer to the intrigue. Boult had apparently been invited in November to conduct at short notice the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague. I say apparently because the British Council Czech file for this year is closed for scrutiny until the year 2026. Boult had asked Riddle to accompany him to play the Walton Viola concerto. According to Riddle, not long before the date Boult informed Riddle that he'd been advised by the British Council that Britain no longer *had* a relationship with Czechoslovakia and therefore Boult couldn't go. Riddle was confused: "Do I go?" he asked Boult. "Oh, yes. You *must* go." So Riddle went to play the concerto and returned to find himself Acting Chairman of the LPO, as he says, ( I quote) "Holding the baby, pretty much a political nonentity myself. I didn't have enough wisdom to avoid the trouble that happened."

I must point out here that Boult had been chairman of the British Council Music Advisory Committee since 1950 when the Prague office was closed down and replaced by Embassy support, so it's hardly likely that he was unaware of arrangements for Prague, especially as he'd worked there periodically.

The EGM lasted seven hours with a lunch break. Boult was not a shareholder but he turned up anyway. Russell made a long and assiduous speech attacking the dismissal as a witch hunt. On that day his latest book on music was being published and he contrasted the tone of the appreciative foreword in it, written by Boult, with that of the conductor's caustic letter to the shareholders. According to Michael Kennedy's second-hand account, ( I quote) "thunderous applause greeted his speech", and it seemed once again Russell had survived.

It was then that Thomas O'Dea, the company secretary, revealed that Russell had relied for his information on the receptionist tapping phone conversations. This "red under the bed" slur created uproar against Russell which Riddle as the meeting's chairman tried to quell by telling the gathering the facts concerning the receptionist's independent initiative. When Riddle finished Boult stood up and said, "But. ladies and

gentlemen, you should know that Mr. Riddle is a communist. He's just come back from Prague."

Riddle later said, "I couldn't answer. I was speechless. It wasn't true." Bravington called for the vote be taken. Russell lost by just five votes, 27 against him, 22 for.

News of the sacking was printed on 1<sup>st</sup> December in both *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Worker*. *The Times* ran a two paragraph item that day, quoting Mrs. Russell on behalf of her husband that it was a witch-hunt and that four of the LPO staff had immediately resigned in protest, but that more importantly, "The orchestra, which for 13 years has been independent and self-governing, now finds itself threatened with interference of the kind which has led to the present situation." But the next day *The Times* ran a larger piece in which Bravington, who took over the chair, claimed that "Mr. Russell visited China in circumstances which... associated the orchestra as a body with his personal political views." *The Times*, in contrast to its extensive coverage in 1951 offered no further analysis than that. The issue was followed up more trenchantly in the *New Statesman* on 6<sup>th</sup> December, where its music critic Desmond Shawe-Taylor, wrote under the banner, "Bother Politics" (I quote): "The Russell case looks very much like a witch hunt. If it is not that, what is all the fuss about? No other reason than his China visit has yet been put forward for the dismissal of an able administrator whose organising capacity and devotion to the LPO's interests are beyond question". [I've copied for YOUR interest a letter from Riddle and 14 members of the orchestra from the same issue].

Michael Kennedy believed that Boulton was "turned" by the outside pressure of Pelican Bill at the Arts Council, while the chronological evidence suggests that Boulton was the instigator of strategic endeavour. However he was apparently duped by Cllr. The Hon. John Fremantle of the LCC. Hayward's subcommittee had no intention of favouring the LPO as the Royal Festival Hall's resident orchestra. The reason was not really a political one to do with Russell, but – as Hayward resolutely claimed from the start – a musical one. They didn't want Boulton, they didn't think he was any good, and the LPO was dropped from consideration at the very time when Boulton was announced as the

orchestra's choice in April 1950. A political issue had ended up being a smokescreen for an aesthetic one.

In the eyes of these aldermen Boult had made his name back in the Thirties and had long since languished. Indeed, it was because of Boult that the LCC failed to provide any new encouragement to the LPO once Russell was sacked. The Finsbury Park concerts were disbanded the next year, and the suburban concerts incrementally dropped.

The orchestra lost at least eight key players, including Riddle who was promptly offered the principal viola seat in Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. His board room experience helped the RPO when in 1961 Beecham died and left the orchestra to fend for itself. That this led to further funding problems between the metropolitan orchestras may itself be considered a subordinate consequence of Russell's sacking - that is, in the redistribution of key players.

The LPO's engagements at the BBC Proms were reduced. The new management tried a number of fresh schemes, including industrial concerts and a fairly successful series in town churches where halfway through the audience had to stand up and sing a hymn. It didn't tour abroad for five years. By 1956 its accumulated deficit had grown to £40,000. The orchestra members agreed to wind up their pension and sick funds to help the ensemble survive. The Board agreed that it was no longer in a position to maintain the LPO on a salaried basis, and Boult resigned. *The Daily Telegraph* headed this news as follows: "Boult leaves LPO – wants more freedom."

It was all the more ironic that in 1956 Boult, using his position as chairman of the British Council Music Advisory Committee, finally secured for the LPO a swansong foreign tour. He ferociously stole it off Sargent who was to visit Scandinavia with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and could fit additional dates in for this special British Council project. But by Boult's "uncharacteristically devious" means - to quote Kennedy - the LPO under his direction became the first British orchestra to visit the Soviet Union. Why did Boult wish to do this? One reason is that he was what is termed a "Friend" of M16, but that's another story.

Meanwhile Russell, who had gained much sympathy as the victim of a witch-hunt, accepted presidency of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, but more



importantly, became managing director of the famous Leftwing house Colletts Bookshops on Charing Cross Road. He died in 1984.

It seems in the end that Russell's big mistake was not a visit to Russia or to China, but to have appointed Boulton – all six foot one of him and his seven-acre estate.