

# Our knavish tricks

by Emanuel Litvinoff

**BLACK BOOMERANG: An Autobiography vol. 2, by Sefton Delmer**  
(Secker & Warburg, 25s)

**M**R SEFTON DELMER'S legendary ingenuity as the perpetrator of brilliant propaganda pranks during the Second World War is known far beyond the confines of Europe. He must surely be one of the most dashing and romantic figures outside fiction, and *Black Boomerang* out-classes, thrill for thrill, most works by masters of the genre of spy-thrillers. It is surely unnecessary to explain that in this book he is describing his activities as head of a special section of the Political Warfare Executive whose task was to demoralise the enemy with counterfeit news and information that pretended to originate from German broadcasting stations. With the aid of a talented group of Englishmen and German refugees, his ghost station *Soldatsender Calais* spread rumour and confusion among the Army and civil population of the Third Reich by pretending to be the voice of a clandestine organisation of super-patriotic military Germans. Another station, *Atlantiksender*, was principally addressed to U-boat crews, and Mr Delmer's was also the fertile brain behind several bizarre forgeries of pseudo-Nazi posters, a handbook for malingerers, "Krank-

helt Rettet," von Dr med. Wilhelm Wohltat, a phoney German astrological magazine predicting disasters, and others. The "boomerang" referred to in the title of his book arises from the fact that *Soldatsender Calais* was often cited after the war as evidence of the underground resistance to Hitler and his SS of the "good" German generals.

The question that arises from all this is whether subversive "black" propaganda, a costly operation if conducted on an adequate scale, is really effective. Mr Delmer is modest on this count, although he shows from Nazi archives that his activities harassed Germany's leaders. We also know from our own experience that the "black" propaganda of "Lord Haw-Haw" was sometimes as demoralising as it was funny, and there was the notable episode of the "Zinoviev" letter that so discredited the Labour Party in the nineteen-twenties. Now we have the busy perpetration of lies, rumour, and practical jokes on both sides in the cold war. But is it really worth it? It has often been said that the only effective propaganda in war is a resounding victory. It would be interesting on this question to have the opinion of Mr Richard Crossman who, as Director of Political Warfare, was the man who controlled "white" propaganda directed at the enemy.