

What Is Propaganda?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *propaganda* comes from the Latin name for a Committee of Roman Catholic cardinals. The committee was called *Congregatio de propaganda fide* or congregation for propagating the faith. It was established in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV to promote Christian missionary work among “the heathen masses” of the New World and to combat the Protestant Reformation in Europe.¹ Gregory knew that it was too late to re-establish Christian unity by force, so he turned to peaceful means of persuasion. As Terence Qualter points out in his 1962 study of propaganda, the Pope’s aim was to persuade people to adopt the Church’s doctrines voluntarily. Qualter writes that the word *propaganda* has been used in three ways:

- At first, it was applied to “any organization set up to propagate a doctrine.”
- In time however, it was used to refer to the doctrine itself.
- And finally it was applied to “the techniques employed in spreading the doctrine.”

Qualter points out that, because of its association with the Catholic church, the word acquired a sinister connotation in the Protestant countries of northern Europe.²

The word’s negative connotations took on added force in the 20th century after the First World War was “sold” to the public in Britain, Canada and the United States as a noble war to end all wars. For the first time, governments conducted extensive and systematic propaganda campaigns to persuade people that this war was worth any sacrifice. Yet, the Great War turned out to be long and bloody.

For the first time, industrial techniques were applied ruthlessly to the systematic slaughter of human beings. Military deaths in the years 1914-1918 have been estimated at eight-and-a-half million with around 13 million civilian deaths.³ The British poet Wilfred Owen wrote the bitter poem “Anthem for Doomed Youth” before dying himself seven days before the Armistice. “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns.”

Philip Knightley, author of a well-known book on war reporting (and propaganda) explained the general principles of the British propaganda campaign in a CBC Radio commentary. According to Knightley, British propagandists followed six principles that have been widely used ever since:

1. Demonize the enemy and its leader.
2. Portray the war as one of civilized nations defending themselves against a menacing aggressor.

¹Propaganda and Persuasion, 2nd edition, by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, Sage Publications Inc., 1992, pp. 53-54. (For more on the Protestant Reformation, see pp. 16-18 in this Portfolio.)

²Propaganda and Psychological Warfare by Terence H. Qualter, Random House, 1962, pp. 3-4.

³“World War I,” Encyclopedia Britannica online, www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=53172

3. Attribute to the enemy all forms of atrocity, true or false.
4. Arouse the patriotic spirit by appealing to past glories and drawing historical parallels.
5. Promise a short war with a minimum of casualties.
6. Exaggerate your victories, play down your defeats.

Knightley has written about the vast scope of the British propaganda campaign designed to prepare the public for further sacrifices. It became a necessity “when the generals, commanding larger armies than the world had ever seen before, could find no way of using them except as fodder for the machine guns.” Knightley adds that “a mood of disillusion with the pointlessness of it all set in.” British authorities had to justify the War: “And so began a great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.” Knightley writes that by the end of the war, Britain had created such a huge propaganda machine that Hitler’s propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels copied it 20 years later to glorify the Third Reich.^{4 5}

No wonder the word *propaganda* acquired such sinister connotations in a century marked by two world wars. ‘Total’ wars such as these required the kind of ‘total’ propaganda that Jacques Ellul wrote about in his landmark study of propaganda published in the 1960s:

Propaganda must be total. The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal — the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing. Modern propaganda must utilize all of these media. There is no propaganda as long as one makes use, in sporadic fashion and at random, of a newspaper article here, a poster or radio program there, organizes a few meetings and lectures, writes a few slogans on walls; that is not propaganda.⁶

Ellul argued that such “total” propaganda is characteristic of the technological society. Before examining his ideas in more detail, we turn to a brief outline of the general social, political and technological conditions that gave rise to modern propaganda in liberal democratic societies such as our own. These conditions have been identified as:

⁴The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker, by Philip Knightley, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, pp. 80-82.

⁵The term “Third Reich” refers to Nazi Germany under Hitler. The Nazis sought to portray Hitler’s Germany as a logical outcome of history. The First Reich, they said, was the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. The Second Reich was founded by Bismarck in 1871 after Prussia defeated France. See The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany by William L. Shirer, Simon and Schuster, 1960, pp. 90-91.

⁶Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes by Jacques Ellul (translated by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner), Vintage Books, 1973, p. 9.

- The rise of industrial capitalism.
- The migration of vast populations from rural areas to urban centres.
- The development of the bureaucratic, nation-state.
- The proliferation of mass media.⁷

As historian Margaret Conrad points out, these conditions arose only recently in Atlantic Canada:

In 1950 there were two Atlantic Canadas, one largely rural and isolated...the other essentially urban and fully integrated into mainstream North American culture...Within ten years, the forces of change would sweep away most of the remnants of the traditional way of life and replace it with highly bureaucratized and centralized structures from which few could escape...For many Atlantic Canadians the change was symbolized by material acquisitions such as electric lights, indoor plumbing, a refrigerator, or that much-prized family car. Others would remember the 1950s as the time when they saw their first television program, received an old-age pension cheque, or took a trip on a school bus.⁸

Conrad captures essential features of the new “way of life” in our “mass society.” Bureaucratic regimentation in school, or at work on the one hand, seductive material rewards on the other. The ubiquitous communications media provide a steady flow of popular entertainment (financed by advertising) to the weary worker and frazzled homemaker.⁹

In the meantime, the welfare state looks after basic aspects of personal security by providing such benefits as universal health care, public education, unemployment insurance, welfare payments and old-age pensions. Governments, backed (more or less) by popular consent “manage” the economy and build or subsidize the vast “infrastructure” of highways, bridges, airports and communications links.

⁷See the essay “Propaganda, Information and Social Control,” by Kevin Robins, Frank Webster and Michael Pickering, in Propaganda, Persuasion and Polemic, edited by Jeremy Hawthorn, E. Arnold publisher, 1987, pp. 1-17.

⁸“The 1950s: The Decade of Development,” by Margaret Conrad in The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation, edited by E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993, pp. 382-383.

⁹For a comprehensive account of advertising’s importance in fashioning new ways of life see Captains of Consciousness: advertising and the social roots of the consumer culture by Stuart Ewen, McGraw-Hill, 1976.

The indispensable pre-requisite for administrative control across the expansive territory of the modern nation-state is, of course, an effective communication and information infrastructure...Only through the extensive flow of communication and information can administrative unity and integrity be assured. In this sense we can argue that the nation-state is essentially and intrinsically an information society.¹⁰

But, in its complexity, the democratic state is also, inevitably, a propaganda society engaged in the “scientific” management of public opinion to defuse conflict and paper over political contradictions. Philosopher George Grant points, for example, to the need to explain away (or justify) stark inequalities:

The very structure of mass society produces impersonal hierarchies of power in which equality can have no substance, particularly equality of participation in economic and political life. This tendency in any industrial society produces added difficulties with our capitalism in which vast accumulations of economic power in private hands and inequalities of possession are the very substance of the system. In such a situation double-think about equality becomes manifest. The popular leaders of governments orate about the glories of equality on the hustings while enacting economic policies which establish intractable inequalities as the very essence of our social life. In such circumstances, talk about equality becomes more and more ritual emptied of belief — part of the equipment of the ‘engineer of consent.’¹¹

Grant argued that propaganda integrated people into an increasingly impersonal society.

The individual is also coerced in what he desires and what he believes to be true by the instruments of mass

¹⁰Robins et al. p. 5.

¹¹“Equality and the NDP,” by George Grant in *The George Grant Reader* edited by William Christian and Sheila Grant, University of Toronto Press, p. 68. Grant wrote his essay in 1960 after being invited, along with Pierre Trudeau and others to help set the direction for a new socialist party to replace the CCF. Grant broke with the NDP in 1962 to support John Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservatives.

communication which press on him from every side, presenting forcefully standards which suit the purposes of big organizations...What is central to his new experience and what distinguishes it from living in the old small town and rural worlds is that the individual is at one and the same time more dependent on big institutions and yet less organically related to them. This has meant inevitably a dying away of the individual's effective participation in politics. The institutions which control us are so powerful and so impersonal that individuals come to believe that there is no point in trying to influence them; one must rather live with them as they are.¹²

Grant argues that individuals find satisfaction in their private lives where they feel more in control. Thus, people tend to see themselves primarily as consumers rather than as citizens — a point of view promoted relentlessly by advertising. Indeed, the late American social critic, Christopher Lasch saw advertising as actually creating “the consumer, perpetually unsatisfied, restless, anxious and bored. Advertising serves not so much to advertise products as to promote consumption as a way of life.” Lasch argued that “the propaganda of commodities” promotes consumption “as an alternative to protest or rebellion...The tired worker, instead of attempting to change the conditions of his work, seeks renewal in brightening his immediate surroundings with new goods and services.”¹³

DEFINITIONS OF PROPAGANDA

There is wide disagreement over how to define propaganda. Many scholars see propaganda as manipulative, deceitful and therefore inherently unethical. The Canadian philosopher, Stanley Cunningham, for example, argues that “it exploits information; it poses as knowledge; it generates belief systems and tenacious convictions; it skews perceptions; it systematically disregards superior epistemic values such as truth and understanding; it corrupts reasoning and the respect for evidence, rigour, and procedural

¹²Grant, pp. 60-61.

¹³The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations by Christopher Lasch, Warner Books, 1979, pp. 137-138. Lasch's idea could be traced back to Karl Marx who coined the term “the fetishism of commodities,” to describe certain aspects of capitalist production in which workers manufacture commodities in exchange for money, a special commodity of its own. Money can then be used to buy other commodities. This impersonal exchange of commodities hides the social or power relations that go into their production. Commodities take on a quasi-religious mystique. See Karl Marx Selected Writings, edited by David McLellan, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 435-443. For an excellent summary that traces the influence of Marx's ‘commodity fetishism’ on other thinkers see the Website, FreeDictionary.com. The site points out for example, that Jean Baudrillard sees advertising as adding a mystique to products encouraging consumers to buy them as aids in constructing their personal identities. encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Commodity+fetishism

safeguards; it supplies ersatz certainties.”¹⁴ Others argue however, that propaganda should be judged by its ends. Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy writes: “There *can* be a virtuous propaganda, when for example propaganda represents an alternative strategy to legal coercion, as demonstrated by the comparison between the very different attempts to deal with the scourge of illegal drugs and that of cigarettes.”¹⁵ Others, such as Jacques Ellul, see propaganda as a necessity for the modern state, even though for him, it is a loathsome necessity.¹⁶ Scholarly definitions reflect these divisions.

1. *Propaganda is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth). Deliberateness and a relatively heavy emphasis on manipulation distinguish propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas. The propagandist has a specified goal or set of goals. To achieve these he deliberately selects facts, arguments, and displays of symbols and presents them in ways he thinks will have the most effect. To maximize effect, he may omit pertinent facts or distort them, and he may try to divert the attention of the reactors (the people whom he is trying to sway) from everything but his own propaganda.*¹⁷
2. *Propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people’s thinking, emotions, and thereby behaviour. The intent of influencing others is hardly objectionable. When we think we disapprove of propaganda, it usually turns out that we really object to its goals or methods. These methods are frequently repugnant. They include manipulating and distorting information, lying and preventing others from finding out the truth. We should deplore dishonesty and cheating — though we must be aware that often there are extenuating circumstances — but to rail against propaganda is useless, for it is an integral part of the modern world.*¹⁸
3. *[Propaganda is] The organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual’s adequately informed, rational, reflective judgment.*¹⁹
4. *Propaganda is the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of*

¹⁴The Idea of Propaganda: a reconstruction by Stanley B. Cunningham, Praeger Publishers, 2002, p. 4.

¹⁵Politics and Propaganda by Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy, The University of Michigan Press, p. 15.

¹⁶Ellul, pp. 118-160.

¹⁷“Propaganda,” Encyclopedia Britannica Online, www.britannica.com. This classic (and comprehensive) definition was written by Bruce L. Smith.

¹⁸The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929 by Peter Kenez, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 4. Kenez argues that when we deplore the existence of propaganda, “we in effect reject mass society.” p. 2.

¹⁹Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion by Randal Marlin, broadview press, 2002, p. 22.

*having the recipient of the appeal come to “voluntarily” accept this position as if it were his or her own.*²⁰

5. *Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.*²¹
6. *[I]t is of the essence of propaganda that it should influence persons to do or to think things which they would not do or think if left to themselves...It is not whether the matter to be propagated is the truth that is of fundamental importance; but whether those whom it is desired to influence are brought to believe in it and act upon it. Propaganda is judged by the skill of its method and the quantity and permanence of its results, not by an inherent excellence of what is propagated.*²²

Jacques Ellul advances his definition of propaganda after 60 introductory pages. He describes it as a partial definition, one that is not exhaustive, unique or exclusive of all others. In the following pages, we look at this definition and attempt to “unpack” it using Ellul’s own explanations. Note: I have slightly modified Ellul’s definition for the sake of greater clarity.

JACQUES ELLUL’S DEFINITION OF PROPAGANDA

*Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions by a mass of individuals [who are] psychologically unified through psychological manipulations.*²³

(a) set of methods

- (1) Modern propaganda is based on the social sciences: psychology and sociology. For example, psychological knowledge of desires, needs, etc.; the sociology of groups, mass influences etc.
- (2) Propaganda is scientific in that it tends to establish a set of rules — rigorous, precise and tested — precise formulas.
- (3) Proper training is needed. Before undertaking an active campaign, it is necessary to make a scientific, sociological and psychological analysis first, for example, by polling, focus groups and other “research.”
- (4) The propagandist is concerned with measuring results as precisely as possible because propaganda is concerned with efficiency.

²⁰Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion by Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, W.H. Freeman and Company, 1992, p. 9.

²¹Jowett and O’Donnell, p. 4. By *cognitions*, the authors appear to mean beliefs or attitudes.

²²Propaganda by Richard S. Lambert, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1938, pp. 9-10.

²³Ellul, p. 61. Ellul “unpacks” his definition in Chapter 1 “The Characteristics of Propaganda” pp. 3-87.

(b) **an organized group**

Propaganda is always organized. An organization is required to try to control the mass media and to use them effectively. Organized groups include advertising agencies, information departments, ratings and circulation bureaus, sales and marketing departments, opinion pollsters and market researchers. Even the Prime Minister's Office.

(c) **active or passive participation**

Propaganda does not primarily try to change opinion. It aims solely at behaviour (participation). The participation may be active or passive: active if the propaganda mobilizes the individual for action (enlisting in the armed forces during wartime, voting, buying a product); passive if the individual does not act directly but psychologically either supports the action or does not protest against it.

(d) **mass of individuals**

The propagandist addresses the individual who is alone in the mass. Isolation in the mass "...is a natural product of present-day society and is both used and deepened by the mass media...the listener to a radio broadcast, though actually alone, is nevertheless part of a large group and he is aware of it." Propaganda uses the remarkable power of the mass media to reach the whole crowd at once, and yet addresses each individual in the crowd. But in reality propaganda only pretends to address the individual. The individual is reduced to an average. Propaganda acts on what the individual has in common with others.

(e) **psychologically unified through psychological manipulation**

The propagandist does not create out of nothing but uses the existing beliefs and myths of a society or civilization. Propaganda uses instinctive popular beliefs, sociological presuppositions, unconscious modes of judgment: "man's aim in life is happiness, man is naturally good, history develops in endless progress, everything is matter." Propaganda uses myths which express the deep inclinations of a society. In our society, the two great fundamental myths on which all others rest are Science and History. And based on them are the collective myths that are our principal orientations: the myth of Work, the myth of the Nation, the myth of Youth, the myth of the Hero.

Ellul writes that there are several kinds of propaganda. Two of them are agitation and integration propaganda.

THE PROPAGANDA OF AGITATION

The propaganda of agitation is revolutionary propaganda. It is often used by groups that seek to overthrow a government or the established order. It has the stamp of opposition. Governments also use this propaganda to pursue a revolutionary course of action. An internal enemy is chosen for attack: e.g. Nazi propaganda to crush Jews, Communists and homosexuals. Hate is generally its most profitable resource. This propaganda breaks habit and normal judgment by involving people in tense and overexcited activity. "In all cases, propaganda of agitation tries to stretch energies to the utmost, obtain substantial sacrifices and induce the individual to bear heavy ordeals. It takes him out of his everyday life, his normal framework and plunges him into enthusiasm and adventure; it opens to him hitherto

unsuspected possibilities and suggests extraordinary goals that nevertheless seem to him completely within reach.” This propaganda is backed up by force.²⁴

THE PROPAGANDA OF INTEGRATION

The propaganda of integration is relatively new. It is now common within Western industrial (consumerist) societies with the United States leading the way. “It is a propaganda of conformity...in Western society it is no longer sufficient to obtain a transitory political act (such as a vote); one needs total adherence to a society's truths and behavioral patterns...(The citizen) must share the stereotypes, beliefs and reactions of the group...Propaganda of integration...seeks to obtain stable behaviour, to adapt the individual to his everyday life...(This propaganda) must be permanent for the individual can no longer be left to himself...Integration propaganda aims at stabilizing the social body, at unifying and reinforcing it.” In ‘consumer’ societies, propaganda persuades people that ‘freedom’ means the freedom to buy, to possess and to move around. This ‘freedom’ brings happiness. The traditional concept of freedom as “freedom of expression” is portrayed as “ideal” and meaningless in everyday life.²⁵

Ellul’s concept of *sociological propaganda* is a crucial element of his analysis. Ellul defines it as:

...the group of manifestations by which any society seeks to integrate the maximum number of individuals into itself, to unify its members’ behaviour according to a pattern, to spread its style of life abroad, and thus to impose itself on other groups.²⁶

Ellul acknowledges that sociological propaganda is more difficult to define than the more easily-recognized political propaganda. Sociological propaganda, he writes, “is based on a general climate” rather than a specific propaganda campaign. It expresses itself for example in advertising, in the movies, in magazines such as the *Reader’s Digest*, in technology and in education. The phrase *The American Way of Life* sums up sociological propaganda in the United States.

This sociological propaganda in the United States is a natural result of the fundamental elements of American life. In the beginning, the United States had to unify a disparate population that came from all the countries of

²⁴Ellul, pp. 70-74.

²⁵Ellul pp. 74-79.

²⁶Ellul, p. 62.

Europe and had diverse traditions and tendencies. A way of rapid assimilation had to be found; that was the great political problem of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The solution was psychological standardization — that is to use a way of life as the basis for unification and as an instrument of propaganda. In addition, this uniformity plays another decisive role — an economic role — in the life of the United States; it determines the extent of the American market. Mass production requires mass consumption but there cannot be mass consumption without widespread identical views as to what the necessities of life are.²⁷

The American Way of Life is supplemented by an American Standard of Living, or in more recent terms, an American Lifestyle — one that prescribes certain patterns of consumption. The family car, for example, brings with it suburbs, shopping malls and the ubiquitous drive-thru, fast-food restaurant. Ellul argues that people come to believe that a particular ‘way of life’ is superior to all others. Then, the world can be more easily divided into *us* and *them*.²⁸

Stanley Cunningham calls Ellul’s concept of sociological propaganda “a major turning point in the history of propaganda analysis.” It shows us that we live in a pervasive environment of mass persuasion.²⁹ In such an environment, Cunningham argues, we come to share a technical “mindset” so that, for example, “the production, packaging, and transmission of all forms of information are dominated by the imperative of *la technique*. By technique Ellul does not mean simply a rag-bag assortment of tricks, but rather, an *ethos*, a social mindset characterized by an inordinate preoccupation with efficiency.” As a result, Cunningham writes, broadcast ratings or print circulation figures, ultimately determine media content.³⁰ It seems “natural” to judge TV news programs by the size of the audiences they attract rather than by the quality of the information they broadcast.

Along with other scholars, Ellul sees propaganda as an essential element of mass society. Many people think that democratic societies are less propagandistic, but Ellul disagrees. He argues that modern propaganda techniques were first introduced in democracies.

²⁷Ellul, p. 68.

²⁸Ellul analyses sociological propaganda in pages 62-70.

²⁹Cunningham, p. 40.

³⁰Cunningham, pp. 102-103.

It is a remarkable fact worthy of attention that modern propaganda should have begun in the democratic States. During World War I we saw the combined use of the mass media for the first time; the application of publicity and advertising methods to political affairs, the search for the most effective psychological methods. But in those days German propaganda was mediocre: the French, English and American democracies launched big propaganda. Similarly, the Leninist movement, undeniably democratic at the start, developed and perfected all propaganda methods. Contrary to some belief, the authoritarian regimes were not the first to resort to this type of action, though they eventually employed it beyond all limits.³¹

Ellul also warns about the effects of the deluge of information that washes over people in the mass communications society.

This claim may seem shocking; but it is a fact that excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him...A surfeit of data, far from permitting people to make judgments and form opinions, prevents them from doing so and actually paralyzes them. They are caught in a web of facts and must remain at the level of the facts they have been given...Thus the mechanisms of modern information induce a sort of hypnosis in the individual who cannot get out of the field that has been laid for him by the information...The more the techniques of distributing information develop, the more the individual is shaped by such information.³²

Although Ellul sees individuals as relatively helpless in the face of “total propaganda,” he argues that people co-operate because propaganda at least gives them some explanation for what otherwise would be a meaningless, threatening and chaotic world. For example, Cold War propaganda reassured Westerners that they were on the side of freedom, while

³¹Ellul, 232-233.

³²Ellul, p. 87.

the Soviet Union was seeking to impose totalitarian communism on the world. Events everywhere could be seen through this prism of freedom versus communism. Thus a civil war in Vietnam became a struggle between the forces of the communist North versus the freedom-loving South — an analysis that grossly oversimplified the actual state of affairs. Ellul emphasizes his point that people subjected to propaganda often go along with it because they need a simplified picture of things. This is one reason why people often choose to read newspaper columnists closest to their own views — as reinforcement for a particular way of seeing the world.

Ellul argues that propaganda must be based on peoples' needs. "All propaganda must respond to a need, whether it be a concrete need (bread, peace, security, work) or a psychological need."³³ People immersed in the news need a sense of coherence in the face of disturbing and confusing events. Similarly, people forced to work harder to meet the ever-increasing demands of technological efficiency, need propaganda to make life meaningful. "The man who is subjected to the demands for efficiency will ask: 'Efficiency for what?' It is then up to propaganda to give him the answer."³⁴

According to Ellul, the modern technological State needs propaganda to induce its citizens to bear heavy burdens such as taxes and war. "Every citizen of a modern state pays more taxes than the most heavily taxed people in pre-Napoleonic days. Then the subject was forced to pay, whereas the free citizen of today must pay for reasons of conviction." Propaganda is needed to produce such conviction. Similarly, the modern state must persuade citizens of the necessity for war. "Nowadays everybody is affected by war; everybody lives under its threat."³⁵

Ellul disputes the idea, popularized by Hitler, that propaganda is based on the Big Lie.

The most generally held concept of propaganda is that it is a series of *tall stories*, a tissue of lies, and that lies are necessary for effective propaganda. Hitler himself apparently confirmed this point of view when he said that the bigger the lie, the more its chance of being believed. This concept leads to two attitudes among the public. The first is: "Of course we shall not be victims of propaganda because we are capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood." Anyone holding that conviction is extremely susceptible to propaganda, because when propaganda

³³Ellul, pp. 36-37.

³⁴Ellul, p. 142.

³⁵Ellul, p. 142.

does tell the “truth,” he is then convinced that it is no longer propaganda; moreover, his self-confidence makes him all the more vulnerable to attacks of which he is unaware.³⁶

Ellul goes on to cite Lenin and Goebbels’ insistence that the facts disseminated as part of a propaganda campaign should as accurate as possible. They insisted that “truth pays off.” Ellul continues: “The truth that pays off is in the realm of *facts*. The necessary falsehoods, which also pay off, are in the realm of *intentions* and *interpretations*. This is a fundamental rule in propaganda analysis...Propaganda is necessarily false when it speaks of values, of *truth*, of *good*, of *justice*, of *happiness* — and when it interprets and colours facts and imputes meaning to them.”³⁷ The same fundamental point is made by Melor Sturua, a former Soviet correspondent. “For propaganda to succeed, the fact itself must be true. If the fact is true, then it is possible to believe the interpretation.”³⁸

Randal Marlin writes that there are strong similarities between Ellul’s work and that of the American theorist, Noam Chomsky. Both see political propaganda as controlled by the military-industrial state, even though there is no “Ministry of Truth.” (as in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four) that forces people to accept certain doctrines or face severe punishment. Instead, western-style propaganda is disseminated through the media by and to an educated intelligentsia — who accept propaganda most readily because they have been prepared for it. “In apparent partial agreement with Ellul, Chomsky saw the media and educational structures as set up in a way ‘to design, propagate and create a system of doctrines and beliefs that will undermine independent thought and prevent understanding and analysis of institutional structures and their functions.’”³⁹

Chomsky’s famous “propaganda model” with its five filters is now dated because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Anticommunism is no longer an overarching filter, although some argue that it has been replaced by anti-Islamic propaganda, by the fear of evil dictators such as Saddam Hussein or by terrorism as the ultimate enemy.⁴⁰ Chomsky outlines his five filters in Manufacturing Consent, a book he co-authored with Edward Herman:

1. The First Filter: Size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media. Chomsky and Herman see huge media corporations as interlinked with other giant businesses and with the

³⁶Ellul, p. 52.

³⁷Ellul, pp. 53-59.

³⁸Quoted in Cunningham, p. 110.

³⁹Marlin, p. 36. Marlin quotation in turn is from Chronicles of Dissent by Noam Chomsky, New Star Books, 1992.

⁴⁰See for example, Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence by Karim H. Karim, Black Rose Books, 2000.

state. Media thus have an incentive to follow the corporate/state policies of what President Dwight Eisenhower in his farewell address called “the military-industrial complex.”

2. The Second Filter: The advertising licence to do business. Chomsky and Herman argue that the media depend on powerful advertisers and therefore do not wish to bite the hands that feed them. Advertisers are interested in a public that is in a ‘buying mood,’ not in people who are ‘challenged’ to think critically about their society.

3. The Third Filter: Media dependence on “experts” who are well plugged into the political, economic and military establishments. Such a dependence tends to push people with unorthodox ideas to the margins where they may never be heard at all.

4. The Fourth Filter: Flak and the enforcers. Chomsky and Herman contend that journalists and the media companies they work for are sensitive to the barrage of criticism they receive from well-funded think tanks and other such groups. “Although the flak machines steadily attack the mass media, the media treat them well. They receive respectful attention, and their propagandistic role and links to a larger corporate program are rarely mentioned or analysed.”

5. The Fifth Filter: Anti-communism as a control mechanism.⁴¹

Chomsky and Herman apply their propaganda model to paired examples of media coverage. For example, they compare the widespread coverage of genocide in Cambodia under Pol Pot to the tiny trickle of stories about the Indonesian genocide in East Timor. “The coverage of Timor actually declined sharply as massacres increased with mounting U.S. support.”⁴²

The authors contend that the U.S. media serve the interests of powerful elites. This explains the double-standards in the coverage of Cambodia and East Timor. Cambodia was an ‘enemy,’ Communist state whose rulers were depicted repeatedly as genocidal monsters while Indonesia was an American ally and a country in which the U.S. had substantial economic interests. And so, what was happening in East Timor received almost no coverage in the U.S. media. “While this differential treatment occurs on a large scale, the media, intellectuals and the public are able to remain unconscious of the fact and maintain a high moral and self-righteous tone. This is evidence of an extremely effective propaganda system.”⁴³

Chomsky and Herman dedicate their book to the late Alex Carey, an Australian scholar who wrote extensively about propaganda and public relations. It may be worthwhile therefore, to review what Carey had to say about the difference between genuine education

⁴¹Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Pantheon Books, 1988, pp. 1-35.

⁴²Chomsky and Herman, p. 285.

⁴³Chomsky and Herman, p. 37.

and manipulative propaganda:

A. Propaganda: “By propaganda, I refer to communications where the form and content is selected with the single-minded purpose of bringing some target audience to adopt attitudes and beliefs chosen in advance by the sponsors of the communications.”

B. Education: “Here, at least ideally, the purpose is to encourage critical enquiry and to open minds to arguments for and against any particular conclusion, rather than close them to the possibility of any conclusion but one.”⁴⁴

SOME TYPES OF PROPAGANDA

Stanley Cunningham provides an extensive list of various categories of propaganda. He includes Jacques Ellul’s propagandas of agitation (sometimes called *agitprop*) and integration. Another especially important type is called **disinformation**. Cunningham writes this term has been used “in recent decades to denote contrived news accounts or reports that have been planted in the news systems of adversary nations, and that are designed to weaken and destabilize the latter.” Cunningham also notes however, that Neil Postman also defines it as *misleading* information — the kind often given in advertisements.⁴⁵

The organizers of the Halifax International Symposium on Media and Disinformation, held in the summer of 2004 defined disinformation as an attempt to mystify and therefore cover up the roots of conflict and/or oppression. They argued for example, that people often don’t understand the Palestinian crisis because the North American media rarely give the full historical background. Instead, Palestinian conflict with Israel comes to be seen as an ‘ethnic clash’ or simply an ‘endless cycle of violence’ that seems irrational or even evil.⁴⁶

Cunningham also refers to **white** and **black** propaganda. White propaganda uses factual and truthful information and people know who is conducting the propaganda campaign. For example, listeners know that radio broadcasts from the Voice of America are financed by the U.S. government. The broadcasts openly give an American point of view. Black propaganda, on the other hand, uses false information and the source is always concealed. Cunningham points to German broadcasts during the Second World War that pretended to be coming from French and British radio stations.

Bureaucratic propaganda is another category that often goes unnoticed. Scholars David Altheide and John Johnson advanced the concept in a book they published in 1980. They defined it as: “Any report produced by an organization for evaluation and other practical purposes that is targeted for individuals, committees, or publics who are unaware of its

⁴⁴Taking The Risk Out of Democracy, Carey, p. 20. Carey’s definition of propaganda differs from Ellul’s. Carey does not stress the importance of mobilizing the individual for participation or action.

⁴⁵Cunningham, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁶For the full definition see the conference Website: <http://halifaxsymposium.ca/invitation.html>.

promotive character and the editing processes that shaped the report.”⁴⁷ The authors argue that public and private organizations routinely engage in bureaucratic propaganda when they issue seemingly ‘objective’ reports, often full of statistics. Such reports serve to portray the organization as useful, effective and unified. Bureaucratic propaganda is spread for example, in police crime statistics or the annual reports of government departments and agencies. It is designed to give organizations the appearance of legitimacy.⁴⁸

Thus, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency advertises itself as “contributing to the quality of Canadian life.” Agency experts labour tirelessly on behalf of everyone. “The CFIA comprises 4,600 people working to meet the demands of domestic and international consumers and markets.”⁴⁹ If, Altheide and Johnson are correct, official CFIA reports are likely to convey the image of a highly-effective government agency. Similarly, the University of King’s College has crafted a “mission statement” that boasts not of what the university hopes to do, but what it is already doing. “The University of King's College serves its community of students and scholars, and its local and national communities, by providing uniquely interdisciplinary education in humanities and in journalism, founded on excellence in teaching and research.”⁵⁰

PROPAGANDA, NORTH AND SOUTH

I have already mentioned Karim H. Karim’s contention that anti-Islamic propaganda may now be a substitute for anti-communism. Here is a short synopsis of Karim’s main arguments from *Islamic Peril*:

[Note: Karim is a professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University in Ottawa. His book won the 2001 Robinson Book Prize awarded by the Canadian Communication Association. The prize is presented to the author of what is judged to be the year's best Canadian book published in either English or French in the field of Communication Studies.]

1. The eve of the twenty-first century saw the photographs of “Islamic terrorists” plastered on the front pages of North American newspapers. Ahmed Ressam, a man of Algerian origins living in Quebec, was caught attempting to smuggle a bomb-making kit into the U.S. on December 14, 1999. This prompted frantic searches by heavily-armed counter terrorist forces of both sides of the border in places that included “Little Pakistan” in Brooklyn, New York. This led to the arrests of four others suspected of being part of a plot to carry out “millennial attacks” during New Year’s celebrations. Media speculation centred around the links of these people to the Algerian GIA (“Armed Islamic Group”) and to the

⁴⁷Bureaucratic Propaganda by David L. Altheide and John M. Johnson, Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1980, p. 5.

⁴⁸Altheide and Johnson, pp. 1-43.

⁴⁹“Canadian Food Inspection Agency Factsheet,”
www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpaffr/publications/prog/agence.shtml

⁵⁰“Mission Statement,” www.ukings.ns.ca/kings_2880.html

current incarnation of global arch-terrorist, Osama bin Laden. Muslim communities were faced once again with descriptions of “Islamic terror group,” “Islamic terrorists,” “Islamic militants,” “violent Islamic group,” “Islamic fundamentalists,” “Islamic extremism,” “Islamic radicalism” etc., in which Islam is a synonym for fanaticism and senseless violence. (From the Preface, pg. viii, emphasis added.)

2. Karim divides the world into the *North* consisting of the rich, industrial nations and the *South* consisting of poor, former colonies. He writes: “The North,” which is used here primarily as a geopolitical, economic and cultural term rather than a geographical one, comprises...[the] United States, Canada, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Israel...Northern societies have Eurocentric world views and Southern ones generally share the cultural subordination (which comes from being former colonies of Northern powers) and the disadvantages of global economic structures that are largely weighted in favour of the North...”Muslim societies” are considered part of the South, even though there are a number of indigenous and immigrant Muslim communities in the northern hemisphere.” (pg. 7)

3. Karim quotes the British journalist Robert Fisk, who serves as the Middle East correspondent for the London-based newspaper *The Independent*. He says Fisk provides *alternative* viewpoints to most other Northern journalists. The quotation from Fisk appears on pg. 39: “...‘terrorism’ no longer means terrorism. It is not a definition; it is a political contrivance. ‘Terrorists’ are those who use violence against the side that is using the word. The only terrorists whom Israel acknowledges are those who oppose Israel. The only terrorists the United States acknowledges are those who oppose the United States or their allies. The only terrorists Palestinians acknowledge — for they too use the word — are those opposed to the Palestinians.” [This quotation is from Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War by Robert Fisk, Oxford University Press, 1990, pg. 441]

4. Karim argues that Northern journalists generally use the term *violence* narrowly to refer to actual physical violence carried out by “terrorist” villains. “Mainstream journalists help sustain consensus on the moral order that supports the *status quo* by portraying state agents [soldiers, police etc.] as heroes who apply force in the cause of national security, terrorists as villains who use it to destroy life and property, and citizens as victims whose security is maintained by state agents and threatened by terrorists.” (p. 19)

5. Karim identifies other kinds of violence that Northern media rarely recognize: “Johan Galtung, a renowned scholar of peace studies, provides useful analytical concepts to study violence. He offers the notion of ‘structural violence,’ manifested in the denial of basic needs (poverty), human rights (repression) and ‘higher needs’ (alienation) as distinct from direct or ‘classical’ violence, thus allowing for the placing of violent actions within a larger framework that takes into account historical and social situations from which they arise. Consequences of systemic institutional behaviour that does not involve direct, physical force but that, nevertheless leads to alienation, deprivation, disability or death, as under poor working conditions, is also not usually described as violent in dominant political discourses. However, direct, forceful reactions to such structural violence are invariably

called violent. As no immediate violent causes can be uncovered for such (re)actions within dominant conceptualizations of violence, they are often described as being irrational.” (Pp. 19-20)

6. “Economic dominance of the North, particularly that of Western countries, is a remnant of the essentially violent colonial period during which the bases of presently-existing global trading structures were forcibly established. The massive historical violence that helped shape the political map of the world is rarely questioned in contemporary narratives of dominant international discourses. Individuals and states which challenge the current configurations of power in the international system with violence are termed ‘international terrorists’ and ‘terrorist states.’” (pg. 28)

7. “The dominant construction of the ‘war against terrorism’ as a conflict between the forces of civilization and barbarism has deep cultural roots...These historic stereotypes...view the North as the domain of rationality, order and democracy, and the South (particularly Muslim societies) as that of irrationality, instability and tyranny...Whereas the modern liberal state in the North is viewed as being only nominally Christian, its Muslim antagonist is generally seen as still holding on to the beliefs perceived as being integral to barbarism. Therefore...the Eurocentric civilization is pitted against the barbaric world, which throws up the challenges of ‘Islamic terrorism,’ ‘narco-terrorism,’ ‘nuclear terrorism’ etc. that the former has to contain forcefully. In this way the hegemonic status of certain states on the global stage merges with older world views to create a *dramatis personae* of heroes and villains who engage in a violent struggle that defines the global moral order.” (pg. 29)

8. “...the Western Christian Self tends to view itself as essentially restrained and non-violent in juxtaposition to the image of the Muslim Other driven to killing by fanatical frenzy.” (pg. 38) Hence the frequent media misuse of the term *jihad* as a synonym for “holy war.” Karim points out that *jihad* is a much more complex term meaning “effort,” “exertion,” or “struggle.” “Whereas other Arabic words such as *harb* (war) and *qital* (fighting) specifically denote bloodshed, jihad does not necessarily involve physical conflict...Northern journalists, who usually translate jihad as ‘Islamic holy war,’ are generally unaware of the debates in Muslim discourses on the nature of jihad...or even the similarities between jihad and Northern conceptions of holy war/just war. Their work, adhering to the dominant Northern discourses on Islam, serve(s) to make an *essential* link between jihad and terrorism.” (pp. 42 & 53)

PROPAGANDA AND HEGEMONY

Karim H. Karim also refers to the concept of *hegemony* in his analysis of global propaganda. The word is from the Greek *hegemon*, meaning leader or ruler. Since the 19th century, hegemony has been used to refer to the dominance of one state over others. It is similar in its meanings therefore to the word *imperialism*.⁵¹ Sometimes hegemony refers to

⁵¹The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, (Third Edition) edited by Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, p. 387.

the process of making imperial domination seem “natural.” Karim argues that when the dominant, Northern nations, led by the U.S. are involved in confrontations with Southern opponents, the transnational media — based in the North — largely align themselves with the hegemonic position. “This had led to the growth of a global media narrative in which civilized nation states led by the U.S. are besieged by ‘Terrorism International.’”⁵²

The word *hegemony* acquired an additional meaning in the 20th century in the writings of the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Gramsci used the word to denote the predominance of one social class over others. Thus, we might refer for example, to *bourgeois hegemony*. “The feature which this usage stresses is not only the political and economic control exercised by a dominant class but its success in projecting its own particular way of seeing the world, human and social relationships, so that this is accepted as ‘common sense’ and part of the natural order by those who are in fact subordinated to it.”⁵³

In his book Endless Propaganda, media historian Paul Rutherford discusses this aspect of hegemony in some detail. He writes: “Hegemony is not just about power, but about power that is routine, institutionalized, organized, and generally accepted — in short legitimate power or authority.” Rutherford goes on to note that one obvious dimension of hegemony is governance. Thus, the dominant social class governs in its own interests. But at the same time, it tries to make those particular interests seem legitimate for society as a whole. Governments dominated by business interests for example, might argue that policies that are good for the business class are ultimately good for everyone. A famous quotation from Charles Wilson, a former president of General Motors reflects this. In testimony before the U.S. Senate, Wilson remarked: “For years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors and vice versa.”⁵⁴ Rutherford writes that an elite social class exercises hegemony using “means of persuasion and display” such as the mass media. Professionals, artists and intellectuals work on behalf of the elite class “and are rewarded with money and status, even a share of power for their efforts.”⁵⁵

Rutherford also writes that a hegemonic class does not normally need to use physical force although the “threat of official violence still lurks behind the institutions of authority.” If the dominant class produces successful propaganda it appears legitimate without any need for physical coercion. Thus, propaganda reduces the cost of exercising power. Rutherford adds: “The ordinary folk must accept authority: they are complicit in their own subordination...The consent of the governed is often passive rather than active, reluctant or

⁵²Karim, p. 30.

⁵³Bullock and Trombley, pp. 387-388.

⁵⁴The Oxford Book of Modern Quotations, edited by Elizabeth Knowles, Oxford University Press, 2002, *Oxford Reference Online*.

⁵⁵Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods by Paul Rutherford, University of Toronto Press, 2000, p. 45.

temporary or even cynical, a combination of both belief and disbelief.”⁵⁶

The governed give their consent, sometimes grudgingly but it is never final. Rutherford writes that the hegemonic elite must constantly work to justify the legitimacy of their power. He argues this is why the elite encourage endless discussion and display, but within limits:

Authority must also try to determine what is permissible, eccentric or transgressive, what can be said or shown, even how the permissible will be expressed. The obverse of this is equally important: hegemony normally involves a process of silencing or rendering invisible, a series of prohibitions, and it is here that the element of repression enters the picture. The purpose of policing is to ensure that ‘subordinate groups lack the language necessary to conceive concerted resistance,’ in the words of the historian Jackson Lears. Little wonder that one of the headquarters of hegemony is the mass media.⁵⁷

In The Fall of Public Man, Richard Sennett argues that bourgeois politicians commonly use their personalities and private lives to legitimize their public policies:

We are likely to describe as a “credible” or “charismatic” or “believable” leader, someone who can make appeals to groups whose interests are alien to his own beliefs, constituency or ideology. In modern politics it would be suicide for a leader to insist: Forget about my private life; all you need to know about me is how good a legislator or executive I am and what action I intend to take in office. Instead, we get excited when a conservative French President has dinner with a working-class family, even though he has raised taxes on industrial wages a few days before, or believe an American President is more “genuine” and reliable than his disgraced predecessor

⁵⁶Rutherford, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁷Rutherford, p. 46.

because the new man cooks his own breakfast.⁵⁸

[IN]FAMOUS PROPAGANDA PRACTITIONERS AND THEORISTS

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 - 1527):

Machiavelli was a political thinker in Florence who wrote a classic political text called *The Prince*. In their book *The New Propaganda*, James Combs and Dan Nimmo write that Machiavelli “was one of the first analysts to grasp the nature, and requirements of modern politics. He foresaw that the nation-state would eventually become the prototypical modern political organization.” He also realized that the printing press had changed the world giving rise to a new public composed of a new educated commercial class. This new ‘public’ with its shifting political allegiances and diverse interests would have to be taken into account if political leaders hoped to govern effectively. “Machiavelli argued that in earlier political eras the two cardinal means of power had been force (*forza*) and cunning or fraud (*frauda*), corresponding with his view that the princely ruler is both lion and fox.” But in the newly-emerging large, centralized states, he believed that force and fraud could no longer subdue restless populations with their relentless political demands.⁵⁹

Machiavelli theorized that rulers who wished to remain in power would have to learn to understand and cultivate public opinion. “The study of the techniques of wielding power must include those of commanding opinion by propagating ideas that appeal to and shape political imagination. For Machiavelli, the political logic of creating mass political opinion was an imperative for successful ruling, what he called *necessita*, or political necessity.” The trick, as Machiavelli saw it, was to fuse the many viewpoints of individual citizens into one common opinion — an opinion shaped and defined by the ruler. He believed however, that public opinion could be unruly — a torrential river — often shaped by events beyond the ruler’s control. For Machiavelli, rulers would be forced to ride out the storms of public controversy governing by cultivating popular illusions.⁶⁰

Combs and Nimmo quote from *The Prince* to show Machiavelli’s estimate of the public mind:

Men are so simple of mind, and so much dominated by their immediate needs, that a deceitful man will always find plenty who are ready to be deceived...The masses are always impressed by the superficial appearance of things, and by the outcome of an enterprise. And the world consists of

⁵⁸*The Fall of Public Man* by Richard Sennett, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 25. For their own reasons, journalists like to “personalize” public figures. They feel it makes for more interesting political reporting. Thus, journalists tend to cooperate with those who exercise power, although there are times when the news media focus on what are seen as “bad” character traits. The Clinton/Lewinsky saga is a good example.

⁵⁹*The New Propaganda: The Dictatorship of Palaver in Contemporary Politics* by James E. Combs and Dan Nimmo, Longman Publishing Group, 1993, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰Combs and Nimmo, pp. 36-37.

nothing but the masses; the few have no influence when the many feel secure.⁶¹

Machiavelli wrote that rulers should always appear to be honest, merciful, religious and good, but he quickly added that it was not necessary to actually practise these virtues. In fact, there would be times when rulers would have to deceive and dissemble to maintain their hold on power.⁶²

V.I. Lenin (1870 - 1924)

Lenin founded the Russian Communist Party and led the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. He became the first head of the Soviet state. In his 1902 pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin drew a distinction between *propaganda* and *agitation* also known as *agitprop*. He wrote that the propagandist primarily uses the print media to explain the causes of social ills such as unemployment or hunger. The agitator, on the other hand, uses emotional speech to arouse people to indignation or action. “Agitation is thus the use of political slogans and half-truths to exploit the grievances of the public and thereby to mould public opinion and mobilize public support. Propaganda, by contrast, is the reasoned use of historical and scientific arguments to indoctrinate the educated and so-called ‘enlightened’ members of society, such as party members.”⁶³

According to Randal Marlin, Lenin saw propaganda as a form of political education. He used an army of agitators to stir people up. “The agitator identifies the most striking concern of his audience — for example, the death through starvation of a group of the unemployed — and, building on this well-known fact, puts all his efforts into getting across a *single idea*: that of the absurd contradiction between the simultaneous increase in riches and of poverty.” The agitator then incites mass anger against this blatant injustice. The propagandist explains the political reasons for this contradiction more completely in printed form.⁶⁴

Once in power, the Bolsheviks faced the huge task of integrating 170 million people into the new Soviet state. Much of the population was rural, illiterate and hungry. The task required a huge propaganda network:

Lenin mobilized every available form of communication (and entertainment) to meet this goal: the press, educational institutions, the arts and even science all became part of the intensive internal propaganda system designed to play the central role in the creation of a Communist

⁶¹Combs and Nimmo, p. 37.

⁶²The Prince by Niccolò Machiavelli (translated by W.K. Marriott) Chapter XVIII, www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm

⁶³“Agitprop,” Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005, <www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9004041>.

⁶⁴Marlin, p. 77.

state. Controlled from the top, the arms of the Soviet propaganda machine reached into every aspect of Russian life, down to the local level where clubs and other quasi-social organizations received political education from trained propagandists. The establishment of reading rooms in even the smallest villages encouraged guided discussions, while films were accompanied by question and answer sessions. All of this was under the control and tight supervision of the Agitational-Propaganda Section of the Central Committee of the Communist party, known as Agitprop, which was attached to every division of the Communist party down to the smallest local cell.⁶⁵

Adolph Hitler (1889 - 1945)

Adolph Hitler, held the twin titles of Führer of Nazi Germany (1933-1945) and Chancellor (1934-1945). Hitler believed strongly in the power of propaganda. In his autobiographical book, Mein Kampf (“My Struggle”) published in two volumes in 1925 and 1927, Hitler wrote that propaganda was a weapon — “a frightful one in the hand of an expert.”⁶⁶ Once in power, Hitler appointed an “expert” to oversee Nazi propaganda. As Minister of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment, Joseph Goebbels shared Hitler’s disdain for the masses the Nazis tried to manipulate. As Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf:

The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan. As soon as you sacrifice this slogan and try to be many-sided, the effect will piddle away, for the crowd can neither digest nor retain the material offered. In this way the result is weakened and in the end entirely cancelled out. Thus we see that propaganda must follow a simple line.⁶⁷

In Mein Kampf, Hitler devoted two chapters to his ideas on how to use the propaganda weapon effectively. He repeatedly stressed the need for simple messages and slogans that appeal to people’s emotions. Popular sentiment, he wrote, “does not have multiple shadings; it has a positive and a negative; love or hate, right or wrong, truth or lie, never half this way and half that way.” Propaganda “must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over...only after the simplest ideas are repeated thousands of times will the masses finally remember them.” Hitler added that “advertising, whether in the field of business or politics, achieves success through the continuity and sustained uniformity of its

⁶⁵Propaganda and Persuasion (2nd Edition) by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, Sage Publications, 1992, p. 175.

⁶⁶Mein Kampf, by Adolph Hitler, (translated by Ralph Manheim), Mariner Books, 1999, p. 179.

⁶⁷Hitler, pp. 180-181.

application.”

[A] slogan must be presented from different angles, but the end of all remarks must always and immutably be the slogan itself. Only in this way can the propaganda have a unified and complete effect. This broadness of outline from which we must never depart, in combination with steady, consistent emphasis, allows our final success to mature. And then, to our amazement, we shall see what tremendous results such perseverance leads to — to results that are almost beyond our understanding.⁶⁸

Jowett and O’Donnell write that Hitler and Goebbels “probably understood the propaganda potential of the mass media better than anyone else alive.” They played on the demoralized condition of the German people who were searching for ways to restore the confidence they had lost after Germany’s defeat in the First World War.⁶⁹ The Great Depression of the 1930s with its high levels of unemployment had also shattered people’s confidence. The Nazis seemed determined to put the masses back to work as Germany rearmed.

Randal Marlin writes that Hitler and Goebbels “provided the world with mass manipulation and multi-layered propaganda in a variety and scale never before seen.” In 1933, all of the mass media came under Nazi control and all could be used to spread propaganda.⁷⁰ Jowett and O’Donnell argue that the Nazis used radio especially effectively.

It was with radio that the Nazis achieved their greatest success, and this medium was used extensively as the primary medium of official propaganda. The importance of radio was stressed when the Nazi government produced a cheap, one-channel radio set for the masses (the *Volksempfänger*), and eventually introduced compulsory installation of radios with loudspeakers in restaurants, factories, and most public places...Radio was also the perfect medium for communicating the almost religious fervour of Nazi spectacles, with the rhythmic chants of “Seig Heil,” the enthusiastic applause, and the power of Hitler’s or Goebbels’ speaking style.⁷¹

This use of radio reflected Hitler’s belief that “men are won over less by the written than by the spoken word, that every great movement on this earth owes its growth to great orators and not to great writers.”⁷²

⁶⁸Hitler, pp. 183-185.

⁶⁹Jowett and O’Donnell, p. 186.

⁷⁰Marlin, p. 80.

⁷¹Jowett and O’Donnell, p. 187.

⁷²See Hitler’s preface to Mein Kampf.

The Nazis spread a propaganda of grandeur using mass torchlight rallies and impressive architecture to inspire popular confidence. They adopted carefully-designed symbols, such as the swastika, the eagle and the flag. They created a Nazi anthem, the Horst Wessel song to celebrate the life of a young Nazi who died in 1930. The filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl created the 1935 film *Triumph of the Will* in which she portrayed Hitler as a god descending on Nuremberg from the clouds in his plane. The film also showed the handsome young men of the Hitler Youth and thousands of newly-confident German workers chanting during the 1934 Nuremberg rally to celebrate the Nazi party's elevation to power.

Nazi propaganda sought to spread Hitler's racial theories, extolling 'Aryan purity,' while depicting Jews as lice and rats.

In fact, anti-Semitism became the underpinning of the Nazi propaganda campaign, as the Jews were blamed for everything that was wrong with Germany and the West. Jews were called decadent capitalists or godless Bolsheviks at the same time; it did not matter that much of the rhetoric was clearly contradictory, for Hitler's principles of propaganda required that a scapegoat be found, and anti-Semitism served both political and social ends. Through the persistent reinforcement of these messages, Hitler was able to achieve a fiery nationalism by convincing the German people that ridding themselves of Jews would create an undefiled, uncorrupt, pure Aryan nation.⁷³

Randal Marlin notes that the Nazis also used terror to reinforce their propaganda. "For those who were recalcitrant, there were the death camps."⁷⁴ Jowett and O'Donnell conclude that in the end, "Hitler's domestic propaganda campaigns were successful, and it was only defeat on the battlefield that finally ended the terror within Germany."⁷⁵

⁷³Jowett and O'Donnell, p. 194.

⁷⁴Marlin, p. 80.

⁷⁵Jowett and O'Donnell, p. 194.