

Introduction

The specter of the omnipotent but amoral propagandist now haunts the educated and semi-educated strata of society.
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What might this instrument of measureless blackmail and most shameful humiliation not have become in the hands of a government mindful to whip up national passions to boiling point! How might propaganda of genius not turned to account its sadistic cruelties in order to transform the indifference of the people into indignation, and its indignation into hottest rage....But to do this everything from child's story-book to the last newspaper, every theatre, every cinema and every advertisement hoarding must be brought into the service of this single mission until the panic-stricken prayer of our patriotic societies today: "Lord, set us free!" becomes, even in the brain of the smallest boy, the glowing plea: "Almighty God bless our arms on the day; be just as Thou ever wast. Judge now whether we merit freedom; Lord bless our fight!" All this has been neglected and nothing done.⁽²⁾

This is a book about propaganda, one more on a mounting pile of comments on a subject that has attracted scores of political scientists and sociologists over the past four decades. Its justification is that increasing interest in

propaganda has led to greater concentration and specialization so that although there are today admirable new books on the processes of propaganda analysis or the factors that make some individuals more susceptible than others to the appeals of propaganda, and carefully prepared case-studies on the use of one special technique in one special set of circumstances, there are few up-to-date books that reduce this mass of specialized data to a systematic, coherent theory of propaganda. I have attempted here to provide such a synthesis, a book that, after surveying the field of literature on propaganda, presents in brief form a guide to the nature, mechanics, and ethics of social control through propaganda.

There have always been propagandists, some extremely skilled, but the continuing, institutionalized, large-scale attempt at mass political persuasion is a modern phenomenon, not fully developed before the First World War. The study of propaganda is even more recent for, apart from a few pioneering works at the turn of the present century, very little was written before 1930.

Any serious study of propaganda would seem to require, as a very minimum, agreement on the subject matter of that study. But to a large extent this has not yet been achieved. For the most part general treatises on propaganda have included purely nominal definitions drafted to support each

author's particular line of argument. One of the tasks of this book, therefore, has been to consider the most important attempts to define the concept of propaganda, testing each first of all against the logical requirements of any good definition, and secondly against the actual activities of real propagandists. From this a new definition has been formulated, a definition which appears broad enough to embrace the full range of propaganda techniques and tactics and, at the same time, restrictive enough to distinguish propaganda from other related forms of activity.

Important to an understanding of propaganda is a knowledge of how and why it developed both as an activity and as an academic study. The answer is found in a peculiar combination of forces first appearing in nineteenth-century industrial society. The combined influence of Liberal and Rationalist philosophies, the extension of the franchise and the need to find methods of political persuasion to replace bribery and violence, the growth of population and its concentration in cities, a revolution in the technical means of communication commencing with the railways and culminating in radio and television, a rise in the general standard of living giving greater opportunities and incentives to take part in political activity, the spread of literacy, the beginnings of experimental psychology with its emphasis on the importance of unconscious and non-rational

motivations, and the practical trial-and-error methods of commercial advertising, together produced a demand for large-scale persuasion, a technique of social control, the physical means of mass communication, and an audience equipped to absorb such appeals. Inevitably propaganda became a matter for the skilled professional rather than the inspired amateur.

But while politicians were beginning to use propaganda, and political scientists were beginning to study its machinery, there was little popular recognition of propaganda until the First World War. In addition to those special characteristics of nineteenth-century society which had led to the emergence of propaganda, the ideological character of the 1914-1918 war and the unprecedented nature of its operations played a further important part in stimulating greater interest in, and awareness of, propaganda. The effectiveness of Allied propaganda in hastening the collapse of German morale, or at least a general belief in its effectiveness, ensured that the propagandist would assist in the planning of every major military and political struggle from then on. The study of propaganda activities from 1914 to 1918 is also important in that it demonstrates the enormously wide range of activities regarded by propagandists as coming within the legitimate scope of their interest. Although most popular writing today

regards propaganda essentially as a matter of lies and false claims, the men who were actually engaged in propaganda emphasized again and again that while they frequently sought to deceive both the enemy and the people on their own side, whenever possible they told the truth because the truth made more effective propaganda.

Once the war was over the flood of memoirs began. Then, as bit by bit the exploits of British, American, French and German propagandists became public knowledge, and as the Bolsheviks stepped up their campaign for international revolution, propaganda became a subject for intensive academic study. A difficulty arose from an unresolved confusion between propaganda meaning simply the propaganda of ideas, something undertaken by all belligerents, and propaganda meaning something basically dishonest which only the "enemy" did. Many who stated that they were considering propaganda in the first sense, demonstrated by their conclusions that they really thought of it in the second sense.

Propaganda is, of course, more than a definition. An understanding of the successes and failures of the propagandist requires also a knowledge of the techniques of propaganda, the machinery by which the propagandist conveys some idea to a larger audience. Propaganda, to be effective, must be seen, remembered, understood and acted

upon. To achieve these aims it must be psychologically sound and adapted to the particular needs of the situation and the audience at which it is directed. Success also demands the selection of the most suitable means of communication, each of which has distinctive advantages and disadvantages. The study of propaganda thus extends into a study of communication media, of the relative strengths and weaknesses of press, film, radio and billboards, of the type of effect that might be achieved through the adoption of a distinguishing uniform, of the allies that might be gained, or lost, by writing a book or staging a parade complete with elephants and majorettes.

It is at this stage of tactical and strategical planning that propaganda evolves into psychological warfare, a form of combat exploited to the full by the Nazis and now the basis of the Cold War. Psychological warfare is the use of military, economic and political actions in conjunction with propaganda to demoralize the enemy, to discourage neutrals from joining him and to preserve morale at home. An enemy army will surrender only when it is no longer capable of effective resistance, but the number of lives that must be lost and the amount of material that must be destroyed before an army decides that further resistance is hopeless are relative values that can be affected by psychological warfare. Originally psychological warfare was designed as a

preliminary to military action, demoralizing the enemy soldiers before the attack was launched, or as an aid to military action, hastening and cutting the cost of victory. Today it has become a substitute for military action. The Cold War is a bitterly fought contest in which each side makes a determined show of strength in order to discourage the other from attacking and while this goes on both sides strive to extend their influence by recruiting the uncommitted nations to their own cause. A defeat in the Cold War could be as real and as final as military defeat and, certainly, it would be followed by military defeat.

When the propaganda tactics of each side in the Cold War are compared, it is soon found that neither side has any inherent natural advantages. The different political systems mean that the East can adopt tactics simply not feasible in a democracy, but although this is true, it is also true that the West is free from the restraints of rigid dogmatism and undue centralism. But apart from these differences in approach the techniques of propaganda available to the modern dictator are not greatly different from those currently in use in the democracies. When one considers the total of all official and private sources of propaganda it can soon be seen that the volume of propaganda appeals in a democracy is almost certainly greater than in a dictatorship of comparable size. Yet, although he is not uniquely skilled in

the arts of propaganda, the dictator appears able to mold the public mind to his will, to twist public opinion in any direction he wishes. The reason for this greater influence is, of course, the ability of the dictator to create a closed environment from which all ideas contrary to those of the official propagandist are excluded. The weapon of the dictator is not so much propaganda as censorship. The "propaganda menace" lies not in the volume or methods of propaganda but in a monopoly control over the means of communication to the exclusion of all propaganda hostile to the established order. Propaganda is a firmly established force in the political life of every modern state. Contrary to popular belief, it need not be a menace to the working of a system of representative democracy. For it is not propaganda that threatens the independence of the individual mind and creates a conditioned mass, but a monopoly control over the means of propaganda in the conditions of a closed society. It is the absence of the stimulus of conflicting ideas and of any alternative policies that result in the unquestioning uniformity of public opinion in the modern dictatorship. The protection of democracy therefore lies not in attempts to restrict or control the activities of propagandists but in providing the means for the propagation of all points of view.
