

Goebbels at Nuremberg — 1934

by Joseph Goebbels

It is difficult to define the concept of propaganda thoroughly and precisely. This is especially true since, in past decades, it was subject to unfavorable, and in part extraordinarily hostile, definitions, on the part of us Germans. First, then, we must defend it. Those abroad sometimes claim that in the past we Germans were particularly knowledgeable in this area, and knew how to apply it, but that unfortunately is not consistent with the facts. We learned the consequences of our neglect all too clearly during the World War. While the enemy states produced unprecedented atrocity propaganda aimed at Germany throughout the whole world, we did nothing and were completely defenseless against it. Only when enemy foreign propaganda had nearly won over the greater part even of the neutral states did the German government begin to sense the enormous power of propaganda. It was too late. Just as we were militarily and economically unprepared for the war, so also with propaganda. We lost the war in this area more than in any other.

The cleverest trick used in propaganda against Germany during the war was to accuse Germany of what our enemies themselves were doing. Even today, large parts of world opinion are convinced that the typical characteristics of German propaganda are lying, crudeness, reversing the facts, and the like. One needs only to remember the stories that were spread throughout the world at the beginning of the war about German soldiers chopping off children's hands and crucifying women to realize that Germany then was a defenseless victim of this campaign of calumny. It neither had nor used any means of defense.

The concept of propaganda has undergone a fundamental transformation, particularly as the result of political practice in Germany. Throughout the world today, people are beginning to see that a modern state, whether democratic or authoritarian, cannot withstand the subterranean forces of anarchy and chaos without propaganda. It is not only a matter of doing the right thing; the people must understand that the right thing is the right thing. Propaganda includes everything that helps the people to realize this.

Political propaganda in principle is active and revolutionary. It is aimed at the broad masses. It speaks the language of the people because it wants to be understood by the people. Its task is the highest creative art of putting sometimes complicated events and facts in a way simple enough to be understood by the man on the street. Its foundation is that there is nothing the people cannot understand, but rather things must be put in a way that they can understand. It is a question of making it clear to him by using the proper approach, evidence, and language.

Propaganda is a means to an end. Its purpose is to lead the people to an understanding that will allow it to willingly and without internal resistance devote itself to the tasks and goals of a superior leadership. If propaganda is to succeed, it must know what it wants. It must keep a clear and firm goal in mind, and seek the appropriate means and methods to reach that goal. Propaganda as such is neither good nor evil. Its moral value is determined by the goals it seeks.

Propaganda must be creative. It is by no means a matter for the bureaucracy or official administration, but rather it is a matter of productive fantasy. The genuine propagandist must be a true artist. He must be a master of the popular soul, using it as an instrument to express the majesty of a genuine and unified political will. Propaganda can be pro or con. In neither case does it have to

be negative. The only thing that is important is whether or not its words are true and genuine expressions of a people's values. During its period of opposition, the National Socialist movement proved that criticism can be constructive, indeed, that in a time which the government is in the hands of destructive powers it may be the only constructive element.

The concept of public enlightenment is fundamentally different. It is fundamentally defensive and evolutionary. It does not hammer or drum. It is moderate in tone, seeking to teach. It explains, clarifies, and informs. It is, therefore, used more often by a government than by the opposition. The National Socialist state, growing out of a revolution, had the task of centrally leading both propaganda and education, uniting two concepts that are related but not identical, molding them into a unity that in the long term can serve the government and people.

Even during the time when we were in the opposition, we succeeded in rescuing the concept of propaganda from disfavor or contempt. Since then, we have transformed it into a truly creative art. It was our sharpest weapon in conquering the state. It remains our sharpest weapon in defending and building the state. Although this is perhaps still not clear to the rest of the world, it was obvious to us that we had to use the weapon with which we had conquered the state to defend the state. Otherwise we faced the danger that we could lose the people even though we had power, and that, without the people, we would lose power. We put what we had learned during our attack on the November pseudo-state in the service of our state. The great wealth of ideas and never failing creativity of our propaganda, proven during our struggle for power, was perfected to the last detail. Now we turned it to serve the state itself, to find meaningful ways and flexible forms to influence the people's thinking. The people should share the concerns and successes of its government. Its concerns and successes must therefore be constantly presented and hammered into the people so that it will consider the concerns and successes of its government to be its concerns and successes. Only an authoritarian government, firmly tied to the people, can do this over the long term. Political propaganda, the art of anchoring the things of the state in the broad masses so that the whole nation will feel a part of them, cannot therefore remain merely a means to the goal of winning power. It must become a means of building and keeping power.

This requires alert attention to the events of the day, and a trained and lively creativity that must include a complete knowledge of the soul of the people. The people must be understood in its deepest depths, or intuitively understood, for only then can one speak in a way that the people will understand. Propaganda must be the science of the soul of the people. It requires an organized and purposeful system if it is to be successful in the long run.

That is what we lacked during the war. That is where our enemy was superior to us. We must make up for that. We must take the techniques and dominance of the other side's opinion apparatus. Which is all they really had, and fill it with the fire of the soul and the glow of new ideas.

Propaganda, too, has a system. It cannot be stopped and started whenever one wishes. In the long run, it can only be effective in the service of great ideals and far-seeing principles. And propaganda must be learned. It must be led only by people with a fine and sure instinct for the often changeable feelings of the people. They must be able to reach into the world of the broad masses and draw out their wishes and hopes. The effective propagandist must be a master of the art of speech, of writing, of journalism, of the poster, and of the leaflet. He must have the gift to use the major methods of influencing public opinion such as the press, film, and radio to serve his ideas and goals.

This is particularly necessary in a day when technology is advancing. Radio is already an invention of the past, since television will probably soon arrive. On the one hand successful propaganda must be a master of these methods of political opinion, but on the other it may not become stale in using them. It must find new ways and methods every day to reach success. The nature of propaganda remains the same, but the means provided by advancing technology are becoming ever broader and far-reaching. One need only consider the revolutionary impact of the invention of radio, which gave the spoken word true mass effectiveness. The technology of propaganda has changed greatly in recent years, but the art of propaganda has remained the same.

Understood in this sense, propaganda has long since lost its odium of inferiority inherited from the past. It holds first rank among the arts with which one leads a nation, It is indispensable in building a modern state. It is something of a connecting link between government and people.

All propaganda has a direction. The quality of this direction determines whether propaganda has a positive or negative effect. Good propaganda does not need to lie, indeed it may not lie. It has no reason to fear the truth. It is a mistake to believe that the people cannot take the truth. They can. It is only a matter of presenting the truth to people in a way that they will be able to understand. A propaganda that lies proves that it has a bad cause. It cannot be successful in the long run. A good propaganda will always come along that serves a good cause. But propaganda is still necessary if a good cause is to succeed. A good idea does not win simply because it is good. It must be presented properly if it is to win. The combination makes for the best propaganda. Such propaganda is successful without being obnoxious. It depends on its nature, not its methods. It works without being noticed. Its goals are inherent in its nature. Since it is almost invisible, it is effective and powerful. A good cause will lose to a bad one if it depends only on its rightness, while the other side uses the methods of influencing the masses. We are, for example, firmly convinced that we fought the war for a good cause, but that was not enough. The world should also have known and seen that our cause was good. However, we lacked the effective means of mass propaganda to make that clear to the world. Marxism certainly did not fight for great ideals. Despite that, in November 1918 it overcame Kaiser, Reich, and the army because it was superior in the art of mass propaganda.

National Socialism learned from these two examples. It drew the correct practical conclusions from that knowledge. The ideal of a socialist national community did not remain mere theory with us, but became living reality in the thoughts and feelings of 67 million Germans. Our propaganda of word and deed created the conditions for that. Mastering them kept National Socialism from the danger of remaining the dream and longing of a few thousand. Through propaganda, it became hard, steely everyday reality.

That which we only imperfectly and inadequately understood during the war became a virtuously mastered art during the rise of the National Socialist movement. Today one can say without exaggeration that Germany is a model of propaganda for the entire world. We have made up for past failures and developed the art of mass influence to a degree that puts the efforts of other nations into the shadows. The importance the National Socialist leadership placed on propaganda became clear when it established a Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda shortly after it took power. This ministry is entirely within the spirit of National Socialism, and comes from it. It unites what we learned as an opposition movement confronting the enemy and under persecution from an enemy system, sometimes more from necessity than desire. Recently some have tried to imitate this ministry and its concentration of all means of influencing opinion, but here, too, the slogan applies: "Often imitated, never equaled."

The organizational union of mass demonstrations, the press, film, radio, literature, theater, etc., is only the mechanical side to the matter. It is not so much that all these means are in one hand. The important thing is that this hand knows how to master and control them. Establishing a central office is not difficult. What is difficult is finding people who are experts in an area previously not a concern of the state.

We could not have done that ourselves if we had not been through the great school of our party. She was our teacher. During 14 years of opposition we gathered an enormous amount of knowledge, experience, wisdom, and ability. This made us able to use the wide-reaching methods of government propaganda without running the risk of losing the spirit behind them. Effective propaganda avoids any form of bureaucracy. It requires lightning-fast decisions, alert creativity and inexhaustible inventiveness. The machinery of the organization would remain lifeless and rigid if it were not constantly driven by the motor of the spirit and the idea.

It is, therefore, also wrong to think that a ministry could replace what the movement alone is able to do. Cooperation between the party and the government was necessary for the major successes that

we are proud of. Only when all means of propaganda are concentrated and their unified application assured is it possible to carry out major educational and propaganda battles, as we did before 12 November 1933 **[the referendum Hitler called to approve Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations]** or 19 August 1934 **[the referendum called to approve Hitler's absolute power after the death of Hindenburg]**, which were of true historical significance.

If such an art of active mass influence through propaganda is joined with the long-term systematic education of a nation, and if both are conducted in a unified and precise way, the relationship between the leadership and the nation will always remain close. From authority and following, that type of modern democracy will develop for which Germany is the model for the entire world in the twentieth century.

That is also the basic requirement for any practical political activity. A government that wishes to be successful over the long term cannot ignore it. Its projects and plans would fail were they not supported by the people. But the people must understand them in order to accomplish them.

One can but smile when one looks over our borders at the efforts of parliamentary-democratic parties that are all concerned with this: "How can I tell my child?" A fear of the people is the characteristic of liberal government theory. It has set the people free, and now does not know what to do with them. The hunt for popularity usually leads to nothing other than concealing the truth and speaking nonsense. One dares not say what is right, and what one does say leads to disaster. But that is presumably what the people want. One no longer has the courage to say unpopular things, much less do them. The result is that major European problems are lost in useless debates while political, economic, and social crises of unprecedented magnitude face the nations.

There are times when statesmen must have the courage to do something unpopular. But their unpopular actions must be properly prepared, and must be put in the proper form, so that their peoples will understand. The man on the street is usually not as unreasonable as some think. Since it is he who usually has to bear the heaviest burdens that result from unpopular policies, he at least has a right to know why things are being done this way and not that way. All practical politics depends on its persuasiveness. It is no sign of wise leadership to acquaint the nation with hard facts over night. Crises must be prepared for not only politically and economically, but also psychologically. Here propaganda has its place. It must prepare the way actively and educationally. Its task is to prepare the way for practical actions. It must follow these actions step by step, never losing sight of them. In a manner of speaking, it provides the background music. Such propaganda in the end miraculously makes the unpopular popular, enabling even a government's most difficult decisions to secure the resolute support of the people. A government that uses it properly can do what is necessary without running the risk of losing the masses.

Propaganda is therefore a necessary life function of the modern state. Without it, seeking great goals is simply impossible in this century of the masses. It stands at the beginning of practical political activity in every area of public life. It is its important and necessary prerequisite.

Let me give several recent examples. I need only sketch the details. They are too fresh in our memories to require elaboration.

There are no parliamentary parties in Germany any longer. How could we have overcome them had we not waged an educational campaign for years that persuaded people of their weaknesses, harms, and disadvantages? Their final elimination was only the result of what the people had already realized. Our propaganda weakened these parties. Based on that, they could be eliminated by a legal act.

Marxism could not be eliminated by a government decision. Its elimination was the end result of a process that began with the people. But that was only possible because our propaganda had shown people that Marxism was a danger to both the state and society. The positive national discipline of the German press would never have been possible without the complete elimination of the influence of the liberal-Jewish press. That happened only because of the years-long work of our propaganda.

Today, particularism in Germany is something of the past. The fact that it was eliminated by a strong central idea of the Reich is no accident, but rather it depended on psychological foundations that were established by our propaganda.

Or consider economic policy. Does anyone believe that the idea of class struggle could have been eliminated only by a law? Is it not rather the fact that the seeds we sowed in a hundred thousand meetings resulted in a new socialist structure of labor? Today employers and workers stand together in the Labor Front. The Law on National Labor is the foundation of our economic thinking, realizing itself more and more. Are not these social achievements the result of the long and tireless labor of thousands of speakers?

What about the shortage of foreign currency? This affects the people in serious ways. Propaganda once again is the key to dealing with the problem.

The Hereditary Farming Law, the idea of the Reich Agricultural System, market regulations in agriculture, all these need propaganda to show the people their importance, which is necessary if they are to succeed.

We could eliminate the Jewish danger in our culture because the people had recognized it as the result of our propaganda. Major cultural achievements such as the unique “Kraft durch Freude” are possible only with the powerful support of the people. The prerequisite was and is propaganda, which here too creates and maintains the connection to the people.

The Winter Relief last year raised about 350 million marks. This was not the result of taxation, but rather many gifts of every amount. Everyone gave freely and gladly, many of whom in the past had done nothing in the face of similar need. Why? Because a broad propaganda, using every modern means, presented the whole nation with the need for this program of social assistance.

45 million Reich marks of goods and services were provided. 85 million Reich marks worth of fuel were distributed. 130 million Reich marks worth of food were given out. Ten million Reich marks worth of meals were provided, and 70 million Reich marks worth of clothing.

Some of these achievements were the result of donations in kind, others the result of cash donations. Street collections, donations of a part of paychecks, contributions from companies, and gifts subtracted from bank accounts resulted in cash totaling 184 million Reich marks. 24 million marks alone were the result of “One Pot Sundays.” **[On some Sundays, people were encouraged to have a simple meal at home, donating the money saved to the Nazi charity.]** The Reich itself added 15 million marks to the contributions of the people. The railway system provided reduced or free shipping with a value of 14 million marks.

Of our population of 65,595,000, 16,511,00 were assisted by the Winter Relief. There were 150,000 volunteers. There were only 4,474 paid workers, of whom 4,144 were in the 34 regional party offices, and 230 at the national headquarters.

Propaganda and education prepared the way for the largest social assistance program in history. They were the foundation. Their success was that, over a long winter, no one in Germany went hungry or was cold.

Over 40 million people approved of the Führer’s decision to leave the League of Nations on 12 November 1933. That gave him the ability to speak to the world in the name of the nation, defending honor, peace, and equality as the national ideals of the whole German people. The issues of disarmament were put on firm and clear foundations. Once again, propaganda was the foundation for the nation’s unity on 12 November, and therefore of the freedom of action that the Führer had in foreign affairs.

Each situation brings new challenges. And each task requires the support of the people, which can only be gained by untiring propaganda that brings the broad masses knowledge and clarity. No area of public life can do without it. It is the never resting force behind public opinion. It must maintain an unbroken relationship between leadership and people. Every means of technology must be put in

its service; the goal is to form the mass will and to give it meaning, purpose, and goals that will enable us to learn from past failures and mistakes and ensure that the lead National Socialist strength has given us over other nations will never again be lost.

May the bright flame of our enthusiasm never fade. It alone gives light and warmth to the creative art of modern political propaganda. Its roots are in the people. The movement gives it direction and drive. The state can only provide it with the new, wide-ranging technical means. Only a living relationship between the people, movement, and state can guarantee that the creative art of propaganda, of which we have made ourselves the world's master, will never sink into bureaucracy and bureaucratic narrow-mindedness.

Creative people made propaganda and put it in the service of our movement. We must have creative people who can use the means of the state in its service.

It is also a function of the modern state. Its reach is the firm ground on which the state must stand. It rises from the depths of the people, and must always return to the people to find its roots and strength. It may be good to have power based on weapons. It is better and longer lasting, however, to win and hold the heart of a people.