

CHAPTER VI: WAR PROPAGANDA

In watching the course of political events I was always struck by the active part which propaganda played in them. I saw that it was an instrument which the Marxist Socialists knew how to handle in a masterly, way and to put to good practical use.

Thus I soon came to realise that the right use of propaganda was an art in itself, and that this art was practically unknown to our bourgeois parties. The Christian Socialist Party alone, especially in Lueger's time, showed a certain efficiency in the employment of this instrument and owed much of their success to it.

It was during the War, however, that we had the best chance of estimating the tremendous results which could be obtained by a propaganda system properly carried out.

Here again, unfortunately, everything was left to the other side, the work done on our side being worse than insignificant. It was the total failure of the whole German system of information—a failure which was perfectly obvious to every soldier—that urged me to consider the problem of propaganda in a comprehensive way.

I had ample opportunity to learn a practical lesson in this matter, for unfortunately it was only too well taught us by the enemy. The lack on our side was exploited by the enemy in such an efficient manner that one could say it showed itself as a real work of genius.

In that propaganda carried on by the enemy I found admirable sources of instruction. The lesson to be learned from this had, unfortunately, no attraction for the geniuses on our own side. They were simply above all such things, too clever to accept any teaching and, in any case, they did not honestly wish to learn anything.

Had we any propaganda at all? Alas, I can reply only in the negative. All that was undertaken in this direction, was so utterly inadequate and misconceived from the very beginning, that not only did it prove useless, but at times harmful. In substance, it was insufficient. Psychologically, it was all wrong.

Anybody who had carefully investigated the German propaganda must have formed that judgment of it. Our authorities did not seem to be clear even about the primary question as to whether propaganda is a means or an end.

Propaganda is a means and must, therefore, be judged in relation to the end it is intended to serve. It must be organised in such a way as to be capable of attaining its objective, and, as it is quite clear that the importance of the objective may vary from the standpoint of general necessity, the essential internal character of the propaganda must vary accordingly.

The cause for which we fought during the War was the noblest and highest that man could strive for. We were fighting for the freedom and independence of our country, for the security of our future welfare and the honour of the nation.

Despite all views to the contrary, this honour does actually exist, or rather it ought to exist, for a nation without honour will sooner or later lose its freedom and independence. This is in accordance with the ruling of a higher justice, for a generation of poltroons is not entitled to freedom. He who would be a cowardly slave cannot have honour; for such honour would soon become an object of general scorn.

Germany was waging war for her very existence. The purpose of her war propaganda should have been to strengthen the fighting spirit in that struggle and help her to victory.

But when nations are fighting for their existence on this earth, when the question of 'to be' or 'not to be' has to be answered, then all humane and aesthetic considerations must be set aside, for these ideals do not exist of themselves somewhere in the air, they are the product of man's creative imagination and will disappear when he disappears from the face of the earth. Nature knows nothing of them.

Moreover, they are characteristic of only a small number of nations, or rather of races, and their value depends on the measure in which they spring from the racial feeling of the latter. Humane and aesthetic ideals will disappear from the inhabited earth when those races disappear which have been their creators and champions.

All such ideals are only of secondary importance when a nation is struggling for its existence. They must be prevented from entering into the

struggle the moment they threaten to weaken the stamina of the nation that is waging war. That is always the only visible effect whereby their place in the struggle is to be judged.

In regard to the part played by humane feeling, Moltke said that in time of war the essential thing is to get a decision as quickly as possible and that the most ruthless methods of fighting are, at the same time, the most humane.

When people attempt to answer this reasoning by high-faluting talk about aesthetics, etc., only one answer can be given, namely, that the vital questions involved in the struggle of a nation for its existence must not be subordinated to any aesthetic considerations. The yoke of slavery is, and always will remain, the most unaesthetic experience that mankind can endure. Do the Schwabing decadents look upon Germany's lot to-day as 'aesthetic'? Of course, one does not discuss such a question with the Jews, because they are the modern inventors of this cultural perfume. Their very existence is an incarnate denial of the beauty of God's image in His creation.

Since these ideas of what is beautiful and humane have no place in warfare, they are not to be used as standards of war propaganda. During the war, propaganda was a means to an end, and this end was the German nation's struggle for existence.

Propaganda, therefore, should have been regarded from the standpoint of its utility for that purpose. The cruellest weapons were then the most humane, provided they helped towards a speedier decision; and only those methods were good and beautiful which helped towards securing the dignity and freedom of the nation.

Such was the only possible attitude to adopt towards war propaganda in that life-and-death struggle. If those in what are called positions of authority had realised this, there would have been no uncertainty about the form and employment of war propaganda as a weapon, for it is nothing but a weapon, and indeed a most terrifying weapon in the hands of those who know how to use it.

The second question of decisive importance is this: To whom should propaganda be made to appeal? To the educated intellectual classes? Or to the uneducated masses?

Propaganda must always address itself to the broad masses of the

people. Propaganda is not meant for the intellectual classes, or what we call the intellectual classes today, which demand scientific enlightenment.

Propaganda has as little to do with science as an advertisement poster has to do with art, as far as concerns the form in which it presents its message. The art of the advertisement poster consists in the ability of the designer to attract the attention of the crowd through the form and colours he chooses.

The advertisement poster announcing an exhibition of art has no other aim than to convince the public of the importance of the exhibition. The better it does that, the better the art of the poster as such.

Although its purpose is to impress upon the public the importance of the exhibition, the poster can never take the place of the artistic objects displayed in the exhibition hall. They are something entirely different.

Therefore, those who wish to study art must study something that is quite different from the poster; indeed for that purpose they must do more than merely wander through the exhibition galleries. The student of art must carefully and thoroughly study each exhibition in order slowly to form a judicious opinion on it.

The situation is the same in regard to what we understand by the word 'propaganda.' The purpose of propaganda is not the scientific instruction of the individual, but rather to attract public attention to certain facts, events, urgent needs, and so on, the importance of which can be brought home to the masses only by this means.

Here the art of propaganda consists in putting a matter so clearly and forcibly before the minds of the people as to create a general conviction regarding the reality of a certain fact, the necessity of certain things and the imperativeness of something that is essential.

As this art is not an end in itself and because its purpose must be exactly that of the advertisement poster, to attract the attention of the masses and not by any means to dispense individual instructions to those who already have an educated opinion on things, or who wish to form such an opinion on grounds of objective study (because that is not the purpose of propaganda), it must appeal to the feelings of the public rather than to their reasoning powers.

All propaganda must be presented in a popular form and must fix its intellectual level so as not to be above the heads of the least intellectual of

those at whom it is directed. Thus, the larger the public to which its appeal is directed, the lower its purely intellectual level will have to be.

When it is a question of bringing a whole nation within the circle of its influence, as happens in the case of war propaganda, then too much attention cannot be paid to the necessity of avoiding a high level, which presupposes a relatively high degree of intelligence among the public.

The more modest the scientific level of this propaganda and the more it is addressed exclusively to public sentiment, the more decisive will be its success, which is the best test of the value of a piece of propaganda, and not the approbation of a small group of intellectuals or artistic people.

The art of propaganda consists precisely in being able to awaken the imagination of the public through an appeal to its feelings, in finding the appropriate psychological form that will arrest the attention and appeal to the hearts of the broad masses.

That this is not understood by those among us whose wits are supposed to have been sharpened to the highest pitch, is only another proof of their vanity or mental inertia.

Once we have understood how necessary it is to concentrate the persuasive forces of propaganda on the broad masses of the people, we can subscribe to the theory that it is a mistake to try to lend propaganda the many-sidedness of scientific instruction.

The receptive powers of the masses are very restricted, and their power of understanding is slight. On the other hand, they quickly forget. Such being the case, all effective propaganda must be confined to a few bare essentials, and these must be expressed as far as possible in stereotyped formulas. These slogans should be persistently repeated until the very last individual has come to grasp the idea that has been put forward. If this principle be forgotten, and if an attempt be made to be abstract and general, the propaganda will turn out ineffective, for the public will not be able to digest or retain what is offered to them in this way.

Therefore, the greater the scope of the message that has to be presented, the more necessary is it for propaganda to choose that plan of action which is psychologically the most efficient.

It was, for example, a fundamental mistake to ridicule the enemy, as the

Austrian and German comic papers made a point of doing in their propaganda. The very principle here is a mistaken one, for, when they came face to face with the enemy, our soldiers gained quite a different impression.

Therefore, the mistake had disastrous results. Once the German soldier realised what a tough enemy he had to fight, he felt that he had been deceived by the manufacturer of the information which had been given him. Therefore, instead of strengthening and stimulating his fighting spirit, this information had quite the contrary effect and, finally, he lost heart.

On the other hand, British and American war propaganda was psychologically efficient. By picturing the Germans to their own people as barbarians and Huns, they were preparing their soldiers for the horrors of war and safeguarding them against delusion.

The most terrific weapons which those soldiers encountered in the field merely confirmed the information they had already received, and their belief in the truth of the assertions made by their respective governments was accordingly reinforced. Thus their rage and hatred against the infamous foe was increased.

The terrible havoc caused by the German weapons of war was only another illustration of the Hunnish brutality of those barbarians, whereas, on the side of the Entente, no time was left for the soldiers to meditate on the similar havoc of which their own weapons were capable.

Thus the British soldier was never allowed to feel that the information which he received at home was untrue.

Unfortunately, the opposite was the case with the Germans, who finally wound up by rejecting everything from home as pure swindle and humbug.

This was possible because at home they thought that the work of propaganda could be entrusted to the first ass that came along, or even to someone who was fairly intelligent in other respects, and they had no conception of the fact that propaganda demands the most skilled brains that can be found.

Thus German war propaganda afforded us an incomparable example of how the work of 'enlightenment' should not be done and how such an example was the result of an entire failure to take into account any psychological considerations whatsoever.

From the enemy, however, a fund of valuable knowledge could be gained by those, who kept their eyes open, whose powers of preception had not yet become dimmed, and who during four-and-a-half years had to experience the perpetual flood of enemy propaganda.

The worst thing of all was that our people did not understand the very first condition which has to be fulfilled in every kind of propaganda, namely, a systematically one sided attitude towards every problem that has to be dealt with.

In this respect, so many errors were committed, even from the very beginning of the war, that it was justifiable to doubt whether so much folly could be attributed solely to the stupidity of people in higher quarters.

What, for example, should we say of a poster which purported to advertise some new brand of soap by insisting on the excellent qualities of the competitive brands? We should naturally shake our heads, and the same is true of political advertisement.

The aim of propaganda is not to try to pass judgment on conflicting rights, giving each its due, but exclusively to emphasise the right which we're asserting.

Propaganda must not investigate the truth objectively and, in so far as it is favourable to the other side, present it according to the theoretical rules of justice, but it must present only that aspect of the truth which is favourable to its own side.

It was a fundamental mistake to discuss the question of who was responsible for the outbreak of the war and to declare that the sole responsibility could not be attributed to Germany. The sole responsibility should have been laid on the shoulders of the enemy, even had this not been strictly true, as indeed it was.

What was the consequence of these half-measures? The broad masses of the people are not made up of diplomats or professors of public jurisprudence nor simply of persons who are able to form reasoned judgment in given cases, but they are a vacillating crowd of human children who are constantly wavering between one idea and another.

As soon as our own propaganda made the slightest suggestion that the enemy had a certain amount of justice on his side, then we laid down the basis

on which the justice of our own cause could be questioned.

The masses are not in a position to discern where the enemy's fault ends and where our own begins. In such a case, they become hesitant and distrustful, especially when the enemy does not make the same mistake, but heaps all the blame on his adversary.

Could there be any clearer proof of this than the fact that finally our own people believed what was said by the enemy's propaganda, which was uniform and consistent in its assertions, rather than in our own propaganda?

This disbelief was, of course, increased by the mania for objectivity which afflicts our people. Everybody began to be careful about doing an injustice to the enemy, even at the cost of seriously injuring, and even ruining, his own people and State.

Naturally, the masses were not conscious of the fact that those in authority had failed to study the subject from this angle.

The great majority of a nation is so feminine in its character and outlook that its thought and conduct are ruled by sentiment rather than by sober reasoning.

This sentiment, however, is not complex, but simple and consistent. It is not highly differentiated, but has only the negative and positive notions of love and hatred, right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Its notions are never partly this and partly that.

Those responsible for English propaganda, especially understood this in a marvellous degree and put what they understood into practice. They allowed no half-measures, which might have given rise to doubt.

Proof of how brilliantly they understood that the feeling of the masses is something primitive was shown in their policy of publishing tales of horror and outrages which fitted in with the real horrors of the time, thereby cleverly and ruthlessly preparing the ground for moral solidarity at the front, even in times of great defeats.

Further, the way in which they pilloried the German enemy as solely responsible for the war—which was a brutal and absolute falsehood—and the way in which they proclaimed his guilt was excellently calculated to reach the masses, realising that these are always extremist in their feeling. Thus it was

that this atrocious lie was positively believed.

The effectiveness of this kind of propaganda is well illustrated by the fact that after four-and-a-half years, the enemy was not only still carrying on his propagandist work, but it was already undermining the stamina of our people at home. That our propaganda did not achieve similar results is not to be wondered at, because it contained the germs of inefficiency by reason of its ambiguity, and because of the very nature of its contents one could not expect it to make the necessary impression on the masses.

Only our feckless 'statesmen' could have imagined that the enthusiasm which is necessary to kindle that spirit which leads men to die for their country could be nourished on pacifist 'slops' of this kind, and so this product of ours was not only worthless but detrimental.

No matter what the amount of talent employed in the organisation of propaganda, it will have no result if due account is not taken of one fundamental principle.

Propaganda must be limited to a few simple themes and these must be presented again and again. Here, as in innumerable other cases, perseverance is the first and most important condition of success. Particularly in the field of propaganda, placid aesthetes and blasé intellectuals should never be allowed to take the lead. The former would readily transform the impressive character of real propaganda into something suitable only for literary tea-parties.

As to the second class of persons, one must always beware of this pest; for, in consequence of their insensibility to normal impressions, they are constantly seeking fresh thrills.

Such people grow sick and tired of everything. They always long for change and will always be incapable of putting themselves in the position of picturing the wants of their less callous fellow-creatures in their immediate neighbourhood, let alone trying to understand them.

The blasé intellectuals are always the first to criticise propaganda, or rather its message, because this appears to them to be outmoded and trivial. They are always looking for something new, always yearning for change, and thus they become the mortal enemies of every effort that is made to influence the masses in an effective way.

The moment the organisation and message of a propaganda movement

begins to be orientated according to their tastes, it becomes incoherent and scattered.

It is not the purpose of propaganda to provide a series of thrills with a view to pleasing these blasé gentry. Its chief function is to convince the masses, whose slowness of understanding needs to be given time in order that they may absorb information; and only constant repetition will finally succeed in imprinting an idea on the memory of the crowd.

Any variation must not alter the main theme of the propaganda, but must always emphasise the same point. The slogan must, of course, be illustrated in many ways and from several angles, but in the end the stress must always be laid on the, slogan itself. In this way alone can propaganda be consistent and dynamic in its effects.

Only by following these general lines and sticking to them steadfastly, with uniform and concise emphasis, can final success be reached. Then we shall be rewarded by the surprising and almost incredible results that such a persistent policy secures. The success of any advertisement, whether of a business or a political nature, depends on the consistency and perseverance with which it is employed.

In this respect also, the propaganda organised by our enemies set us an excellent example. It confined itself to a few themes, which were meant exclusively for mass consumption, and it repeated these themes with untiring perseverance.

Once these fundamental themes and the manner of placing them before the world were recognised as effective, they adhered to them without the slightest alteration for the whole duration of, the war. At first, all of it appeared to be idiotic in its impudent assertiveness.

Later on, it was looked upon as disturbing, but finally it was believed. Four-and-a-half years later, a revolution, the slogans of which were borrowed from enemy war-time propaganda, broke out in Germany.

In England they came to understand something else, namely, that the possibility of success in the use of this spiritual weapon consists in the mass employment of it, and that, when employed in this way, it brings full returns for the large expense incurred.

In England propaganda was regarded as a weapon of the first order,

whereas with us it represented the last hope of a livelihood for our unemployed politicians and a snug job for shirkers of the modest heroic type.

Taken all in all, its results were negative.

