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McGill Guide 9th ed.

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## CHAPTER III

# SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF HATE PROPAGANDA AND THE ROLE OF LAW AND EDUCATION AS CONTROLS

### 1. The Social-Psychological Effects

The volume of hate propaganda in Canada, as we have noted in the preceding chapter, is relatively small and its intensity is geographically concentrated. Most of the material shown to us appears to have come either from outside Canada or from a small number of individuals in Canada out of sympathy with the dominant ideals of Canadian Society.

The Committee is conscious of the fact that many people dismiss this material as being unworthy of public attention, much less legislative action. Some, like Dr. Daniel G. Hill, director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, in his evidence before the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs, believe that the Canadian public, because of its social stability and high standard of living, is relatively immune to extremist anti-Semitic and other "hate" materials.

In view of opinions of this nature which are fairly widespread, we have had to ask ourselves whether we are dealing with a significant social problem at all. Our discussions with officials and certain studies (notably the paper prepared for us by Dr. Harry Kaufmann, Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Toronto and included herewith as Appendix II) have convinced us, however, that a potentially dangerous problem does exist, that the damage which hate propaganda can cause is not necessarily related to its volume, that many normally sensible and decent people are susceptible to it, and that the materials now circulating in this country are deeply hurtful to the minority groups at which they are aimed. Whether and how these groups can be appropriately protected by legislation is discussed in another chapter of this report, but the Committee wishes to register its conviction that hate propaganda, even in its more irrational forms, can and does have a deleterious effect on society, and that it has a tendency to encourage other discriminatory social practices.<sup>(7)</sup>

The committee has received sufficient evidence to indicate that there exists in Canada a comparatively small number of individuals whose attitude to others is irrational and anti-social, and who direct their hostility at specific (usually

<sup>(7)</sup>For a recent Canadian study of Anti-Semitism and "hate" traditions see Cormier, On the History of Man and Genocide, a paper given to 5th International Criminological Congress, Montreal, 1st September 1965.

minority) groups. Whatever the roots on their belief and behaviour, the fact remains that such people exist and that they are capable of doing great damage. We are less concerned with their numbers and identity than with the effect of their activities on others.

In discussing the social-psychological aspects of this problem the Committee is conscious that it is entering a field in which all conclusions are tentative and few things can be scientifically measured. It is also a field in which, as Dr. Karl Stern observed in his testimony to the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs, one must always beware of "l'optimisme de la technique," the naive belief that everything can be done with the scientific knowledge which we now possess or "that we can fix everything scientifically as if society were a piece of plumbing." Yet a considerable amount of study has been done in the field of psychological and psychiatric aspects of group relations. Our observations and comments in this field are summarized under five general headings: the nature of prejudice; the hate propagandist and his audience; the target group; non-legal preventive measures; and the potential social effects of legislation.

a. *The nature of prejudice:* Man is not born with "prejudice", nor does he arrive in the world with any meaningful inborn racial or ethnic differences in intelligence or personality attributes. The overwhelming scientific evidence contradicts widely held misconceptions to the contrary. The way man thinks about himself, about his group and especially about other groups is conditioned by his upbringing, by his family and religious experience, by his education, by his general environment. He has a pronounced tendency to generalize about others as a way of making his world more manageable. Nearly all people, even those of high intelligence, first perceive other people by noticing chiefly those characteristics which their generalized preconceptions lead them to expect. The process also has a reverse effect; psychologists have found that some people, especially members of minority groups, sometimes unconsciously try to live up to what other people expect of them. The knowledge that one belongs to a group which society believes to be emotional and effusive, for example, can often cause an individual to behave in the manner expected. It can also have the opposite effect, causing the individual to react to his stereotype by behaving in an opposite extreme.

There is no question that family upbringing and education (secular and religious) play a very important part in moulding the individual's attitudes toward others, and that they have a bearing on the degree of his susceptibility to persuasion. But it must be recognized that education alone does not and cannot eliminate prejudice. Even highly-educated people can be extremely prejudiced, particularly if they have had early and habitual exposure to it. Their prejudice may take somewhat sophisticated form and expression, but it is there nonetheless. Many well educated people, for example, still believe that persons of different racial stock have varying levels of intelligence, despite conclusive

anthropological, medical and other evidence to the contrary. They also belong to clubs, live in neighbourhoods and manage companies or organizations which practice discreet but cruelly effective forms of racial and religious discrimination.

b. *The hate propagandist and his audience:* some psychologists tell us that the typical hate propagandist (whether an individual or group) will do his best to be attractive to or to be liked by his prospective converts; to appear to be someone of status (by employing a military title, for example, or by citing eminent authors and books); to adopt a facade of total sincerity and altruism; to appear to possess a certain real or potential power; and to have information which is not available to society as a whole.

The typical item of hate propaganda usually makes some or all of the following points: the sender and the recipient share membership in a group which has been cheated of its birthright. They are God-fearing, decent patriotic citizens of a great country which is being run by traitors and dupes. There is an international conspiracy against goodness and democracy. It must be fought and in the fight there is no middle ground. People in the middle are as bad as the enemy itself. Fire must be fought with fire. The situation is urgent. There is an answer ("Support us with your money and we will grow strong enough to eradicate this menace.") Many tracts are vague and unspecific as to what action should be taken beyond political and financial support, but an increasing number of those now circulating in Canada make blunt statements of an intention to expel, liquidate, or exterminate the target group.

The hate propagandist often resorts to pseudo-logic and "Alice in Wonderland" syllogisms: some Jews are known to be Communists; therefore most Jews probably are Communist and communism must be a Jewish plot. He will also attempt to give the impression that no fundamental change of attitude is needed in order to see his point of view: thus murder is described as "liquidation", robbery as "recapturing property which has been stolen from us." Typically he will associate himself with positive values, opening his argument with ringing references to God, Democracy, Patriotism, Decency, etc., and may even attack such non-values as fascism or violence, in this way seeking to ingratiate himself with his audience before expressing his real opinions. His appeal is almost entirely to the emotions. It is usually one-sided and its conclusions, which are normally repeated several times, are always explicit.

How are people affected by these materials? The great majority of individuals are neither extreme bigots nor devoted liberals. Their initial response to some of the cleverer forms of hate propaganda is neither strongly favourable nor instantly hostile. It is with the degree of their acceptance or acquiescence that we must be concerned.

Most psychologists now accept the theory of general persuadability as a personal characteristic: given the right technique and circumstances, human

beings can be persuaded to believe almost anything. Some individuals, of course, are more susceptible than others. Persons of low self-esteem or with a feeling of social inadequacy are consistently more easily influenced than persons without these personality attributes. Highly hostile individuals tend to be less susceptible than persons with little hostility, but on the other hand they also tend to hold generally negative opinions about others, particularly about minorities.

The once widely-held theory that frustration is always the antecedent of aggression has been considerably modified by contemporary psychological research. Frustration can lead to many responses which are not necessarily hostile or aggressive. Yet common sense suggests that an intensely frustrated person is more likely to be receptive to hate literature than someone who takes life as it comes.

c. *Target groups:* We have been discussing perpetrators and recipients, but it is among the victims that hate propaganda may have its most tragic social and psychological consequences. Many psychologists agree that a minority group member sometimes pictures himself as the majority sees him, that there is a tendency for his personality traits to fit the majority's stereotype of him. This self-picture will sometimes include a certain devaluation of self (notable in sociological studies of Negroes) and even an acceptance of the majority group's judgment of inferiority.

There are three ways a target group can respond to prejudice:  
(a) by aggression, (b) by avoidance or (c) by acceptance. The "rioters" in Allan Gardens, Toronto, in the spring of 1965, were an extreme example of the first category, "aggression". But in its commonest form this response to prejudice manifests itself in a determination to strive harder than other people, an effect which, ironically, creates among majority groups the misconception that some racial groups are born cleverer than others.

"Avoidance" of the issue takes such forms as "passing" among Negroes, changes of name among Jews and immigrant groups, and "voluntary" physical and economic segregation. Generally speaking the minority group member's exposure to prejudice decreases inversely with his income and occupational status.

"Acceptance" of prejudice and of one's minority status may be total, specific or unconscious. In its total or wholehearted form it may be accompanied by apathy, resignation or "voluntary" segregation. When acceptance is specific – the commonest form – the individual simply accepts the fact that certain doors are closed to him and makes no effort to change these circumstances. When acceptance is unconscious (the category which is probably most important psychologically) it produces the kind of inner tension which can be either completely demoralizing to an individual or a genuine challenge to him.

It is sometimes suggested that prejudice can produce certain beneficial effects in the minority group. Because its members have to work harder than others if they are to improve their status, a larger proportion of them may be successful in their careers. Similarly their minority status may create a high sense of loyalty to their group and a pride in its achievements. But these occasional and marginal benefits of minority status are heavily outweighed by the cruel economic, social and psychological damage which prejudice can inflict. The knowledge that one is barred, through no fault of one's own, from certain social circles, from clubs and resorts, even from some certain professional activities and industries, is infinitely more degrading and demoralizing than any conceivable advantages of belonging to a minority group.

d. *Non-legislative preventive measures:* No single non-legislative counter attack on hate propaganda can be either foolproof or readily practicable on a large scale. Among the psychological methods and consequences described by Dr. Kaufmann (and others) we mention the following:

*Social pressures against the propagandist:* The propagandist who encounters frequent rebuffs may restrain himself or alter the form of his propaganda. Such a change may modify his behaviour, but does not necessarily imply a change of attitude. No amount of rebuff by the target group is likely to change the propagandist's views.

*Disapproval and discrediting of the source:* Recipients of hate propaganda may be favourably influenced if an individual who is respected in the community takes a strong stand against the propagandist. There is also evidence that propaganda from persons known to have a low status or who are ignorant or have an "ax to grind" is less acceptable to people.

*Group disapproval:* If the recipient belongs to a group (a church, for example) which has actively registered its disapproval of hate propaganda or a hate propagandist, the recipient is more likely to reject the material he receives.

*Discrediting the information:* Accurate counter information sometimes exposes obvious fallacies in hate propaganda and may alter a recipient's attitude toward it, but in a surprising number of cases it fails because the recipient may already be committed emotionally to the attitude advocated by the propaganda.

*Providing insight or "inoculation":* There is evidence that if the recipient of hate propaganda has an understanding of the factors in his personality which make him susceptible to it, his resistance may be increased. It may also be possible to "inoculate" a group with advance doses of the information to which the group is to be made resistant. Both these techniques are difficult to put into effect on a large scale.

*Increasing contacts between recipients and targets:* There is evidence that social contacts do reduce prejudice in some instances, but sociologists have also found that they can aggravate relations between groups.

*Counter propaganda:* This is perhaps the most obvious of all methods for countering hate propaganda, yet it is difficult to select the right technique for a particular situation. Some excellent and promising work has been done in this field, but it is a technique which has limitations.

*Education:* It is in the class room that the most hopeful and effective measures against prejudice can be limited, but surprisingly little formal instruction and virtually no research has been conducted in Canadian schools. Pilot projects carried out in the United States and Britain suggest that inter-group harmony can be enormously improved by carefully planned school programs, though a great deal remains to be learned about precisely which techniques are most effective.

Continuous and careful study of existing programs and the establishment of new ones in this country could reap great benefits. Some useful suggestions for more precise research in this field are outlined in Dr. Kaufmann's study and the Committee commends them to the attention of Canadian educators.

e. *The social effects of legislation:* The manifestations of prejudice may be legislated against and a number of eminent sociologists, psychiatrists and psychologists advocate such laws, but no one pretends that laws alone are a permanent or final answer. Both Dr. Stern, in his testimony to the External Affairs committee, and Dr. Kaufmann in the study which he prepared for this Committee, favor legislative action against hate propaganda, but they tend to view it as an aspect of education or as a means of improving the social climate rather than as a final solution. The American sociologist, Dr. G.W. Allport, believes that the establishment of a law creates a public conscience or "a standard for expected behaviour" that will help to check overt prejudice.

The Allan Gardens riot in Toronto in the spring of 1965 may be instructive from a socio-legal standpoint. Dr. Kaufmann has indicated that informal questioning of certain of the rioters who were Jewish showed clearly that their anger sprang from the impression that no official position had been taken against the holding of a public gathering on the subject of race extermination. The sponsors of the meeting, though they were open advocates of genocide, had been treated in the communications media (perhaps unavoidably) as though they were normal citizens expressing a legitimate viewpoint. The targets and intended victims of their theories, for obvious reasons, were unable and unwilling to see things this way or even to allow the viewpoint to be expressed since to them these expressions went to the very heart of their physical and social existence. Since the advocates of Nazi policies were not engaged in legitimate debate and since no government policy or instruments stood ready to prevent it, private action by those affected followed. Without in any sense condoning such private action it would be unwise to disregard the depth of feeling of those affected by statements, programs or symbols that historically and politically signify to them extermination at worst, deprivation at best.

From its studies and discussions of this aspect of the hate propaganda problem, the Committee has concluded that minority groups in Canada are entitled to the assurance that society protects them not only against physical attack but also against threats and vilifications directed at them solely because of their religion, colour, race, language, ethnic or national origin. The feasibility of changes in the law along this line is discussed later in this Report, but there is no doubt in our view as to the general desirability of measures which help to create a social climate that is uncongenial to hate propagandists and their message, and which also may be employed as lawful controls and correctives in specific instances.

### **11. Education and "Hate" in Canada.**

The need for a serious general study of efforts through education to deal with the problems of hate propaganda was considered beyond the scope of the enquiry. However, it was felt that it would be useful to survey, even if in a summary way, what the present Canadian situation reveals. Through the good offices of the Canadian Association of Adult Education, queries were sent to all Provincial Departments of Education and to universities. The objective was to elicit from these sources what attention is being given to some ancillary aspects of the problem of bias and prejudice against racial and ethnic groups.

No Provincial Department of Education seems to provide for any direct, specific teaching programs concerned with racial and religious discrimination, although in two or three provinces high school courses on "social problems", "man in society" and similar fields do touch generally on intergroup relations and are aimed at developing constructive student attitudes.

At the university level there is generally an absence of specific courses on religious and racial discrimination, but of course many university courses in sociology or social psychology deal with these matters, often in considerable depth and in a few instances there have been university workshops on inter-group relations or certain specific minority questions.

In our view, school and university authorities and teachers in Canada have not yet explored the value of devoting teaching time and materials to the problem of inter-group relations — with the potentially constructive effects on the "hate" problem in general and hate propaganda in particular. We believe we must direct more attention to these questions in a multi-ethnic Canadian society where the two dominant language groups also are now searching anew for means of a lasting accommodation. The idea of a healthy acceptance and accommodation as between all groups in Canada is indispensable to the future well-being of Canadian Society.

