

social research

AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY

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Source: *Social Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (MAY 1943), pp. 200-218

Published by: [The New School](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40981952>

Accessed: 25/06/2014 05:26

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GOEBBELS' CONCEPTION OF PROPAGANDA¹

BY HANS HERMA

SPEAKING of National Socialist propaganda, Goebbels claims to have developed "such a virtuosity in the art of controlling the masses that similar attempts in other countries impress us as mere dilettantism."² He prides himself on having created a "unique modern propaganda," the accomplishments of which make foreign experts "turn pale with envy" and fill them with amazement. If we look for hints as to how such amazing progress and achievement were accomplished, we find, in the same work, such statements as: "Good propaganda need not lie, in fact, must not lie. Propaganda which makes use of the lie . . . cannot have success in the long run. . . . But a right idea must also be set forth in the appropriate way." In other words, the secret of propaganda is to tell the truth in the appropriate form. Puzzling as it is, such an assertion can hardly be dismissed by seeking in it just another instance of that refined technique of lying which is all that National Socialist propaganda supposedly amounts to. What, then, does Goebbels mean by that statement?

Not only has National Socialism applied propaganda on an unprecedented scale, but its exponents have written much about it. If we take these utterances as a whole and try to reconstruct the pattern of thought whence they are derived, we may arrive at a better understanding of the National Socialist conception of propa-

¹ This article has been prepared in connection with the Graduate Faculty Research Project on Totalitarian Communication.

² Goebbels, "Propaganda als Mittlerin zwischen Führung und Volk," in *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 8, 1934, subsequently referred to as "Propaganda als Mittlerin." The present translations of this and other works are intended to render the exact meaning rather than the style of expression. As a result of the peculiar use of language by the totalitarian authors their meaning is not always clearly ascertainable.

ganda and perhaps see more clearly the implications of Goebbels' statement. In attempting this I shall rely on his own words and those of his disciples rather than on those of Hitler. Not that Hadamovsky is to be agreed with in his assertion that under the leadership of Goebbels' mastermind "the despised weapon of German politics has been made into a creative art."³ Actually Goebbels has added hardly anything new to the fundamentals of the National Socialist conception of propaganda. But his formulations, unlike Hitler's, are concerned not only with the problem of how to gain power but also with that of retaining it, and therefore they are more suitable for a discussion of the present state of affairs.

I

"To scratch our names into the pages of history, that is what we shall do."⁴ When Goebbels asserted this future for the National Socialists, some time before Hitler's rise to power, he can hardly have had any notion of how inadequate his metaphor was, compared to the scale of things to come. But he had a very clear idea of the role of propaganda in the accomplishment of this future, in spite of the fact that it is "altogether impossible either to write or to learn an ABC of propaganda," and "you either can do it or you just can't."⁵ Propaganda would make for a unity of thought that would carry the National Socialists through the struggle for power, the period after the ascent to power, and the eventual war—consecutive stages according to the basic ideas of National Socialism.

How much the later expansion of propaganda was contained in the premises of National Socialist doctrine is shown by the fact that when the party came into power monopoly was established in this field as a matter of course. Goebbels scoffed at those in the party who thought that now they had power they could dispense with propaganda. He made it clear to them that propaganda was neces-

³ Eugen Hadamovsky, *Propaganda und nationale Macht* (Oldenburg 1933).

⁴ Goebbels, *Michael, Ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern* (Munich 1927).

⁵ Goebbels, "Erkenntnis und Propaganda," speech of January 9, 1928, published in *Signal der neuen Zeit* (Munich 1934).

sary not only for gaining but also for holding power, because in enforcing the will of a minority it is essential to have the apparently spontaneous support of strong social forces. Here is how Goebbels expresses these views: "It was the strongest weapon in the conquest of the state, it remains the strongest weapon in the consolidation and building up of the state. What in many ways remained understandable to the world was a matter of course for us. The weapon by which we conquered the state has to remain . . . in the service of the state, lest, with power, we run the danger of losing the people and with the people, the power."⁶ "We are not satisfied with having 52 percent of the nation and terrorizing the other 48 percent. We want the people as the people, not only passively but actively . . . for if we have only a part, be it the majority of the nation, we shall be unable to realize the great tasks ahead of us in a larger frame."⁷

Thus propaganda is an instrument of politics; in fact, according to Goebbels, it is the "most modern political instrument," and "among the arts of ruling the people it ranks as one of the first."⁸ This importance derives from the doctrine that the political intentions of National Socialism can be realized only through the "great masses." Goebbels follows Hitler in defining the aim of propaganda: "In politics this aim is always the conquest of the masses."⁹ More precisely, he regards propaganda as an instrument for the control of the masses. Its aim, he asserts,¹⁰ is "to acquaint the people with certain ideas in such a way that they yield voluntarily and without inner resistance to the tasks and aims implied in the ideas of a superior leadership of the state. . . . Without propaganda a modern state is helpless against the subversive forces of anarchy

⁶ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

⁷ Goebbels, "Der Sinn der sozialen Revolution," stenographic record of a speech given on April 24, 1933, subsequently referred to as "Soziale Revolution."

⁸ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

⁹ Goebbels, *Kampf um Berlin* (Munich 1934) p. 91. Compare Hitler's assertion in *Mein Kampf* (Reynal and Hitchcock ed., New York 1941) p. 464, that the "preliminary winning over of the great masses" is "the presupposition for everything" after the unsuccessful attempt to gain power by a putsch.

¹⁰ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

and chaos." Hadamovsky expresses the same view in a less diplomatic form. The aim of propaganda, according to him (p. 37), is "the elimination of all serious resistance in the masses, in order that they may be provided with bread on the basis of the national will of the masses devoted to the cause" (*einsatzbereit*). His "programmatic treatise" addresses itself to "the leading strata of the intelligentsia," and demands that they "acquaint themselves with the tools whose use will finally again secure their power over minds" (p. 9).

Whereas the liberal state, according to Goebbels, had to take the will of the people into account in its decisions, "had to be afraid of the people," as he puts it, no such limitations on doing "what is unpopular" are imposed upon the fascist state, which he chooses to call the "modern state." On the contrary, its propaganda ". . . accomplishes even the miracle of making popular the unpopular, and of securing the unwavering support (*Gefolgschaft*) of the people even for decisions that demand the greatest sacrifices. A government that consciously makes use of it can afford to do what is necessary without taking the risk of losing the masses. . . . In the century of the masses it has become altogether impossible to carry out great objectives without propaganda."¹¹ Goebbels defines a "bad" demagogue as one who "not only talks as the masses like to hear but also is willing to carry out their intentions."¹² Thus, in a typical self-revelation, the Propaganda Minister intimates that he himself is a "good" demagogue because by saying what people like he makes them accept his intentions and his will.

Propaganda in the National Socialist sense is linked to politics not only by its aim, the elimination of resistance, but also by its relation to force. Here, as in the writings of National Socialists, that word is used loosely and almost interchangeably with violence and power. For the sake of simplicity I shall quote mainly from the book by Hadamovsky, who has most explicitly elaborated his master's dictum that "power is always the most convincing factor."¹³

¹¹ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

¹² "Erkenntnis und Propaganda."

¹³ "Soziale Revolution."

The relation of propaganda to force is manifold. In the first place, it can serve as a substitute for force. Thus Hadamovsky opposes propaganda to the "open force of oppression" and calls it "the art of achieving power without possessing the instruments of power, the secret of the powerless for overcoming the holders of power when they feel themselves too secure. . . . Propaganda is the will to power" (pp. 16, 10). Also, it can supplement force, as well as serving as an alternative to it. "Propaganda and force are never absolutely antagonistic poles. The application of force can be part of propaganda," in fact must sometimes collaborate with propaganda. Not only in domestic but also in foreign affairs, and particularly there, this combination "will have the proper effect if cleverly weighed and balanced" (pp. 48 ff.). Further, propaganda must be supported by force, for "the formation of power through mere propaganda is unstable and can suddenly fall apart from one day to the other unless it is based on the power of the organization" (p. 21). And finally, when force is displayed or expressed either in the content or in the form of propaganda the latter has a representative quality which may be called its symbolic function in regard to force. The style of National Socialist propaganda is characterized by "that combatant note which is inseparable from any propaganda instrument."⁴ According to one of Goebbels' biographers it is designed "to suffocate every resistance by its mere grandeur." This symbolic quality is what leads Hadamovsky to declare that "propaganda and force are indissolubly connected with each other" (p. 10), though of the two propaganda is "the deeper and more secret and thus the more powerful, because, with tactically correct application, it affects the human will itself" (p. 16).

II

The fact that propaganda in the National Socialist sense is a political instrument intrinsically linked to force raises the question of the difference between such propaganda and political action in general. There are at least two features that clearly distinguish it

⁴ Gerhard Eckert, *Der Rundfunk als Führungsmittel* (Berlin 1941) p. 266.

from political action: the fact that it establishes immediate contact between government and masses; and its role of anticipating political action.

Like propaganda political action brings about changes in the situation; but it is through social institutions of a traditional character, through formalized procedures and specialized agents, that political action realizes the aims of the policymakers. Propaganda, however, realizes those aims through a direct communication between the government and the people. Propaganda is intended to secure from the people the necessary degree of participation in the government's actions, and to give them the impression that they have had some part in the decisions.

Thus Goebbels, referring in retrospect to the wool collection of the winter of 1941-42, asserts that "there were people who prophesied the complete failure" of the campaign, and proudly explains that "this would, of course, have been correct if the collection had been run according to an official scheme . . . depending more on the resources of the state than on an appeal to the imagination and inventiveness of the entire people." He emphasizes the spontaneous response of the people when their "healthy imagination and vital instinct become effective," and explains that this means "the mobilization of the people's immediate interest in the everyday life of the war, the value of which cannot be overrated in the total potential of our war effort."¹⁸

The National Socialists' claim of having realized "true" democracy is based on the fact that in the fascist state propaganda serves as a substitute for the people's exercise of democratic rights and for the processes by which they influence political decisions. This idea is founded on the concept of the revolutionary mass movement, the leaders of which derive their power from the "masses," not from traditional institutions. In *Michael*, Goebbels' hero declares that his counterpart, a figure symbolically representing Bolshevism, "has shown him the way involuntarily."

Thus time and again we find in Goebbels' writings such re-

¹⁸ *Das Reich*, September 11, 1942.

marks as "political propaganda as a principle is an active and revolutionary element," and propaganda "emerges from the depths of the people and it must descend to the depths of the people again in order to find its strength. It may be well to have power which rests on cannons. It is better still and more lasting to win the heart of the people and to keep it."¹⁶ "A government that stems from the people must never permit an intermediary between itself and the people. It must be the first representative of the people"; and therefore propaganda must "be developed into a state political art."¹⁷ It must become, "so to speak, the connecting link between government and people. . . . It is the never-resting instigator in the public formation of opinion (*öffentliche Meinungsbildung*). It must uninterruptedly sustain the relation between leadership and people. . . . Its sphere of influence is the solid ground on which the state must stand."¹⁸ "Therefore a Ministry was founded to carry out the coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) between government and people," in order that the government should never again lose contact with them (*vom Volke weichen*) but should "always be in immediate contact with the people, listen to the most secret vibrations of the soul of the people and adjust every public measure to it."¹⁹

The elimination of every influence arising from old or new kinds of institutionalized social participation in political life is only one aspect of propaganda as an instrument of immediate guidance. A more fundamental one seems to be that propaganda is a necessary part of the "leader principle," once the latter is transplanted from the party organization to the social organization of the state in general. Propaganda is expected to guarantee the inde-

¹⁶ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

¹⁷ Goebbels, *Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei* (Munich 1934) p. 140.

¹⁸ "Propaganda als Mittlerin."

¹⁹ "Soziale Revolution." The postulate of immediacy is only partly contradicted by the institutionalization of propaganda in a special ministry. Aside from the fact that the Propaganda Ministry can hardly be called an independent institution, even within the narrow limits of the fascist system, and that it is a mere instrument in the hands of its chief, who is himself connected with the policymakers by close personal relationship, its assigned task and function is to establish and safeguard the immediacy of the contact between the government's actions and the people's reactions.

pendence of the leader in making decisions or, in totalitarian parlance, to guarantee the unchallenged "initiative" of the leading elite. In 1934 Goebbels (in "Propaganda als Mittlerin") was rather confident that this grandiose scheme "to destroy the spirit of rebellion" would work: "If the active influencing of the masses through propaganda is supplemented by a long-range systematic enlightenment of the people, and if both are conducted as a unified whole, permanently and with precision, then the connection between leadership and nation will always remain alive, and from authority and followers (*Gefolgschaft*) there will develop that kind of modern democracy for which Germany has set an example to the whole world as a conception of the state of the twentieth century."

Goebbels never lost sight of this idea of providing the "illusion of self-government," to quote Mussolini, by the diligent working of totalitarian propaganda. And in following this idea he wrested the initiative from everybody and everything that might possibly obstruct his purposes. An example is his use of the device of "self-criticism" for handling the critical attitudes that might arise in the masses. In an article dealing with the strains and stresses of the winter of 1942, which, significantly enough, carries the title "Our kind of democracy," Goebbels declares: "We Germans are living in a true democracy, however autocratic the methods of its leadership may sometimes be. The most important characteristic of our democracy is the great trust uniting government and people." This trust permits the government to draw the people into its confidence: "You need not be afraid of the people, for they usually notice mistakes just as speedily if not earlier than the government. . . . People do not faint at the thought that something has gone wrong somewhere."²⁰ Goebbels advocates "open discussion": "... to put every case before the people and discuss it openly is a sign not of weakness but of strength and supreme assurance. . . . Things like these may, indeed must, be explained."

The self-criticism occasionally contained in National Socialist

²⁰ *Das Reich*, April 17, 1942. The dates in this and the following references indicate when the articles were broadcast, not when they were published.

propaganda is in apparent contradiction to the principle of wholly superior and independent leadership. But self-criticism is itself only a device for maintaining that leadership by keeping the initiative, even in criticizing the government's actions. A limitation of this technique is noteworthy: only those problems are supposed to be "explained with utter frankness" which are "uppermost in everybody's mind, usually problems of everyday life with which we all have to cope."²¹

Goebbels' repeated assertion that propaganda is an art, a creative activity, is closely linked to this idea of keeping the initiative. Just as the leader is free and creative in his political actions, so is the propagandist, who manages the mind of the people, in supreme command of ever new techniques of manipulation for meeting ever new conditions and demands.²²

This last point leads us to the second characteristic that helps to distinguish propaganda from political action in general. If propaganda is to assure a free hand for the initiative of the leader, unhampered by the wishes or hopes of the populace, and is to make his actions appear to be the expression of the people's wishes ("sham democracy"), then it must precede those actions, must prepare the people for them. Thus, by what we have called its anticipatory function, National Socialist propaganda actively takes part in the creation of the political situation. As Hadamovsky says, "Any propaganda is preparation for political actions. Since life proceeds continuously propaganda can never cease working, but will always have to take the lead. . . . It will again and again have to work for the necessities of the future. . . . Propaganda does not set in at the height of a political or military action, but is the great, farflung (*ausholend*) educative preparation for that action" (pp.

²¹ *Das Reich*, January 2, 1942.

²² The assertion that propaganda is an art has other implications as well. Propaganda is a means of self-aggrandizement, and the revival of a dream of the young Goebbels, who turned to politics because his literary career did not materialize. As he declares in *Michael*, "The power of the word was not given me; therefore I shall start to act. I shall now be more ruthless, and shall devote myself completely to the cause" (*mich ganz einsetzen*).

45, 33). And Goebbels (in "Propaganda als Mittlerin") declares that: "Propaganda is to prepare the way for the practical work. It must actually precede it and enlighten [the people]. It stands at the beginning of every practical political work in all spheres of public life. It is the great presupposition [of that work], full of its meaning (*ihre sinngemässe Voraussetzung*) . . . what is unpopular must be prepared in time, and must be correctly formulated in its presentation so that the people can understand it. . . . It is no sign of wise foresight to confront the nation with frightful facts. Crises must therefore be prepared not only politically and economically but also psychologically." Hadamovsky goes so far as to assert that if an unforeseen event takes the propagandist by surprise, all he can do is bound to be ineffectual and nothing but a "fill-in." Propaganda cannot live from hand to mouth.

Analysts of National Socialist propaganda have not infrequently been led astray by underestimating the importance of this feature. They tend to take as symptomatic for the present what actually is intended as preparation for the future.

There are several reasons why the anticipatory function of National Socialist propaganda is of particular importance. First and most important, it makes for systematic planning. Thus Goebbels declares ("Propaganda als Mittlerin"): "Propaganda too has its system. It cannot be applied ad libitum and turned off at will. If it wants to be successful, propaganda must have . . . a clear and strictly defined objective." Hitler has justified his tactical principle that attack is preferable to defense with the remark that it can be planned more thoroughly, and the same principle is discernible in National Socialist propaganda. Thus it "has not allowed the opponent to prescribe the time for its action, but on the contrary it has started and conducted [its activities] according to its own realization of the aims to be achieved and its own requirements."²²

By planning the content of his communications the totalitarian propagandist is able to create a picture of the world which, because

²² Franz Alfred Six, *Die politische Propaganda der NSDAP in Kampf um die Macht* (Dissertation, Heidelberg 1936) p. 22.

of its homogeneous structure, may deviate considerably from real facts and events without the subject being aware of it. Consequently the response of the people is not to the actual historical situation but to an impression of it, an "image," which has been systematically built up. Hadamovsky points to an important psychological implication of the fact that a "sham world" can be created when he discusses the significance of "news" (whether conveyed by pictures, sound or words) and its relation to reason: "People have relied upon so-called human reason without taking into consideration its dependence on the impressions of the environment. Nowadays we receive these impressions to a large extent indirectly, namely through news. Thus everybody is dependent on news and must believe it, in spite of the strongest resistance on the part of his reason, if he finds it confirmed again and again and does not find it anywhere refuted. . . . Against news everybody is defenseless as long as he has to rely solely upon himself . . . for only a few facts can tell their own story without comments to bring forth their meaning" (pp. 26, 84, 121).

A second reason for the importance of anticipation in National Socialist propaganda becomes evident now. After a favorable or receptive attitude has been created in the people toward certain events to come, the actual occurrence of those events serves for them as a corroboration of the picture of the world previously given them by propagandistic manipulation.* What they have been made to expect by propaganda has become true, and propaganda is therefore proved reliable. It is clear that this advantage is greatest in regard to events that are created by the policymaker himself, and wholly under his control. When the course of events evades control the danger arises that the control of minds will also slip from the hands of the propagandists. This has an immediate bearing on defeat situations in war. The clumsy handling of such situations by National Socialist propaganda in a number of instances reveals the inherent weakness of a propaganda doctrine that is based on the

* See Hans Herma, "Some Principles of German Radio Propaganda," in *Radio Research*, ed. by Paul F. Lazarsfeld (New York 1942-43).

presupposition of always keeping the initiative, of continued success and victory.

A third implication of the anticipatory function of propaganda is the role it allows to prediction and prophecy. He who predicts correctly, or gives the impression of doing so, increases his prestige. Thus anticipatory propaganda helps in creating the image of an "omniscient" and "omnipotent" leader. Dr. Ley, in his speech celebrating the May Day of 1942, declared: "The Führer's greatness consists in not allowing himself to be surprised by fate—but in himself mastering it! He masters fate by foreseeing the greatest possibilities of victory and success . . . he crushes the forces of nature and leads our people to victory." Where such an image of the leader prevails the pretense that events take place "according to plan" must be carried to the extreme and maintained even in defeat situations; if this is impossible it must be explained why events could not have been foreseen. Thus Hitler attributed the difficulties in the first winter of the Russian campaign to the "coldest winter in the last 140 years."

In short, propaganda helps to give the impression that the totalitarian leader is independent of and has control over events. This impression of control contributes in turn to the efficacy of the propaganda. From this interrelationship is created the image of the omnipotent leader, on whose initiative alone is supposed to depend what is going to happen in the world."

III

The foregoing characterization of National Socialist propaganda on the basis of the theoretical formulations of German propagandists can be summarized as follows: National Socialist propaganda is an instrument of politics, resembling political action in its aim of controlling the masses and in its relation to force, distinguished

²⁵ See Ernst Kris, "The Danger of Propaganda," in *The American Imago*, vol. 2, no. 1 (May 1941); Howard B. White, *Prediction and Political Power*, Doctoral Dissertation prepared under the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research (1943); H. D. Lasswell, "The Psychology of Hitlerism," in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 4 (July-September 1933) pp. 373-84.

from political action in the immediacy of its contact with the populace and in its anticipatory character. It is the management of minds, the psychological supplement to the political "leader principle." But essential as these features are, National Socialist propaganda is not exhaustively characterized unless its relation to values and its idea of the nature of man are taken into consideration.

With regard to values National Socialist propaganda is a purely managerial activity, a mere tool. The only value it recognizes is success. Says Goebbels ("Erkenntnis und Propaganda"): "All critical standards that have been applied to propaganda by other parties mistake its purpose, and most of the accusations against it result from a wrong attitude toward propaganda per se. . . . Nobody can say your propaganda is too rude, too vulgar, too brutal, or is not decent enough, for none of these traits is distinctive for its character. . . . If somebody tells me: 'Your propaganda does not even have a civilized level,' then I don't see any sense in continuing the discussion. . . . What matters is not whether propaganda has any level but whether it leads to the goal." In other words, "Propaganda is a means to an end" ("Propaganda als Mittlerin"), and "any means that serves the end is good" (*Kampf um Berlin*). "If I have recognized something as right, it does not matter whether it is right in the sense of theoretical hairsplitting (*in aller Theoretisiererei*). All that matters is whether I find people who are willing to fight for it. . . . The purpose of propaganda is to lead to success, not to be clever. Therefore propaganda is a matter not of theory but of practice. The quality of the propaganda proves itself only after a certain time lag" ("Erkenntnis und Propaganda").

This utilitarian orientation of National Socialist propaganda is one of the reasons for its well-known adaptability in content. Goebbels (in "Erkenntnis und Propaganda") declares that "Propaganda must adapt itself in everything to the one toward whom it is directed." Once he complains about the lack of understanding in his own ranks of the difference between strategy and tactics, and adds:²⁸ "Tactics is more a matter of intelligence and feeling than of

²⁸ *Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei*, p. 171.

character. One must be as elastic in methods as one must be hard in matters of principle."

The cynicism—to speak in moral terms—of this attitude is most clearly evident when the propagandist appeals to values that he knows to be cherished, in spite of the fact that their validity or universality is denied by his ideology—such values as peace, freedom, humanitarianism, decency in international affairs. This manipulation of value symbols may be demonstrated by an example or two.

Let us consider a situation in which the propagandist has the task of making the bombing of English towns morally acceptable to the German people. Since the bombing of German towns by the enemy has been morally condemned, there is a danger that Germans, looking at the situation "objectively," might doubt the morality of their own action. From the objective point of view both actions might be considered immoral. The propagandist has to prevent such a "detached" point of view, has to substitute a completely subjective standard of judgment according to which an action is "good" if one does it oneself, "bad" if it is done by another. But he would hardly succeed if he were so blunt. Instead he says: "Bath, Norwich, York and all the other bombed places are the teeth we are knocking out of Mr. Churchill's mouth until he learns to fight decently."²⁷ The bold metaphor focuses attention on the image of a concrete and hated individual in order to detract it from the victims in the bombed towns. More relevant to the present discussion, however, is the introduction of "decency" as a universal value, one that is supposed to be acceptable to both sides. Bombing the enemy's towns appears to be the deed of a champion of decency, in the service of his ideals. Thus the use of a universal value symbol covers the crudeness of the primitive response of revenge which the propagandist intends to evoke.

Not always is National Socialist propaganda so subtle. Göring is hardly capable of such refinement of technique; Ribbentrop and Hitler sometimes resort to threats without any attempt to cover the crudity of their argument. Then they simply imply that the Ger-

²⁷ Goebbels, *Das Reich*, May 1, 1942.

man point of view is the only relevant one, thus encouraging a completely egocentric standard of judgment. As Goebbels puts it ("Propaganda als Mittlerin"), "The only decisive requirement is that propaganda give expression to those forces that represent the true and undiluted values of a people." With regard to major issues, however, such as the war guilt, such openness is rare; there is scarcely any reference to the war that is not coupled with the phrase "which has been forced upon us."

A similar example is Goebbels' attempt to counteract an admiration for the Russians' heroic defense (in this instance at Sevastopol), apparently latent among German civilians and soldiers, by explaining why this is not "bravery." Among the arguments he uses in this discussion, in an article entitled "The so-called Russian soul," is one that attracts our interest because it is a description of propaganda by a self-acknowledged expert. "The Bolshevik system is based on the ingenious use made of the Slav soul. Only Russia was capable of this gruesome experiment. . . . It was . . . carried out with a logic which positively makes the expert [sic] shudder. . . . It is a matter of taste to express admiration for the fact that Bolshevik propaganda has largely succeeded in convincing the broad mass of Russian workers and peasants, by means of a stringent isolation from outer influence and by monotonous repetition of its world-salvation phrases, that this state of affairs represents paradise on earth. . . . Independent realizations require a standard of comparison. . . . In a system of this type the political commissar has a function to fulfil which, to our mind, is positively incredible. . . . A national intelligence which might combat such a system no longer exists. The system has at its disposal all the necessary means for stifling at birth any possible attempts against it. What is left to the dull and weak-willed masses other than to obey implicitly and to submit to their fate with that fatalism which is inherent in their very soul? . . . These reflections will indeed place too great a strain on the conventional picture of the Russian soul conjured up by the learned philistine."²⁸

²⁸ *Das Reich*, July 17, 1942.

The model for this description is easily recognized. The interesting point is that Goebbels stresses the "subjectiveness" of the propagandized, and explains it by the absence of that "standard of comparison" which is necessary for "independent realizations," that is, for independent thinking. It was Hitler who was the first of the National Socialist writers to stress the point that elimination of rational thinking is a prerequisite for the control of the masses. If "the wavering masses" are given an opportunity to choose, or a standard of comparison, "objectivity at once steps in"; the "key to the masses," he asserts, is not the "so-called objective viewpoint" but "a ruthless and fanatically onesided orientation."²⁹

In a recent article with the significant title, "Do not be too objective," Goebbels, asserting that "super-objectivity is the one blemish on the German soul," states this point of view in a most explicit manner. He declares that those who look at the enemy "objectively" are identical with the critics of the government. Admitting that one must be "very skilful" if one wants to "stir the national soul to rage," he advocates a "healthy national egotism which fights unconditionally for national interests, beyond all objectivity and desire for justice." These "lying humanitarian conceptions" are out of date, he says, and adds: "We do not in the least mind being accused of prejudice. We have no desire for decent objective judgments while fighting for our existence. . . . In such cases we are all party, all prejudice, all stubborn and obstinate onesidedness."³⁰

Goebbels made this point of view the basis of his recent attack on "a certain type" among the German people, the intellectuals, "who believe they have reached the peak of human ethical standards" by having "acquired the habit of looking at the war from both sides," and "who go so far in their aberration" as to look at it even "from the angle of the enemy." With regard to these "half-educated nit-wits" Goebbels not only feels "like spitting in their faces" but also considers their "apathy toward great events" as dangerous.

²⁹ Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (ed. cited above) pp. 153, 467.

³⁰ *Das Reich*, September 4, 1942.

"Today," says Goebbels, "we have no time for false objectivity . . . we regard it as a danger and as a threat. . . . Fairness comes only in relation to our own people. . . . We are touched only by the sufferings of our people, and not by the punishment which fate inflicts on those nations who intended [outrages] for us. . . . Today the most radical fanaticism and the most violent passion for our great cause is the proper attitude for us. . . . We do not wish to listen to any other view except what is good for our nation. Even if this view might seem wrong to us it becomes right because it serves the welfare of our people." In war "man reemerges in his original savage state, and events revert to the era of barbarism. The question is not what is ethical and approved by custom, but what promises success . . . the advantage is with those who derive the justification for their actions from success rather than from ethics. . . . It is better to put oneself in the right than to be in the right." "Fortunately," Goebbels continues, "the government at the head of the Reich . . . is not subject to this German national vice" of objectivity. The leaders "always do what they think right," and they will "stand up manfully against those who talk of the right of the enemy in this war."²¹

Such remarks are intended to reorient the value judgments of that elite addressed by Goebbels in his articles. What he advocates with cynical frankness as a state of mind desirable in itself is at the same time the aim of his propagandistic manipulation.

The National Socialist conception of man is that he is or can be made into a being with no ability to see any other point of view than the one that has been accepted around him, a being with no objectivity, reverting more and more to an egocentric conception of reality—that is, to a primitive mode of mental operation which makes him incapable of rational thinking.²² According to this view

²¹ *Das Reich*, November 27, 1942.

²² The relationship between rational thinking and the egocentric conception of reality has been investigated for the child by Jean Piaget. The egocentric orientation of the child prevents it from acquiring the "reversibility" of mental operations which is characteristic of rational thinking. See Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (New York 1929), and his later works.

there are no inherent limits in the nature of man which would preclude his being deprived of the free use of one of his basic mental functions, that is, reason."³³

The conditions for the loss of objectivity, and with it the capacity to reason, are indicated in Hitler's statements as well as in those of Goebbels: emotional involvement, and the absence of choice or of a frame of reference (other than the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*). Participation of the individual in activities of the community makes for emotional involvement and leaves no place for choices or alternatives. Action is substituted for thinking."³⁴

The totalitarian organization of society provides the optimal conditions for such manipulation: a monopolistic organization; uniformity of opinion and ideas; completeness of control over all social spheres and activities; permanency of control and thus the possibility of systematization."³⁵ The preventive and punitive measures necessary for maintaining such a system are witness to the weakness of the psychological doctrine as well as to the fact that its weakness has been taken into account by National Socialism.

The foregoing exposition of Goebbels' conception of propaganda, incomplete as it is, may have succeeded in showing that the concept of propaganda has been redefined by National Socialism. It has been closely linked to the totalitarian organization of society, and may more aptly be called "psychological management" than propaganda. It does not want to persuade or convince. It introduces the element of fear, and aims at the elimination of rationality.

In view of this new concept of propaganda we may now understand what Goebbels meant when he spoke of the importance of

³³ The model for this idea is apparently the manipulation of a subject by the hypnotizer. It was bequeathed to the totalitarians by an outstanding representative of French social psychology at the end of the nineteenth century, Gustave Le Bon. See Ernst Kris, *op. cit.*

³⁴ See Franz L. Neumann, *Behemoth, The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (New York 1942) p. 438.

³⁵ "Propaganda has to be built up . . . as the science of the psyche of the people. In order to make its success permanent . . . its work has to be systematized in line with its aim" ("Propaganda als Mittlerin").

truth in propaganda. Like all other value symbols this word too has only an operational meaning to him, and his remark may be translated in either of two ways. It may mean that what is to be said must be brought to the notice of the subject in such a way that it is not contradicted by standards of comparison in the subject's world of immediate experience, and therefore can be believed and can carry conviction. Or it may mean that it is possible through proper manipulation to give any statement the appearance of truth and thus the power of conviction. While the first interpretation constitutes a postulate for the technique of manipulation, the second expresses a belief as to the nature of man. But it is clear that the two are interrelated. The point is that psychological management, however completely it can be achieved, must be careful not to impair the basis of its influence; in fact, it must even strengthen that basis by building up a "veracity prestige." The National Socialist propagandist is thus confronted with the apparent paradox that the use of values as a mere instrument finds a limit in the requirements of the very purpose that instrument is intended to serve.

(New School Graduate Faculty Research Projects)