

Excerpts from *Mein Kampf*

Volume I, Chapter VI: War Propaganda

At the time of my attentive following of all political events, the activities of propaganda had always been of extremely great interest to me. In it I saw an instrument which just the Socialist-Marxist organizations mastered and knew how to apply with expert skill. I learned very soon that the right use of propaganda represents an art which was and remained almost entirely unknown to the bourgeois parties. Only the Christian-Socialist movement, especially during Lueger's time, acquired a certain virtuosity with this instrument and it owed much of its success to it.

But it was shown only during the War to what enormously important results a suitably applied propaganda may lead. Unfortunately, everything has to be studied on the other side; for the activity on our side was more than modest in this respect. However, the very failure of the entire enlightenment on the side of the Germans – a fact which was bound to stare in the face of every soldier – now caused me to occupy myself still more thoroughly with this question.

There was often more than enough time for thinking, but it was unfortunately the enemy who gave us only too good an object lesson.

For what we failed to do in this direction was made up by the enemy with really unheard-of skill and ingenious deliberation. I learned infinitely much more from the enemy's war propaganda. But time marched on without leaving an impression on the brains of those who most of all should have taken this as a lesson; partly because they deemed themselves too clever to take lessons from others, and partly because the honest will to do so was lacking.

Was there any propaganda at all on our side?

To my regret, I can only answer no. Everything that was actually undertaken in this direction was so incomplete and wrong from the very first moment that it not only did not help, but sometimes did considerable harm.

Insufficient in form its nature was psychologically wrong: this was necessarily the result of a careful examination of the German war propaganda.

It seemed that one was not quite clear about the first question, namely: Is war propaganda a means or an end?

It is a means, and therefore it has to be judged from the point of view of the end. But its form has to be properly adapted to the aim which it serves. But it is also clear that the importance of its aim can be a different one according to the point of view of the general demand and that therefore propaganda is also defined differently according to its inner value.

The second question of actually decisive importance was the following: To whom has propaganda to appeal? To the scientific intelligentsia or to the less educated masses?

It has to appeal forever and only to the masses!

Propaganda is not for the intelligentia or for those who unfortunately call themselves by that name today, but scientific teaching. But propaganda is in its contents as far from being science as perhaps a poster is art in its presentation as such.

The task of propaganda lies not in a scientific training of the individual, but rather in directing the masses towards certain facts, events, necessities, etc., the purpose being to move their importance into the masses' field of vision.

All propaganda has to be popular and has to adapt its spiritual level to the perception of the least intelligent of those towards whom it intends to direct itself. Therefore its spiritual level has to be screwed the lower, the greater the mass of people which one wants to attract. But if the problem involved, like the propaganda for carrying on a war, is to include an entire people in its field of action, the caution in avoiding too high spiritual assumptions cannot be too great.

But if one understands the necessity of the attitude of the attracting skill of propaganda towards the great masses, the following rule then results: It is wrong to wish to give propaganda the versatility of perhaps scientific teaching.

The great masses' receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great. As a consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda has to limit itself only to a very few points and to use them like slogans until even the very last man is able to imagine what is intended by such a word. As soon as one sacrifices this basic principle and tries to become versatile, the effect will fritter away, as the masses are neither able to digest the material offered nor to retain it. Thus the result is weakened and finally eliminated.

The greater the line of its representation has to be, the more correctly from the psychological point of view will its tactics have to be outlined.

For example, it was completely wrong to ridicule the adversary as was done in Austrian and German propaganda in comic papers. It was basically wrong for the reason that when a man met the adversary in reality he was bound to receive an entirely different impression; something that took its most terrible revenge; for now the German soldier, under the direct impression of the resistance of the enemy, felt himself deceived by those who so far were responsible for his enlightenment, and instead of strengthening his fighting spirit or even his firmness, quite the contrary occurred. The man despaired.

Compared with this, the war propaganda of the British and the Americans was psychologically right. By introducing the German as a barbarian and a Hun to its own people, it thus prepared the individual soldier for the terrors of war and helped guard him against disappointment. The most terrible weapon which was now being used against him then appeared to him only as the proof of the enlightenment already bestowed upon him, thus strengthening his belief that his governments assertions were right, and on the other hand it increased his

fury and hatred against the atrocious enemy. For the cruel effect of the weapon of his enemy which he learned to know by his own experience appeared to him gradually as the proof of the already proclaimed “Hunnish” brutality of the barbaric enemy, without, however, making him think for even a moment that his own weapons could have, perhaps, or even probably, a still more terrible effect.

The great mass of a people is not composed of diplomats or even teachers of political law, nor even of purely reasonable individuals who are able to pass judgment, but of human beings who are as undecided as they are inclined towards doubts and uncertainty. As soon as by one’s own propaganda even a glimpse of right on the other side is admitted, the cause for doubting one’s own right is laid. The masses are not in a position to distinguish where the wrong of the others ends and their own begins. In this case they become uncertain and mistrusting, especially if the enemy does not produce the same nonsense, but, in turn, burdens their enemy with all and the whole guilt. What is more easily explained than that finally one’s own people believe more in the enemy’s propaganda, which proceeds more completely and more uniformly, than in one’s own? This however may be said most easily of a people which suffers so severely from the mania of objectivity as the German people does. For now they will take pains not to do an injustice to the enemy, even at the risk of the severest strain on, or destruction of, his own nation and State.

But the masses do not at all realize that this is not the intention of the responsible authorities.

The people, in an overwhelming majority, are so feminine in their nature and attitude that their activities and thoughts are motivated less by sober consideration than by feeling and sentiment.

This sentiment, however, is not complicated but very simple and complete. There are not many differentiations, but rather a positive or a negative; love or hate, right or wrong, truth or lie; but never half this and half that, or partially, etc.

Nevertheless, all geniality in the makeup of propaganda will not lead to success unless a fundamental principle is considered with continually sharp attention: it has to confine itself to little and to repeat this eternally. Here, too, persistency, as in so many other things in this world, is the first and the most important condition for success.

Now the purpose of propaganda is not continually to produce interesting changes for a few blasé little masters, but to convince; that means, to convince the masses. The masses, however, with their inertia, always need a certain time before they are ready even to notice a thing, and they will lend their memories only to the thousandfold repetition of the most simple ideas.

A change must never alter the content of what is being brought forth by propaganda, but in the end it always has to say the same. Thus the slogan has to be illuminated from various sides, but the end of every reflection has always and again to be the slogan itself. Only thus can and will propaganda have uniform and complete effect.

Here, too, the enemy's war propaganda set a typical example. It was limited to a few points of view, calculated exclusively for the masses, and it was carried out with untiring persistency. Basic ideas and forms of execution which had once been recognized as being right were employed throughout the entire War, and never did one make even the slightest change. At the beginning it was apparently crazy in the impudence of its assertions, later it became disagreeable, and finally it was believed. After four and a half years a revolution broke out in Germany the slogan of which came from the enemy's war propaganda.

Volume II, Chapter XI – Propaganda and Organization

After my joining the German Worker's Party, I immediately took over the management of the propaganda. I considered this section by far the most important. For the first it was less important to rack one's brain about questions of organization than to impart the idea itself to a greater number of people. Propaganda had to precede far in advance of the organization and to win for the latter the human material to be utilized.

...it is more expedient first to spread an idea by propaganda from a center and then to examine and to search for the leading heads in the human material which is gradually being assembled. Thereby it will sometimes be apparent that insignificant people have nevertheless to be looked upon as born leaders.

During the first period of my activity in the movement, as already mentioned, I occupied myself with propaganda. The latter had to succeed in gradually instilling a small nucleus of people with the new doctrine, in order to form thus the material which would later furnish the first elements of an organization. Hereby the aim of propaganda lay far beyond that of the organization.

If a movement had the intention of pulling down a world and of building a new one in its place, then there must be absolute clarity about the following points in the ranks of its own leaders: Every movement, at first, will have to divide the human material it has won into two great groups: into followers and members.

The task of propaganda is to attract followers; the task of organization to win members.

A follower of a movement is one who declares himself in agreement with its aims; a member is one who fights for it.

The follower is inclined to like a movement by its propaganda. The member is induced by the organization to help personally towards acquiring new followers who then, in turn, can be trained to become members.

As followership demands only a passive appreciation of an idea, while membership demands an active presentation and defense, there will be then followers for every one or two members at most.

The followership is rooted only in recognition membership, in the courage to present personally, and to spread further what has been recognized.

Recognition in its passive form corresponds to the majority of humankind, which is inert and cowardly. Membership requires an effective mind and thus corresponds only to the minority of men.

Therefore propaganda will have to see to it that untiringly an idea wins followers, while the organization has to watch most sharply that from the followers only the most valuable ones are made members. Propaganda, therefore, needs not to rack its brain about the importance of each individual it enlightens, about his ability, achievements, and understanding or of his character, while the organization has most carefully to collect from the masses of these elements those who really make possible the victory of the movement.

Propaganda tries to force a doctrine upon an entire people; organization embraces in its frame only those who for psychological reasons do not threaten to become a brake to a further spreading of the idea.

Propaganda works on the community in the sense of an idea and it makes it ripe for the time of the victory of this idea, while the organization conquers victory by the permanent, organic, and fighting union of those followers who appear able and willing to lead the fight for victory.

The first task of propaganda is the winning of people for the future organization; the first task of the organization is the winning of people for the continuation of propaganda. The second task of propaganda is the destruction of the existing condition and the permeation of this condition with the new doctrine, while the second task of the organization must be the fight for power, so that by it it will achieve the final success of the doctrine.