

## Footnotes

1. Václav L. Benes and Norman G. J. Pounds, *Poland* (London, 1970), pp. 34-54.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 56-57.
3. *ibid.*, p. 59.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 60, 65-72.
5. M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1977), pp. 80-108.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 119, 122, 136-42.
7. Richard F. Staar, *Poland 1944-1962: the Sovietization of a Captive People* (New Orleans, 1962), *passim*.
8. George Blazynski, *Flashpoint Poland* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 113, 188-89.
9. *ibid.*, pp. 181-88.
10. *ibid.*, p. 333.
11. *ibid.*, pp. 340, 359.
12. *New York Times*, 18 Aug. 1980.
13. *Newsweek*, 24 Nov. 1980.
14. *Economist*, 6 Sept. 1980.
15. *Guardian*, 14 Sept. 1980; UPI/Reuter News Service Report, 3 Dec. 1980. It would be a mistake to place too much emphasis on the reshuffling of government personalities. In communist countries ministers can vanish from the government into the organs of the party or bureaucracy without major upset.
16. *New York Times*, 11 Nov. 1980; *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 9 Dec. 1980. Poland's 3.5 million private farmers are the latest group demanding permission to join solidarity.
17. *Time*, 22 Sept. 1980; *Newsweek*, 24 Nov. 1980.
18. *Newsweek*, 8 Dec. 1980.

## UNDERSTANDING PROPAGANDA

by

*Maurice Tugwell*

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>1</sup>

"Let the ruling class tremble at a communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!"<sup>2</sup>

These two excerpts, one from the American Declaration of Independence, another from the Communist Manifesto, illustrate the importance of propaganda in the service of revolution. They demonstrate too the neutrality of propaganda itself which, like a rifle or a warship, may be used for any cause, good, bad or indifferent. But, unlike most weapons, which inflict casualties and

damage and therefore tend to harden perceptions of good or evil, propaganda seeks to change such sentiments. It possesses a dimension which other weapon systems lack — the power to render an adversary harmless without resort to violence. This power can only rarely be brought to bear with full force and, since uncertainties complicate planning and worry commanders and staffs alike, the weapon called propaganda tends to be used mainly by those with no viable alternative — by the underdog, the weak, the revolutionary — and by those who, believing that God, history or some irresistible force is on their side, are willing to accept short-term uncertainties within the framework of their long-term confidence.

In the liberal democracies, propaganda has a poor reputation. It is associated in many minds with deliberate distortion of facts, with brain-washing and totalitarianism. Dame Freya Stark, the travel-writer who worked for British propaganda during World War II, remarked that “the main obstacle was the unfortunate word propaganda itself. When first adopted by the Church of Rome it was simply used in the gospel sense of the spreading of a faith, until a reputation for subtlety whether or not deserved gave it a new and sinister twist of deceit. Two opposed ideas, the truth and the hiding of truth, thus became sheathed in one term, and have shuffled promiscuously inside it ever since.”<sup>3</sup>

To overcome such reservations, Western nations have tended to abandon the word propaganda when describing their own efforts in the field, and to reserve it for hostile appeals. Internally, our attempts to mold public opinion are often referred to as “information”, while against an adversary we use “psychological operations”<sup>4</sup> or “political warfare”<sup>5</sup>. These evasions are not simply inspired by liberal squeamishness. They acknowledge, albeit indirectly, the dangerous side effects of propaganda for democracy. In the modern age, when the means of communicating and influencing opinion are so widespread, sophisticated and powerful, any nation which indulges in full-scale, long-term propaganda activities places its democratic credentials at risk. Like total war, total propaganda is a totalitarian force.<sup>6</sup> This poses severe problems for the West.

### **Propaganda in History**

There is nothing new about propaganda. Four centuries before Christ, the Indian minister Kautilya recommended psychological action to strengthen loyalty at home, to earn the support of neutrals, and to promote rebellion in the enemy state.<sup>7</sup> The Greek philosopher Plato imagined an ideal city state governed by an elite group known as the guardians, whose “divine” right to rule would be underpinned by the mass indoctrination of one “Noble Lie”. Lying was to be the prerogative of government: mothers were to tell their children only authorised stories, music was to be censored and drama banned.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese strategist Sun Tzu advised that enemies could be weakened by encouraging dissipation of wealth, by sending women and boys to befuddle leaders, by manipulating character defects — particularly pride — and by creating anxiety over constant casualties. “Generally in war,” he wrote, “the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior . . . to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”<sup>9</sup> In 1622 the word “propaganda” was coined in a Papal Bull setting up a committee of cardinals to supervise foreign missions — the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* — charged with converting

the "heathen masses of the Americas, and the protestant populations of Europe".<sup>10</sup>

The revolutionary movements of the 18th Century showed the importance of propaganda in mobilizing the mass, an importance that would increase with the universal franchise, literacy, mass communications and the "age of the common man". In World War I the warring nations were subjected to intensive propaganda, which kept many men fighting under conditions which might otherwise have been unendurable. Some historians believe that the United States internal propaganda directed by George Creel pushed that nation dangerously towards totalitarianism. In Russia, however, internal propaganda failed. First the Czar was overthrown and then, aided by the Germans, Bolshevik revolutionaries were able to undermine military discipline, mobilize vital segments of the population, seize power by coup and consolidate it by force.

By World War II the special power of revolutionary propaganda had been harnessed by Nazi Germany and lesser fascist states, as well as by the USSR, and the war was begun under competing ideological banners. The Soviets found that communist propaganda failed to unify or inspire their people and switched in haste to nationalism as an integrating force. This was effective, and ever since 1945 the USSR has sought to enlist Russian patriotism in support of socialist ideology when times are hard. Opposing the generally perceived evil of fascism, the democracies succeeded in mobilizing national wills without recourse to the crass demonology of the first world war. Few who witnessed the second war, however, failed to be impressed by the German capacity for resistance even after all reasonable hope of victory had gone, and we may conclude that the union of national pride and revolutionary fervour that Nazi propaganda promoted unleashed potent psychological forces.

Since 1945 much political propaganda has followed the Nazi pattern, even when in the service of causes far removed from that ideology. The pan-Arab nationalism of Nasser, militant Zionism, the crusading Castroite liberators, and the struggles by colonized people for self-determination used a combination of nationalism and political idealism to inspire the faithful. In China, Mao's revolution followed more closely the strictly communist formula, which is supposed to subordinate nationalism to the new international order, but in later days the Sino-Soviet dispute has exposed the resilience of nationalism even within this new order. Often, nationalist propaganda has employed Marxist techniques and rhetoric, just as communist revolutionaries have sometimes concealed their ideology behind nationalist facades because of the latter's wider appeal. Strong revolutionary propaganda contains the seeds of the integration propaganda which will be needed to unify the country in the aftermath of battle. *The Chinese communists were much more successful in this transition than their Russian predecessors.* Integration propaganda ought to enable the new regime to rule with sufficient consensus that coercion is scarcely needed. The failure of communism in the USSR to achieve consensus, and its later failure in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe to inspire anything more positive than hate and despair, denotes the shortcomings both of the ideology and its propaganda, which to all intents and purposes are the same thing.<sup>11</sup> Internally, we may say that the Russian revolution is sick.

Yet, paradoxically, external Soviet propaganda is alive and well. Marxist-Leninism has yet to prove that it can deliver its supposed advantages to people under its control. But so attractive are those advantages, when seen from afar and taken at face value, that the glittering generalities (to use a technical propaganda term) of communism retain a powerful revolutionary utility in the world. It is not the sole source. Recent events in Iran have shown the power of militant Islam. From the have-nots of the world, the victims of the so-called North-South confrontation, we can hear the beginnings of a new revolutionary rhetoric, one that may overwhelm our children if we turn a deaf ear. And let us not overlook our own, unstructured but remarkably powerful propaganda, which takes the form of ideas, deeds, examples — the improvised propaganda of democracy and free enterprise.

### **Organization**

To be really effective, that is to say to cause its subjects to *act* in accordance with the sponsor's wishes, propaganda needs organization. If the action obtained is to be productive, it must be collective. Coordination can only be achieved through organization. Yet, within the group, propaganda operates against the "individual in the mass", by surrounding him, isolating him, and playing upon his individual emotions. Belonging to the group makes the individual feel stronger, but in reality he is weakened because he dare not speak or act outside group attitudes. This makes him susceptible to any message emanating within the organization, and immune to other appeals. Although we may think of the Hitler Youth Movement or *Komsomol* as typical examples of organization, nearer home the street gang, labour union or elite military unit provides similar conditions.

Propaganda and organization can lead their subjects to act in accordance with the sponsor's desires, and such actions in turn cement the individual to the group and its propaganda. Once a new member has been persuaded to act outside the norms of his background, family and previous associates, he cannot easily turn back. He is committed. Moreover, because he may feel uneasy about what he has done, whether this be an act of betrayal, or something unlawful, or merely behaviour outside his previous experience, he or she needs more propaganda to justify the past and inspire the future act.

### **Operations**

Propaganda works well if it builds on existing attitudes and sociological trends. These can easily be modified, directed and sharpened to the sponsor's advantage, and subjects will readily act in accordance with the sponsor's strategy. The current concern in the West over environmental issues has its roots in apolitical sociological propaganda. Radicals who infiltrated the movement succeeded to some degree in using it for political purposes, without rank and file environmentalists being aware of what was happening. Soviet propaganda has supported this move, claiming that capitalist countries are responsible for pollution, while the communist bloc "devote great attention in the sphere of the environment" — another glittering generality.<sup>12</sup> From environmental concern to anti-nuclear energy to anti-nuclear armaments to unilateral disarmament to "peace", the skilful propagandist can hope to modify and redirect the public's

legitimate concerns until, in the Soviet vision of peace, Marxist-Leninists govern the world.

In contrast, propaganda which tries to oppose fundamental trends and attitudes in the society in which it acts is likely to fail. Any propaganda needs time: its psychological action has to be lasting and continuous if it is to have the desired effect. However, to attack fundamental attitudes head on may take forever, and for that reason this approach is generally avoided. Propaganda must be consistent with visible facts, upon certain of which it must pronounce judgement. Without facts, propaganda has little strength. Despite all technique, the art remains uncertain. No one can be absolutely sure how audiences will respond. Propaganda, strong within the group and effective beyond the group amongst the domestic audience, becomes weak when addressed to a foreign country or enemy. Psychological action can only be fully effective in the hands of nationals addressing fellow citizens.

This last characteristic may seem at odds with the assertion made earlier, that Soviet propaganda to the outside world was alive and well. The reason why communist propaganda succeeds in the Third World and in the West is that it uses national parties, front organizations, agents of influence, news media assets under covert Soviet control, and other "local" means to overcome the problem of separation. Few North Americans, for instance, listen to Radio Moscow or read *Pravda*, and those who do are apt to become bored. However, many may hear and see Soviet propaganda dressed up as news, information, education and culture every day of their lives, delivered in forms which do not betray their origin or subversive purpose. Recent Soviet successes in the United Nations may exclude Western television, radio and news agencies from much of the Third World, leaving audiences there more receptive of communist propaganda.<sup>13</sup>

### **Climates of Opinion**

Outside the organized group of ideologically committed activists, all of whom will act at the sponsor's command, propaganda's chief function is to alter the climate of opinion in society at large. By climate of opinion we mean the totality of opinions, knowledge, values and behaviour which, for a certain period and at a certain place, either *must* be displayed publicly by members of a society in order not to become isolated, or *may* be displayed publicly without risk of isolation from the other members of society. The term is appropriate because climate is something external which nevertheless strongly influences our inner beings by its condition and variability.<sup>14</sup> Climates of opinion are created by a variety of influences. Without interference, sociological propaganda, that force by which any society seeks to integrate the maximum number of individuals into itself and to spread its style of life, would be the main architect of the climate of opinion. Fashions, fads, crazes and vogues are the creatures of sociological propaganda, prodded perhaps by commercial interests, and these make it impossible, for instance, for a woman to wear last year's dress length without risk of isolation. More profound aspects of the climate affect our feelings towards women's rights, blacks, big business, and of course the environment. One has only to cast the mind back ten or fifteen years to appreciate how changed are the attitudes that may safely be aired publicly on these and other issues. If opinions cannot be uttered without risk of social isolation, few ordinary

people and fewer still politicians are likely to say them. Thus the climate of opinion limits our thoughts and our actions within precisely defined boundaries. This may leave the way clear for the agent of influence to direct events in a manner desired by his sponsor.

## **Facts**

Facts are so important to effective propaganda, particularly in free societies where people have scope to investigate, that their presentation, and in some instances their creation, lies at the centre of this form of communication. The nineteenth century terrorists realised this, and coined the phrase "Propaganda of the Deed" to describe acts of violence designed to influence the mass through the indirect psychological impact of the deed. Modern communications have multiplied the effectiveness of this method and television has elevated the visual symbol high above the spoken or written word in the struggle for men's minds. Thus public opinion forms itself around those images which are available to news cameramen to record and which are selected for broadcasting by the producers and editors. By its nature, this medium will always give priority to stories which are visually dramatic. The skilful propagandist can capitalize on this tendency, as coverage of the Vietnam war showed.

Facts can sometimes be created by the method known to the Russians as *Dezinformatsiya* — disinformation. According to a KGB training manual, "strategic disinformation assists in the execution of State tasks, and is directed at misleading the enemy concerning the basic questions of State policy..."<sup>15</sup> Just as, in war, the Western powers used deception operations to mislead Nazi Germany on such vital matters as the place and date of the invasion of France, so, in the on-going war called peace, the USSR works hard to deceive the West. Sometimes this deception is aimed directly at the elites, through agents of influence, traitors in high places, etc.: more often, it is directed at the news media, opinion-formers and the general public. Here again, the objective is to create a climate of opinion in which it is politically impossible for the government to adopt policies which might hinder the USSR in the "execution of State tasks".<sup>16</sup> One disinformation method is the forged document, which provides as it were the speck of grit around which the pearl of propaganda can form. When in June 1980 the Iranian authorities cited an alleged confidential memorandum on White House stationery from Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance, they presumably knew that the "fact" they were revealing would make "news" in the west and thus influence target audiences which might have ignored a plain statement from Iranian sources.<sup>17</sup>

Another, more advanced, disinformation technique is to conjure the facts into existence. Perhaps the most common example is the creation of conditions in which law enforcement agencies have to arrest struggling protestors in the full glare of the news media. If the protestors are youthful boys and girls, unarmed and apparently defenceless, and the police wear riot gear, helmets and visors, and carry clubs, the pictures that the public will see will tend to discredit the forces of law and order. If the protestors struggle, hurl rocks or fight with improvised weapons, the pictorial coverage will almost certainly feature the upraised baton of a burly police officer, civilian casualties and other symbols of repression. Casting our minds back half a century, we should remember the Reichstag fire,

which provided an excuse for the persecution of Jews and communists, and was a classic example of disinformation.

### **Deception**

Propaganda that acknowledges its source is known as “white”, that which does not specifically identify any sponsor is “grey”, and “black propaganda” is a message which purports to emanate from a source other than the true one. As an example of “black”, we recall Sefton Delmer’s World War II bogus German army “underground” radio broadcasts, which seemed to be the work of disillusioned army officers but in reality were beamed from England, using high-grade intelligence material to provide apparent authenticity.<sup>18</sup> In the permanent struggle of Marxist-Leninism all shades of propaganda can be identified. With easy access to the target countries it is unnecessary for the sponsor to rely on technology to penetrate and mislead: one well-placed, greedy or “committed” journalist can be fed high-grade intelligence material selected for its power to embarrass authority and disillusion the public. He will be applauded as a fearless investigative journalist and few will suspect the “black” origins of his stories. Moreover he will gain in professional stature if he steadfastly refuses to disclose his sources. The shade of propaganda has nothing to do with its veracity. Indeed, the blacker the source, the greater the need for verifiable accuracy.

Although correct or at least credible facts are usually essential, this does not rob the propagandist of the opportunity to deceive. Untruths enter the system through the intentions that are attributed and the interpretations offered. Western and Soviet commentators are agreed that Russian troops entered Afghanistan in the closing days of 1979. One side interprets this as military aggression, the other, as fraternal assistance.

Although as a general rule it is best, and safest, to build propaganda upon verifiable facts, there are occasions when the unscrupulous can benefit by bending this rule. One example is the long-term forecast. It is quite safe for Soviet leaders to assure audiences of better harvests, more food, adequate housing and plentiful consumer goods in say, ten years time. No one inside the system will dare expose the lie when the promises are broken, and in the unlikely event that someone in the West bothers to uncover the deception, he is unlikely to reach a Soviet audience. Another use is more dangerous, but may sometimes be unavoidable. This is the lie that is necessary to support a false interpretation. In 1968 the Czechs were drifting away from communist orthodoxy: that was a fact. The Warsaw Pact armies were entering that country to stop the drift: that too was a fact. The interpretations offered by the Soviet propagandists alleged that the Dubcek government was under foreign influence and was acting against the wishes of the population. Both were lies of interpretation but the latter was also a denial of verifiable fact. Ideologically, the theme could not be changed, since at the root of all totalitarian systems there is the primacy of ideology over empirical fact, yet the truth was there for all to see. The real hostility of the Czech people to the invasion of their territory and the destruction of their bid for partial independence so affected the Soviet occupation troops that summary executions of disaffected soldiers ran into dozens. Most divisions that took part in the invasion had to be removed from Czechoslovakia because their morale

and political reliability were shaken. This event exposed a weakness in the Soviet system that might be exploited.

Then there is the lie that brings such enormous short-term gains that any later embarrassment can be accepted. Of course if time and circumstances allow, such an invention would be made plausible by disinformation but, however it is handled, it aims to resolve a crisis to the sponsor's benefit. Lies of this sort have accompanied almost every border violation in history — "the Poles/Norwegians/Dutch/Belgians/Yugoslavs/Greeks/etc. fired on our border guards/invaded Germany/shelled our troops/etc." These are the routine variety. More important are the lies which, for instance, use "black" techniques to allege that the target nation's government is suing for peace and has ordered all troops to lay down their arms, or that the royal family, accompanied by harem and gold, is about to depart in its fleet of private Boeing 747s. It really does not matter to the sponsor if future historians of the battle expose these lies: if the battle ends in one day with scarcely any casualties or damage, such lies can even be justified.

Sometimes the lie can be insinuated simply by stretching a point, or by mistake. Writing in *The Washington Post*<sup>19</sup> in October, 1980, William Greider alleged: "The Russian tank is crude and simple compared to our million-dollar electronic marvels", a view that has no foundation in fact, and he used this argument to disparage "the cold warriors" (a Soviet propaganda phrase) for "the new hysteria over national defense". Later in the same article Greider listed Soviet security problems and included "the new tactical nukes in Germany that threaten from the West", even though he must presumably have known that none has yet been deployed, and none is likely to be in place before 1983.

Reluctance to use untruths springs, of course, from a fear of being found out, with damage to one's credibility. The necessity is often turned into a virtue by attributing it to moral restraint, but experience suggests that whenever the chance of detection is small, propagandists will not hesitate to use falsehood. British propaganda in World War I was a case in point. One reason why the lie is never likely to be completely abandoned as a weapon in this form of conflict is the public's lasting preference for the first story which is published, particularly if it is made attractive by sensation, and more particularly if it is what people want to believe. Not without good reason did Britain's former Prime Minister, James Callaghan, complain: "a lie can be half way round the world before truth has got its boots on".<sup>20</sup>

#### Footnotes

1. The Continental Congress, "The Declaration of Independence", (July 4, 1776).
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", quoted Lewis S. Feuer (ed), *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York, 1959).
3. Freya Stark, *Dust in the Lion's Paw* (London, 1961), p. 64.
4. The term "psychological operations" was used by the US during World War II and is still in favour. All propaganda is a psychological operation, but the latter embraces other activities too, such as hostage-bargaining, where there is no mass audience.



5. The British used the term "Political Warfare" as a cover for their propaganda to the enemy during World War II.
6. See Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York, 1965), pp. 256-257.
7. T. N. Ramaswamy, *Essentials of Indian Statecraft: Kautilya's Arthashastra for Contemporary Readers* (London, 1962), pp. 58-59.
8. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1946), pp. 130-131.
9. Sun Tzu, trans. Samuel B. Griffiths, *The Art of War* (Oxford, 1963), p. 77.
10. Bruce Lannes Smith, "Propaganda" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Ed., vol. 15.
11. Ellul, pp. 193-202.
12. "Harmony Between Life and Nature", editorial in *The Democratic Journalist*. (Prague, July-Aug. 1980), p. 1.
13. See, for instance, Kistner and Kleinwachter, "Non-Aligned Countries and a New International Information Order" in *The Democratic Journalist*, op cit, pp. 13-16.
14. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Mass Media and the Climate of Opinion", paper before *10th General Assembly*, International Association for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, 1976.
15. Deputy Director, CIA, *CIA Study: Soviet Covert Action and Propaganda*, presented to the Oversight Subcommittee, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, 6 February 1980.
16. Readers may feel that America's inability to react to Soviet and Cuban actions in Africa in 1976-77 arose out of such a climate of opinion.
17. "Carter Anti-Khomeini Letter Cited" in *Citizen* (Ottawa), 3 June 1980. The success of this disinformation exercise can be measured by this newspaper report. Apart from a solitary "alleged" at the first mention of the letter, the report accepts the authenticity of the document at face value. The White House denouncement of the letter as an "utter fabrication" is nowhere mentioned.
18. See Sefton Delmer, *Black Boomerang* (London, 1962).
19. William Greider, "The New Wave of Fright", *Washington Post*, Oct. 1980.
20. James Callaghan, Prime Minister, speaking in the House of Commons, November 1st, 1976. *Hansard*, Vol. 918, no. 176, colm. 976. (According to the 1948 edition of *Benham's Book of Quotations*, the truism was originated by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.)

## PROBLEMS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S DEFENCE

*by*

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"The dark clouds rolling towards South Africa pose a threat that makes essential the transition from a prosperous society to one that is geared for survival." So spoke General Magnus Malan, the recently retired head of the South African Defence Force in February, 1977. Other senior officers have echoed these words, but the Republic's military men are less dramatic than their political leaders who promise, if provoked, to fight "until the blood rises to the