Propaganda : its technique and how to combat it

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PROPAGANDA.

Its Technique and how to combat it.

"The success of any advertisement, whether in business or politics, is due to the continuity and consistency with which it is employed."

So declares Hitler in his autobiography, "Mein Kampf"; he sums up in these few words the reason for the continual use of State advertisement which in our time poisons the whole international atmosphere.

The word "propaganda" has in our days assumed a sinister significance and it is this malignity which I propose to analyse in this article.

The nefarious evolution of propaganda has been rapid since its inception during the Great War. The hymns of hate which poured out of Moscow to proclaim to an exhausted world a different warfare of classes seem now but child's play when compared with the technique of modern dictatorships.

Propaganda is essentially the instrument of despots; it is important for the dictator to explain in his own fashion the why and wherefore of the policy he is pursuing. He generally has two versions—one for his people and the other for external purposes, hence the need in totalitarian states of a strict censorship. The dictator's greatest worry is TRUTH, which at all costs must not reach the people of which he is nominally the head.

Incidentally, of late, certain individuals have made capital out of the activities or proposed designs of the distatorships. These elements, operating on the bourses and stock exchanges of the world, have deliberately spread false rumours in order to further their own ends—politically and financially. These people should be called before the bar of public opinion and severely punished. These war-mongers are the authors of the fits of jitters which have recently been registered on all financial markets.

Propaganda demands before anything else—psychology. The German Chancellor praises in his book the wartime technique of the British and Americans: this consisted in showing the Germans in a very detestable light. The British Tommy was told that the enemy was a barbarian and a Hun, and when he met him on the battle-field he was prepared for this villainous foe. On the other hand, German propaganda was fundamentally wrong in underrating and ridiculing the enemy; when the Prussian came face to face with these so-called "degenerates" he discovered at a terrible cost how he had been deceived.

"If your lie is big enough and often enough repeated," says Hitler, "people will begin to believe it." This is true. An immense majority of people are so feminine in nature and point of view that their thoughts and actions are governed more by feeling and sentiment than by reasoned consideration. This sentiment is, however, not complicated, but very simple and consistent. It does not differentiate much, but it is either positive or negative, love or hate, truth or lies, never half one and half the other and so on.

It is on this assumption that Propaganda Minister Goebels acts. He reiterates time after time the same lies. Many are those in the Reich who firmly believe Messrs. Churchill, Eden, Duff Cooper and others to be paid agents of Moscow.

I am happy to state, however, that during a séjour in Germany, I discovered that among the more intelligent Germans, Goebels is treated as an outstanding joke. The recent expulsion of certain German humorists from the Berlin stage bears out my statement.

A book could be written on all the little tricks of propaganda, suffice it to say that cartoons, caricatures and horror-pictures (usually out of date) go a long way towards convincing the mass. It is a known fact that certain gruesome pictures have already served to illustrate four or five different wars. A photo was shown to me of a cruiser sinking in Far East waters after having been hit by a bomb; the same picture was given to me, subsequently, as depicting a sinking warship in the present Spanish Civil War (the camera never lies, you know!).

Slogans often enough repeated will first numb the brain and then be accepted without demur by the tired mind.

If we who are fortunate enough to live in a democratic country only pause to consider how often an information, an article or some news has affected us, influenced our opinions, increased some prejudice or augmented our intolerance of something, how greater then must be the reactions in a state where the Press is day in and day out skilfully doctored and prepared as carefully as a salad dressing?

It is perhaps happy for us that sudden recent volte-face in the dictators' press have quickened the suspicions of the more critical minded readers. In time of war these suspicions might magnify and rapidly gain ground in the mass, which might suddenly wake up to realities.

Hence the immense care taken by propagandists to prevent their work turning against themselves.

Nowadays, diplomatic battles are supported by broadsides from the Press—the radio steps in with garbled versions of events.

The short-wave war is no myth. Countries are broadcasting "news" in half-a-dozen languages besides their own. Central Europe, the Near East and South America seem to be the more favoured soils in which to sow all this glut of discordancy.

Daventry, Stuttgart, Zeesen and Bari all contribute towards this incessant babel.

Propaganda has been particularly disruptive in Spain; Belgium (Walloon-Flemish dispute); Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Rumania (over the Ukrainian question) and has been fomenting discord between Croats and Serbs, Czechs and Slavs and is even now attempting in Sub-Carpathian Russia (Ruthenia) to create the new Ukrainian state out of the 40,000,000 Ukrainians at present living in the adjacent countries.

Anti-semitism is one of the chief instruments of modern propagandists. The Communist peril has been exaggerated beyond all bounds.

The continuous cacophony and mass production of lies and distortions augur ill for the future; if this ritournelle continues at the same tempo, it is evident that they will lead to but one result—another conflagration. Polemics have never in history been conducive to peace and what is taking place now is much more than controversy.

In the light of what has just been written, let us examine the position of Switzerland with regard to the vortex of propaganda at present undermining confidence in Europe.

Switzerland—one of the remaining countries of freedom—is geographically and culturally hemmed in on all sides by puissant neighbours.

Quite recently it was alleged in certain reliable quarters that the German and Italian governments had attempted to bring pressure to bear upon the Swiss Federal Council with the object of "aligning" the democratic Swiss press to the standards and likings of Berlin and Rome.

Switzerland has never in the past submitted her press-policy to the dictates of an external force. She has thus established for herself a world-wide reputation for the fearlessness and independence of her views. It has never been more necessary than to-day to maintain this reputation.

Latterly the Swiss authorities have been anxious as to the sources of news abroad which supply the country with its foreign information.

More and more—and although it is an expensive affair—Swiss papers tend to rely on Swiss correspondents abroad for their news. However trustworthy a foreign source may be it can never be as satisfactory as a purely Swiss one.

Unfortunately, certain foreign elements in that grand little democracy can cause much harm by their writings which they represent as being Swiss opinions. This must be ended at all costs if Helvetia wishes to maintain her integrity.

The position of Holland is very similar to that of Switzerland and the former country is now pursuing the same policy of complete independence.

Now that we have reviewed the whole field of the technique of propaganda, let us examine what Great Britain is doing to counteract it.

Up to a few years ago the British Government only spent annually a few paltry thousand pounds to spread English culture abroad.

It has been realized since, that in front of the millions spent on propaganda by the totalitarian states, it was essential to combat this new threat.

Accordingly, that very energetic and capable authority, Sir Robert Vansittart, was appointed chairman of a committee in which are represented the British Broadcasting Corporation, the British Council (for the spreading of British education abroad) and the Travel Association (which encourages tourists to visit this country). In this way the British Government wishes to show abroad English institutions and aims in their true light. These measures have already given very satisfactory results to their initiators.

TRUTH is now being circulated in the world and although it arrives tardily in certain quarters of the globe, it is better late than never.

There is one other factor of high importance to which I wish to allude before ending this analysis on a subject which is so very topical these days. It is this:

If we wish our TRUTH to bear fruit, we must also for our part search the mote which is in our own eye. For we are not so innocent as many would believe, and it is incumbent on us to end all these baseless rumours, exaggerations and sensational stories that appear daily in our own Press. Adopting a correct attitude does not signify our abandoning freedom of the press or the ventilation of one's political opinions of whatever tint they may be.

So let TRUTH, HONESTY and FREEDOM be our maxim and let us hope that a new and rosier era will dawn on our globe, at present in the throes of MAN'S ignorance and intolerance.

(*Gerald Meyer.*)

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CITY SWISS CLUB.

The plans which have been made for the June meeting have now materialised, and it is with the greatest of pleasure that we now announce to all members and their friends, who have made up their minds to attend the monthly meeting at Pagani's, on June 6th, that we have been fortunate enough in getting Mr. Gilbert Carr to accept an invitation to attend this meeting.

Mr. Gilbert Carr, who is very well known to a number of our members, is Governor of the American Club in London. He is also Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in London.

From 1937-1938 he was Chairman of the American Society in London.

From 1933-1938 he was Commander of the American Legion in London.

From 1936-1938 he was Chairman of the Incorporated Sales Managers' Association.

Mr. Gilbert Carr is a personal friend of the writer. He is a very much travelled man, and one of the most experienced business men we have had the pleasure of meeting with. He has just returned from a long trip in America, and he makes frequent journeys throughout Europe including Germany, the Baltic States, etc. He has first-hand knowledge of the economic, financial and political situation, and I feel sure that all members who are so keenly interested in the international situation at the present moment will consider it a privilege to listen to what Mr. Gilbert Carr has to say when he addresses the members on "European Affairs." The number of friends who have already heard of his coming to the forthcoming meeting are overjoyed at having such an opportunity of hearing an unbiassed opinion by such an expert, and I strongly recommend all our members and our friends to make early reservation, as the meeting promises to once more break all records as far as attendance is concerned at a monthly meeting of the City Swiss Club.

As usual, the meeting will be preceded by a dinner which will start at 7 o'clock, and I understand that Pagani's are going out of their way to give all the "boys" a real treat.

May I once more point out that this is the last monthly meeting before the autumn season, and our President with his colleagues of the committee looks forward to a "full house."

Please do not hesitate to let Mr. Boehringer or the Secretary know at the earliest possible moment