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# Nazi Propaganda and Second World War

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## ABSTRACT

*The 'use' of mass media by the governments has been a long standing tradition. Every government has a ministry or a department related to the Press or the Media. The need of 'managing' the media by the governments is felt the most during the time of national crisis, and incidentally war is one such time. This paper attempts to analyse the use/ misuse of media as a propaganda tool by the state and non-state actors for achieving their own goals which are stated to be nationally important.*

**Keywords:** Propaganda, Nazi, World War, Media

## I. INTRODUCTION

Propaganda is a method of systematic deception of the people by means of control over their minds with the aid of mass media tools. It is done with a primary purpose of generating a popular opinion amongst the people towards a cause or a goal as desired by the ruling elites. News bulletins, advertisements, posters, graffiti are some of the primary methods used to diffuse the ideas of the ruling elite among a large base of people, and to control their minds and opinion in the manner they desire. However, it is not a fool proof method. Though propaganda does influence a large group of people, there may be rebellious under-currents existing in the society waiting for the right opportunity to raise their heads.

The term 'Propaganda' was a widely used term till the 1920s in the western world as the method of controlling the 'public mind'. This is seen in the works of Edward Bernays, a US based Public Relations manager, who wrote a standard manual for public relations titled as 'Propaganda'. It was after the Second World War that the term 'Propaganda' got bad connotations, because of Nazi Germany, and the term was dropped. (Chomsky 2001: 182-183).

## II. THE BINARY WORLD OF NAZI PROPAGANDA

If telegraph helped the empire tighten its grip over colonies and Communist propaganda led to the rise of ideological dogmatism in Russia, then the Ministry of Propaganda delivered the death warrant to humanity in Europe. The credit, or the blame, for systematically making use of propaganda for advancing political gains and views of the leadership was developed under the

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command of Joseph Goebbels. It was believed by him and Adolf Hitler that to control individual actions it was first necessary to control their thought processes. He devoted two chapters of his book ‘Mein Kampf’, itself a propaganda tool, to the study and use of propaganda. Hitler was particularly amazed by the success of Allied Propaganda of the First World War which had mobilized the people in their home nations against the Central Powers led by Germany. The Allied Propaganda had also succeeded in depicting Germans as war-mongers and barbaric. Hitler decided to use the same propaganda machinery, but on an even more planned and coordinated manner, to raise the morale of the German masses and to depict the superiority of the Germans over all the others. It was with this purpose that a ‘Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda’ was established under Goebbels.

Due to his educational and oratory skills Goebbels stood out among the goons in Nazi party and soon started a newspaper Der Angriff (The Attack). Like Marat, he too positioned his newspaper as a voice of oppressed. With the advent of the great depression and rise of Hitler, Goebbels found him at the helm of power and later as the head of the ministry. The ministry and Goebbels teamed up to spill vicious oratory, misinformation drive against opponents and Jews which led the carnage thoroughly bringing forth the darkest chapter in modern history. This was done by controlling the press and culture of Nazi Germany, he was charged with enforcing Nazi doctrine on the people and controlling public opinion.

Hitler writes in his book ‘Mein Kampf’ –

*“... The great majority of a nation is so feminine in its character and outlook that its thought and conduct are ruled by sentiment rather than by sober reasoning. This sentiment, however, is not complex, but simple and consistent. It is not highly differentiated, but has only the negative and positive notion of love and hatred, right and wrong, truth and falsehood.”*

(Hitler 1925: Chapter VI)

Nazi Propaganda was based on traditional German values and provided a complete explanation of the past and present events happening in the world (Bytwerk 2008). Nazi Propaganda therefore had a close relationship with economic disturbances and also incorporated prominent theories and problems of the time (Welch 2004). For example, the propaganda related to the Jewish people was based on the already existing anti – Semitism in Germany. Nazi Propaganda relied heavily on rhetoric, keeping the main points simple, emotional and insistent (Bytwerk 2008). The self/ other distinction is of particular importance in propaganda, since it is a means of justification of action and identification of friend or foe (Kohl 2011: 7). The division of the

world was done in binary terms, us versus them, good versus evil, internal and external foes.

The Nazi propaganda thus created two identities in German society which have been termed as ‘self’ and ‘other’ by Diane Kohl. It led to the classic ‘us versus them’ conflict within the society already known for its deep antipathy towards the Jewish community. Its dominance in certain spheres of economic activity in the city created further dislike which was effectively utilised by Hitler in his rise to power, and later to keep his control intact over the nation.

*“On a general level, the distinction between self and other appeared to be equal between good and evil: Aryans were synonymous with everything good and the Jewish people with everything bad.”*

(Kohl 2011: 10)

The ‘others’ in Nazi propaganda came to have two subdivisions – internal and external. The internal enemies were the Jews, who were held responsible for all the economic miseries and failures of Germany, and the external enemies were France and England on one hand and the Soviets on the other. The Nazi Propaganda initially focused more on the internal enemies who need to be ‘exterminated’ from the society, later turning to the external ones in mid 1930s. The Jews were the ‘dominant others’. As per the Nazi Propaganda under Goebbels, in order to rise as a ruling race of the planet the Aryans need to clean their homeland from the Jewish dirt. The Jews were consistently portrayed by the Nazis as ‘parasitic’, ‘disease’, ‘fungus’, etc. People should not care about them, nor should they feel guilt for killing them (Volkan 2007: 45).

*“The Jews are a parasitic race that feeds like a foul fungus on the cultures of healthy but ignorant peoples. There is only one effective measure: cut them out.”*

(Goebbels Speech 1941; quoted by Kohl 2011: 17)

Posters, films, speakers, radio, cartoons, and fliers were seen throughout Germany which attacked the Jewish community, such as the 1940 film ‘*The Eternal Jew*’. Hitler and Goebbels believed that film was a potent tool for molding public opinion. Soon after the Nazi takeover, Goebbels was insisting in the speeches that the role of the German cinema was to serve as the “vanguard of the Nazi military” as they set forth to conquer the world (Eisner 2008: 329). Radio was another effective and a much more mass based propaganda tool utilized by the Ministry under Goebbels. The Nazi regime provided subsidies on the production and distribution of radios, with the effect that it is estimated that about seventy percent of the German households had one radio by 1939 Radio broadcasts were also played over public speakers on city roads and near government offices. This was done with the primary reason of diffusing the ideas of

the Nazi regime among the German masses.

What is beyond slightest of doubts is that the Nazis did succeed in establishing one of the most systematic, efficient and inhuman propaganda machinery under the guidance of the two ‘Satans’ (or ‘spirits’ for the Neo-Nazis) in the form of Hitler and Goebbels. The effect of the Nazi propaganda still lingers on the psyche of many individuals around the globe who see in him as a virtual ‘demi – god’. The spirit of anti – Semitism is also present, though in a subdued form, along with the belief that the Nazis helped in creating the best epochs of German history. The existence and steady growth of Neo – Nazi movements is a testament to the success of the ‘Propaganda Machinery’ of Goebbels. Never before was the media so effectively and successfully manipulated by a political system.

### **III. SECOND WORLD WAR AND PROPAGANDA**

At the same time, England and the US also responded with their measures to counter the Nazi – Fascist propaganda. While the US was predominantly interested in spreading the war time awareness in her own society, trying to motivate people to either participate as soldiers or to help in the production of war essentials. The seven part propaganda film series titled “*Why We Fight*” was produced by the US government to motivate the soldiers to fight, and was later released for the general public to enlist support for the Allied war effort. The Soviets also primarily focused their efforts of propaganda to motivate their people to fight against the ‘Nazi Aggressors’ and to defend their ‘Motherland’. It was only when the Soviet Army reached the boundaries of Germany that the Soviet Radio started broadcasting in German territories to convince the Germans to surrender.

England countered the Nazi propaganda in her colonies through her network of BBC Radio. The BBC along with AIR went on a two front attack in the Indian sub-continent – countering the Nazi supported propaganda on one hand and on the other the propaganda of Indian National Congress (Congress had started her own underground radio broadcasts from Bombay in 1942).

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Since the two World Wars, radio and other forms of mass media have been effectively utilized by the state to forward its aims and objectives in a war or a war like situation. The recent attack on the World Trade Centre in US, and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ launched under Bush Administration is a prominent example. So is the war on Iraq launched under the, now falsified, premise that they had Weapons of Mass Destruction. Radio and other mass media tools remain one of the most utilized methods of spreading information and for diffusion of ideas. It has

immense potential to act as a tool of peace, just as it has been used as an effective war time tool.

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