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PROPAGANDA: ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN WAR AND PEACE

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Lecture Delivered

by

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at the

Naval War College
Newport, R.I.
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PROPAGANDA: ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN WAR AND PEACE

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A. What is propaganda?

1. Pre-war Definitions (standard but anachronistic)

Origin of the word: propagare, to fasten down slips of a plant, for forced generation.

Webster: any organization or scheme for spreading a particular doctrine or system of principles.

Criticism: leaves out the peculiar methods of propaganda as distinguished from education. E.g., schools are organization for spreading particular doctrines and principles, such as the multiplication table, the alphabet, etc.

Even Lippmann's post-war definition is too old-fashioned: "the effort to alter the pictures to which men respond" - a perfectly good statement of the aims of education.

These definitions do not show the modern coloring of appeal to emotion by means of suggestion for self-interest.

2. Post-war Definitions (critical and suspicious)

New concepts of defense creeping in: debunking and Ballyhoo.

A typical anagonistic definition: "Propaganda is a partisan, one-sided, self-serving communication to the public, from an irresponsible and concealed source, calculated to influence public thought, either for or against a public policy or cause". M.E. Pew, Teach. Coll. Rec., 1929, 31, 1, 37-43.

Criticisms: not necessarily an "irresponsible and concealed source". The anti-saloon league is neither irresponsible nor concealed; same with Birth Control Leagues, editors of papers, advertisers, etc. Many times this condition obtains, but not necessarily.

Another example: "the creation of public opinion by the spread of misinformation". Propaganda need not contain misinformation, though it is almost always selected and partial information.

Propaganda is extinguished when both sides of the question are known to the individual.

3. Post-war definitions (critical and psychological)

E.g., "the illegitimate child of the publicity family; born of education as a mother and special interest as a father" (E.M. Hopkins).

This definition brings out the double face of propaganda. And shows that it is distinct from education, but does not show how.

Definition by a professional propagandist (note lack of antagonistic flavor):

"Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring, effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea, or group" (E. L. Bernays). Virtually no important activity, he goes on to say, is undertaken without it.

Criticism: leaves out method (which distinguishes propaganda from education); also makes no mention of special-interest.

A psychological definition:

"An effort to influence public opinion in behalf of some special interest by means of suggestion".

three important elements here: public opinion,
not individual opinion at issue;
special interest,
deemed desirable by proponent, usually but
not necessarily self-serving;
process of suggestion
as distinct from process of discrimination
(which is education).

Definition of suggestion:

"Suggestion is the acceptance of a proposition for belief or action in the absence of the intervening thought and judgment that would normally occur".

All propaganda uses suggestion, which is the same as absence of self-determination. One does not make up one's mind; one's mind is made up for one!

B. The Background of Modern Propaganda. (Large scale organized propaganda is something new, post-war). But the roots of its use, and the reasons for its discovery are the following:

1. The psychology of irrationalism

- a. older psychology called "idea psychology" regarded man as a purely rational animal; force of emotions neglected.
- b. influence of Shopenhauer, Darwin, Freud, McDougall in uncovering, emphasizing the primacy of emotionality. Intellect held to be subservient to emotion.

2. The psychology of "the crowd"

- a. Older view of crowd mind as distinct from individual mind: E.g., "Trotter and Le Bon, who approached the subject in a scientific manner, and Graham Wallas, Walter Lippmann and others who continued with searching studies of the group mind, established that the group has mental characteristics distinct from those of the individual, and is motivated by impulses and emotions which cannot be explained on the basis of what we know of individual psychology". (E.L. Bernays).
- b. Criticisms: The descriptions by Le Bon are good; the explanations in terms of "crowd mind" dim and vague.

The modern view of psychology is to study the individual both outside and in the crowd, to discover the individual processes which are responsible for his crowd behavior.

"The individual behaves in a crowd as he would alone, only more so". Mechanisms of social facilitation, projection, release of repressions, freedom from responsibility, etc. See Martin, Behavior of Crowds, and F.H. Allport, Social Psychology.

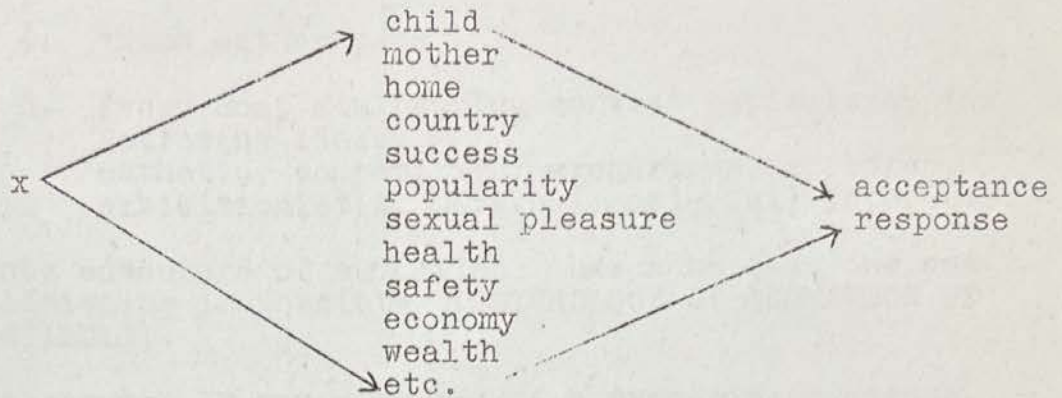
There is no super-mind; only individuals who "go crazy" together.

3. The Pulitzer Revolution in Newspaper methods (1880's).
 - a. The discovery by practical journalism of the commercial value of exploiting emotional interests.
 - b. Pulitzer's memorandum to his staff to publish "what is original, distinctive, dramatic, romantic, thrilling, unique, curious, quaint, humorous, odd, apt to be talked about".
 - c. Later development in same direction by Hearst: memo to staff on Washington Times, "newspaper readers are most interested in stories which contain the elements most dominant in the primitive emotions of themselves, namely
self-preservation (fight stories)
love and reproduction (sex and scandal)
ambition (success stories)
 - d. This direction reached its climax in the tabloid: enduring and powerful emotions constantly aroused: sexuality, fearsome spectacles, early emotional sentiments connected with mother love, childhood religion, transgressions of convention, but also confessions, repentances, advice to young men. "The electric chair which fries and fries..."
 - e. Illustrations from newspaper advertising: Boston Globe, Feb. 3, 1873: Jordan Marsh will open next Monday, a large and fresh stock of Housekeeping Goods".

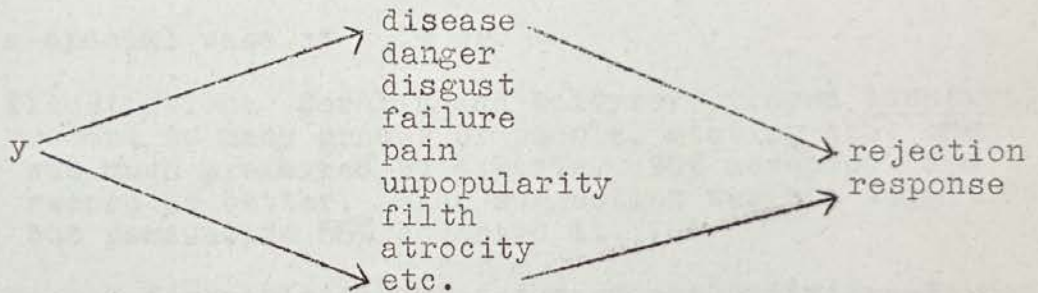
Compare with: "Keep your hands soft for caressing".
"Buy our Rubber Gloves".

4. The Great War. More than any other factor brought to a focus these movements and gave rise to the practical use of propaganda for controlling almost every phase of public opinion.
 - a. Mr. Creel assures us that paper bullets won the war.

- b. During autumn of 1918, 100,000 leaflets a day distributed behind the lines, by stringing them on a lighter cord, which was attached to a balloon; as it burned it released packs of leaflets; west wind favored allied propaganda by this method.
 - c. Propaganda at home colossal; methods to be described.
 - d. war focused interest, changed definitions, and created a new profession, and social force.
5. Public Relations Counsel; a powerful contemporary profession.
- a. Cf. Playing the Deep Bassoons, by Stanley Walker, February, 1932, Harpers Magazine.
 - b. Propaganda becoming a special profession.
 - c. Devising new and clever methods, hard to detect, and enormously fruitful. Cf. use of follies girls to force druggists to carry "fatless" remedy. They pretended to buy \$10 worth of goods; then flung out in a rage when their order for "fatless" could not be filled. Druggists then notified that they could buy this remedy in 60 pound lots; then let the druggists get rid of it. Sold more this way than by advertising.
 - d. many concerns restricting their advertising outlay, and engaging more clever and effective "public relations counsels".
- C. The Rules of Propaganda and their Underlying Psychological Principles.
1. Attach the proposition to pre-existing desires or aversions. (PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CONDITIONED EMOTIONAL RESPONSE).
 - a. What G.B. Shaw has called, "The organization of Idolatry".
 - b. Most important principle of all; universally employed.
 - c. E.g. is one wishes to "sell" proposition x (tooth paste, repeal, enforcement, armament, disarmament, Chinese nation, Japanese nation, or what not) associate it with known acceptance-attitudes.



d. If one wishes to obtain a rejection for proposition y (any of the above or other propositions) associate it with well-worn rejection responses.



e. This method is effective (a) because it is economical, the emotional force already made and waiting to be exploited, (b) because it is the essence of suggestion, responding to partial (in this case, emotional) influences, in the absence of argument, thought, logical reasoning, experience, and discrimination.

f. Illustrations:

1. Haldeman-Julius sold only 8,000 copies of Hugo's drama "The King enjoys himself"; but retitled, "the Lustful King enjoys himself" sold 38,000 copies.
2. "Proves mother is your closest friend" caption for an ad for Carter's Little Liver Pills.
3. Sentence from anti-Catholic tract: "Canon Law brands Protestant wives as concubines and Protestant wives as bastards, while Roman priests curse our flag and government from their pulpits."

4. "Huns eat corpses".
 5. Ivory Soap Sculpturing contest capitalizes the following idols:
esthetic, competitive, gregarious, snobbish, exhibitionistic, maternal, material, interests.
 - g. Note advantage of summation: use more than one conditioning if possible (PSYCHOLOGY OF SUMMATION OF STIMULI).
 - h. In short: If you wish to put a proposition across, railroad it into the action system via a well-worn action habit.
2. Use the Authority of Trusted Leaders (PSYCHOLOGY OF PRESTIGE SUGGESTION)
 - a. a special case of Rule #1.
 - b. Illustration: Sorokin and Boldyreff played identical record to many groups of people, stating that one was much preferred by experts. 96% accepted same record as better. When suggestion was not dogmatic but persuasive 58% accepted it.
 - c. People favorable disposed toward authority are favorably disposed toward propositions accepted by authority.
 - d. this is the psychology of testimonials.
 - e. exploiting life-long habits of trust, deference, obedience, submission, projection, identification, and admiration.
 3. Give the proposition the sanction of "facts" or "science" (PSYCHOLOGY OF PRESTIGE SUGGESTION)
 - a. a special case of Rule #1.
 - b. a particularly American idol.
 - c. Illustration of worthless Sanatogen and picture; of doctor and nurse looking very professional.
 - d. Cf. pseudo-science of ads.
 - e. The "facts" given may be false; but are more usually partial (which makes this kind of propaganda a good illustration of suggestion).

- f. Illustration: war department gives duplicates of its films of maneuvers to commercial companies for news reels; but refused gruesome pictures to the author of a recent book called "The Horror of it". Permits West Point to be used for filming stories that are favorable to military life. Keeps cavalry chiefly for propaganda purposes; people like horses.
 - g. Illustration: Bureau of Educ. Dept. of Interior, Pamphlet #28, on benefits of R.O.T.C. showing about 97% of graduates well-disposed. But graduates are only those who took the elective final two years, and not those who took the compulsory first two years.
4. Give special attention to choice of words (PSYCHOLOGY OF ASSOCIATION OR REDINTEGRATION; also STEREOTYPE)
- a. a special case of Rule #1.
 - b. Illustration: "Evacuation hospitals" were severely criticized in England because of their lack of facilities. Name changed to "evacuation Posts" and criticism ceased; because no one expects much of a "post".
 - c. Be sure your word arouses the attitude you want aroused.
 - d. Must employ pat words, shibboleths, apt phrases; for these are the immediate and effective cause of attitudes and acceptance or avoidance responses.
5. Avoid Argument. Do not admit the other side (PSYCHOLOGY of SUGGESTION).
- a. Admitting both sides leaves the individual free for his own decision which is the opposite of propaganda. Arguing suggests the other side.
 - b. When asked what he would do if his opponent for congress tried to advance facts regarding public ownership, Mr. Insull's asst. director of public utility information replied, "My idea would not be to try logic or reason, but to try to pin the Bolshevik idea on my opponent".
 - c. Pseudo-argument useful to gain attention and throw people off guard. E.g. stating your topic in a question form, "Is there a Japanese Menace"?
6. Speaking generally, use positive rather than negative statements and appeals (PSYCHOLOGY OF POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE SUGGESTION).

- a. a special case of Rule 5.
- b. Negative suggestion arouses opposite tendency, as does argument.
- c. Laboratory experiment, employed grooved board with electrical wiring. A stylus must go down the middle. Instructions "go down exact middle" much more successful than "do not touch the sides".
- d. Negative suggestion tells one what not to do, but arouses the opposite tendency. "Do not think of the word elephant".
- e. Qualification necessary. Growing use of negative appeal. Advertising telling all sorts of things to avoid. Danger is that the product itself will be avoided.

But this does not seem to be fatal; people have just enough wit to realize that the danger is to be avoided, and that the product is meant to assist in avoiding it, e.g. insurance.

- f. Negative suggestion based chiefly on fear appeals, and these are growing in favor.
7. Use indirect statement, implication or inuendo (PSYCHOLOGY of DIRECT VS. INDIRECT SUGGESTION).
- a. Direct suggestion is command, and commands are ordinarily resisted. You tell a stranger to "look up into the sky"; and he will say "Look up yourself"! But you can make him look up by pointing or gazing up yourself.
 - b. In normal life, direct command arouses doubt or antagonism.
 - c. Direct suggestion effective only
 - 1) when people are trained, prepared, and willing, as in military or naval service; students, etc.
 - 2) when hypnosis is employed.
 - d. Indirect suggestion is suggestion that masks the ends desired, but appealing to a previous motive and not to the final act.
 - 1) Soap Mfgs, Assoc. support the Cleanliness Institute, and appeal to the motives rather than advertise "Buy Palmolive". The real goal is hidden.

- 2) Diphtheria anti-toxin difficult to advertise. Public relations counsel stages dog-sled trip to Nome for chemical company producing this anti-toxin. No diphtheria there or at least plenty of anti-toxin. Just a good show with free publicity.
 - 3) Bringing soldiers' bodies back from France, appealed to sentimentality; but supported by Undertakers association.
8. Make your statements brief and clear (PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SPAN OF ATTENTION, IMAGERY, and INTEGRATION for ACTION).
- a. Illustration 1916 "(With honor) he kept us out of war". too much for the average mind; a compound proposition; the slogan became abbreviated.
 - b. Singleness of purpose necessary, definite concrete, homogeneous action tendencies.
 - c. Illustration: the Anti-saloon League persistently refused to endorse other moral reforms; know they must keep their purpose single.
 - d. This same point shows the advantage of pictures. Concrete definite images produce singleness of action. Posters on same principle; only one idea at a time.
9. If possible, have the emotional attitude aroused consistent with the proposition (PSYCHOLOGY OF INTEGRATION and REINFORCEMENT).
- a. a corollary of Rule 1.
 - b. Not absolutely necessary, for simply associating the proposition with an arbitrary acceptance attitude is possible. Pretty girls in ads for everything.
 - c. But propaganda doubly effective if close connection exists previously in the association produced.
 - d. Illustration: good idea to have political candidate kiss babies or hold sap buckets, but doubly good if the candidate has a baby-welfare policy or farm-relief program.
 - e. psychologically this means exploiting previous bonds.
10. Keep talking and printing incessantly (PSYCHOLOGY OF LAW OF FREQUENCY). Probably second only to first rule in importance.

- a. Reiteration necessary, for other things being equal frequency counts.
 - b. Illustration: Anti-Saloon League press at Waterville, Ohio issued 244,782,296 pieces of literature between 1909 and 1923.
 - c. This principle shows the importance of money. Groups with more resources will win out.
 - d. Dismal prospect at present; more spent in advertising than in the total educational outlay for the country.
11. Aim at Children for long-run results. (PSYCHOLOGY of PRIMACY).
- a. of interest only to long-run policies or established firms.
 - b. Illustrations: prohibition, Ivory Soap, contests under patriotic societies, Public Utilities Corporations, etc.
 - c. Psychology, simply that other things being equal first impressions are important for retention.

D. The Effects of Propaganda

1. The Social Effects

- a. Empirical evidence that it pays: it writes constitutional amendments, it defeats and elects candidates, it sells millions of cases of soap, billions of cigarettes, it makes wars, and can make peace.
- b. experimental evidence. New research for measuring attitudes, to determine the specific effects of different kinds and amounts of propaganda. University of Chicago. Gosnell under committee of S.S.R.C. which is studying Pressure Politics.
- c. The power in hands of small groups who have money; practically no limit to what they can do in making the rest of us think what they please.

Illustration: Public Utilities Corporations, represent small minority interest, but have made

30,284 public speeches to a combined audience of 4,000,000 (1922-1927); in addition have modified text-books, paid and unpaid advertising, purchase of newspapers, elected F.L. Smith to U.S. Senate, Insull contributing \$125,000,- voted fraudulent by Senate.

2. The psychological effects.

- a. Directly opposed to self-determination and individuality of opinion; also directly opposed to discrimination on the basis of all evidence and personal desire.
- b. This fact makes propaganda the antithesis of the educational ideal, which is to enable people to decide for themselves in the light of all relevant determinants: experience, facts, both sides of argument, personal desires and personal advantage.
- c. In extreme cases (e.g. war), the summation of propaganda can throw the public into a delirious, undiscriminated, emotional muddle.

E.G. French War Creed (an utterly utter debauch); note how many juxtapositions there are between well-established acceptance habits and the instruments of war, i.e., evidences of rule 1.

"I believe in the courage of our soldiers and in the skill and devotion of our leaders. I believe in the power of right, and in the crusade of civilization, France, the eternal, the imperishable, the essential. I believe in the reward of suffering and in the worth of hope. I believe in confidence, in quiet thought, in the humble daily round, in discipline, in charity militant. I believe in the blood and wounds and the water of benediction; in the blaze of artillery and in the flame of the votive candle; in the beads of the rosary. I believe in the hallowed vows of the old, and in the potent innocence of childhood. I believe in women's prayers, in the sleepless heroism of the wife, in the calm piety of the mother, in the purity of our cause, in the stainless glory of our flag. I believe in our great past, in our great present, and in our greater future. I believe in our countrymen, living and dead. I believe in the hands clenched for battle, and in the hands clasped for prayer. I believe in ourselves, I believe in God. I believe, I believe".

E. The Future of Propaganda. Will the masses continue to accept it?

1. Opinion of contemporary propagandists and public relations counsels that they will.

- a. impossibility of all people acting with discrimination in all departments of our complex life. Avg. man apallingly ignorant of all but one or two subjects.

therefore all of us at mercy of judgments issued for us by propagandists in other fields than our specialty.

- b. Cannot eliminate propaganda by public enlightenment of methods, for new methods discovered continually.

- 1) If advertising palls, the Pub. Rel. Counsels invent something new.

Whispering campaigns effective; started by well-set up men in Pullman Cars.

Canned-goods companies flatter the grocery clerks to get them to sell their products.

bribery of editors; mutual favors; you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Boston papers publish news stories favorable to stores if stores advertise especially heavily.

- c. No social control possible; laws ineffective. Besides govt. does not want too many laws, since it depends also upon propaganda. E.g., even the statements issued by the president and all officials are selected to form and energize certain selected opinions deemed desirable by the officials in question.

2. A psychologist's opinion.

- a. Not very optimistic. As I see it a race between education and propaganda. Money, skill, and human weakness on side of propaganda.
- b. One possibility. A general attitude of skepticism and suspicion. Distrust everything; just as we now are on our guard when people come to our door or phone us with a bright and engaging voice.

Not negativism- that is refusal of everything, for the person who always rejects everything is just as suggestible as the person who accepts.

But a general attitude of discrimination is a possibility, and might be developed in education.

Worst obstacle in education is the "prestige suggestion" employed willy-nilly by teachers (Cf. Sorokin and Boldyreff who found 100% of college students falling for the "expert" opinion, so that they could not even recognize two records as identical!).

- c. Growing signs of hope: the popularity of Ballyhoo, and debunking plays, periodical, and satire. Growing membership in Consumer's Research, where facts are given to offset commercial propaganda.