

Propaganda as an Instrument of War

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MORE THAN any other war in history the conflict of 1914-18 was one of arms and ideas—of words as well as of explosives and steel. Early in 1918 the late Edwin E. Slosson said: "The war has resolved itself to a question of morale. Which people will lose heart first?" And Hindenburg is quoted as having said that he who keeps his nerve the longest wins the war.

Thus, to make the enemy lose heart, to tear down their morale, the Allies organized a system of propaganda for enemy countries that rivaled any other means of warfare for efficiency and scientific perfection. In England, Crewe House, under the direction of Lord Northcliffe; in France, La Maison de la Presse and Le Comité Catholique; in America, the Military Intelligence Division of the United States Army, under the direction of Heber Blankenhorn; the Committee of Public Information, under the leadership of George Creel, and the Friends of German Democracy, all concentrated their efforts toward the destruction of the enemy morale. Before the close of the war there had been organized a regular Interallied Board for propaganda against the enemy; it met at regular intervals at Crewe House in London, under the presidency of Lord Northcliffe.

These organizations printed leaflets, pamphlets, books and pictures, and delivered them to the German troops, and the people behind the lines, with amazing efficiency. The trench mortar, the airplane, and finally the free balloon, were all used to deliver the "word bullets" to the enemy.

A study of the propaganda leaflets, or *Flugblätter*, as the Germans called them, reveals clearly four distinct phases of the propaganda war. The

subject matter of these various phases may be thus classified: (1) propaganda of education; (2) propaganda of fear; (3) propaganda of hope, and (4) revolutionary propaganda. This is more or less the chronological order in which these different phases appeared. Only a few typical examples of each can be given to show just what the allied propagandists were driving at in their campaigns.

A. Propaganda of Education—The first thing that the "verbal warriors" attempted to do was to present to the enemy the allied war aims. The initial series of "balloon leaflets" issued by Crewe House contained Lloyd George's speech in which he outlined the war aims of the Allies:

We are not waging an aggressive war against the German people. * * * The destruction of the German people was never one of our war aims, either at the beginning or today.

Throughout this and other speeches we find the sentiment expressed that the Allies are fighting for justice, for the protection of the weaker nations, and for international honor.

The French attacked the supposed war aims of Germany in a "Message to the Berlin Populace," which was dropped over Berlin by French fliers. The aviators attached a little note to the packets of these leaflets which said:

We could have attacked the city of Berlin with bombs, and thereby killed innocent women and children; but we chose to direct the following to the German people.

Then follows the message:

Many clear-sighted Germans know today that the war was instigated by the military degenerates of Berlin and Vienna. * * * The German people were lied to, to force them into a war which they did not want. They call it a war of defense, a war of liberation, but it is noth-

ing but a war of conquest and stealing.

When the United States entered the war, much space was devoted to the causes that drove America into it. American disinterestedness in the conflict, so far as conquest or reward was concerned, was stressed. America's great desire, said the leaflets, was to help free the world of Prussianism and the military Junkers. Quoting from one of Wilson's speeches, leaflet A. P. 3 says in part:

What we want is that the world come to the point where security and prosperity are insured; security for every peace-loving nation, which, like our own, desires freedom, the right to determine its own destinies, and to be assured of justice, and fair dealing with other nations.

In order to keep the enemy rank-and-file informed with regard to the activities on the front, various "newspapers" were established, of which the *Trench Newspaper* and the *Truppen Nachrichtenblatt* were the outstanding. The latter was a small leaflet, six by eight inches in size, and contained such pointed headlines as: "Foch Leading New Attack. Entente Armies Press Forward on Another Wide Front." Or again, "Turkish Army in Palestine Destroyed. No Further Opposition to English Expected."

When the British took the offensive in 1918, they sowed the German trenches with maps upon which their gains were plainly marked. They recalled the false hopes which the German leaders had held out to the people and the army. They circulated an alleged statement in a German newspaper which lamented that a few weeks ago it appeared as if our armies were near their goal: the defeat of the enemy and peace. But what a change! The maps contained also the number of prisoners taken and the number of dead and wounded on each side, after every encounter. So accurate were these estimates of losses to Germany that Eugene Netter was prompted to write in his *Der Seelischen Zusammenbruch der Deutschen Kampffront* (The Psychological Collapse of the German Fighting Front):

The leaflets told of the losses to the

Germans in the first offensive. The number lost in one of our regiments, as given in the leaflets, tallied exactly with the actual loss; hence, thereafter, the entire contents of the leaflets were believed, and one was stunned at the greatness of our losses.

B. Propaganda of Fear.—Intensifying the horrors of war, and assuring the enemy that the Allies were determined to fight to the end, was another type of propaganda against Germany—the propaganda of fear. Such leaflets as these, constantly brought to the attention of the soldiers, could not but have a desirable effect—from the standpoint of the Allies, at least. Said one:

To You in the Field of Death!

Wherever you march there is a desert and everywhere there is death. You are in the field of death! Look about you! All that you can see is the work of death.

Why are you here with the dead?
Why? For how long?

And another contained the comforting words that

Probably tomorrow you too will lie in a shellhole with your face up, looking toward heaven; then you will have peace, the peace of the field of slaughter!

While at home your wives and children are hungering!

When the American forces were being felt at the front, the odds were entirely against Germany. Her cause seemed hopeless, and yet her troops fought on. Along with the attacks of gas, bombs and shells during the great Western offensive, the Allies made unceasing attacks with propaganda. Word "bullets" such as follows were rained upon the enemy:

The war may last for years yet.

One hundred thousand more Germans lie buried in France. He who has had enough of this nameless dirtiness; who is tired of spending his best years in blood and dirt; who wants to return home with unbroken bones, to work for a better and freer Germany, let him refuse to follow further.

Then calling upon the troops to surrender to the French, the leaflet ends:

Free yourselves, come over to a free nation and victory is yours; the victory of a freedom-loving German people against war-mad exploiters.

C. Propaganda of Hope—But it was not enough to bring to the attention of the German troops the fact that they were fighting a losing battle, and that they were slaves to the military and Junker class. They had to be given something better to strive for, and to hope for.

One way by which the German soldier could hope to save his life, and perhaps return home to his family un-maimed, was to surrender to the Allies. Propaganda, purporting to emanate from the German prisoners already in allied camps, telling about the good food, the comfortable quarters and the fine treatment that they were receiving in these prisons, was sent out by the wagon load. Many times supposed letters of German prisoners to their families at home were leafletized and distributed to the enemy. The following is an example of these:

Chateauroux, Jl. 7, 1917.

Frau Dreuske, Bueschow, Province Brandenburg.

I have just finished cracking nuts, for we receive nuts or cherries for every meal. Our host is glad to have us eat our fill, for when we leave something over he thinks we do not want it, and sometimes it is not possible to eat it all. We have plenty of bread and wine; if he sees we want water he turns and brings wine. From this you can see that I suffer no need. I close in the hope that this letter finds you in the same condition it has left me.

But perhaps the most ingenious scheme for getting the enemy to desert to the Allies was that used by the Americans. This was in the form of an invitation. Typographically it was an exact reproduction of the German field postcard. Its instructions began:

Write the address of your family upon this card and if you are captured by the Americans, give it to the first officer who questions you. He will make it his business to forward it in order that your family will be reassured concerning your welfare.

The reverse side had the following greeting to the home folks all ready for the prisoner to sign his name to:

Do not worry about me. The war is over for me. I have good food. The American Army gives its prisoners the

same food as its own soldiers; beef, white bread, potatoes, beans, prunes, coffee, butter, tobacco, and so forth.

To make certain that the enemy troops would surrender, the propagandists distributed leaflets which gave instructions. They had only to steal out of their trenches at night, crawl to within hearing distance of the French trenches, lift their two hands to heaven and give the international password, "*Kamerad, ne tirez pas.*" Said one of these:

Come to us before it is too late. Report to us with the words, "We come to you by leaflet Number 1," and we will know who you are.

So appealing were some of these leaflets that J. Norman Hall, a member of the famous Lafayette Flying Corps, said, "The charming picture of the deserter's reception in France made me feel like deserting to France myself."

D. Revolutionary Propaganda—Although this type of propaganda did not get into full swing until late in 1917, attacks upon the military leaders were made indirectly from the very beginning of the war. The leaders were accused of prolonging the war. Why shouldn't they want to prolong the war? They were receiving glory from it and were suffering no privations:

And that isn't the worst, soldiers! A Lieutenant General in Berlin takes bribes to firms, soldiers! in order to supply goods to the war officials * * *

And in the big hotels in Berlin every night champagne flows at 80 marks a flask.

When the Kaiser decorated Hindenburg with the Gold Medal, the propagandists said:

What has he given you? Suffering, poverty, hunger for women and children, misery, pestilence, and tomorrow—the grave!

They say you are fighting for the Fatherland—but what is your Fatherland? Is it Hindenburg, who with Ludendorff is many kilometers behind the lines, making plans to give the English more cannon-fodder?

Thus, the troops' hatred of their officers was intensified and spread.

The Kaiser was by no means spared in this attack. Among other things,

folders were distributed which contained a picture of the Kaiser and his official staff seated at a table in a beautiful garden. The table is covered with glasses of liquor, and there is a look of contentment on the faces of the members of the "party." The picture is labeled: "How the War looks at Headquarters." Opposite this picture is another showing the explosion of a shell and two soldiers being torn to pieces. This is labeled: "How the War looks in the Trenches."

That this campaign against the German monarch was effective is evident from the entry of Princess Bluecher in her diary as early as January, 1918:

The [good] feeling towards the Kaiser is steadily diminishing, and the same people who greeted him so warmly a short time ago with "Ave, Caesar," are now distributing leaflets in the back streets of Berlin, proclaiming "Down with the Kaiser, down with the government!"

Nor did the propagandists avoid revolutionary suggestions. As early as August, 1917, a member of the Seventh Army reported having received a leaflet as follows:

On the day the Kaiser of Berlin falls, you will be liked in Paris, London, New York and Rome. * * *

German soldiers, think of this! Have counsel with your comrades. Oppose the continuation of the war as forcefully as you oppose your enemies!

The sentiment of this revolutionary propaganda is well summarized in a leaflet entitled "Comrades, Awake!" After criticizing the German Government it closes with the words:

For a more beautiful, higher and nobler end our strength should go. The holy aim of our strength should be: A free and happy German republic! Comrades, work for this high, beautiful aim, with which the happiness of the world is bound up! Comrades, awake! Realize your strength!

It was difficult to find out just what effect this propaganda was having. In the Summer of 1918, the Psychological Subsection of the United States Army determined to watch the progress of the deteriorating morale of the enemy. A daily report was prepared which contained in brief form all news bearing

on German morale which had come in during the preceding twenty-four hours. From a collective weekly report was worked out the famous "Chart of German Civilian Morale," which showed its variations from week to week, as a nurse's chart records the variations in the temperature of a patient.

Such paragraphs as the following, taken from the Intelligence Summaries of the United States Army, give us some idea of the effect of allied propaganda:

Oct. 17, 1918.

Enclosed find leaflets taken from prisoners captured Oct. 15. They said that leaflets were eagerly read by every one who could get hold of them and that the President's answer to Germany's note of Oct. 4 was news to them.

The officers said: "The propaganda which your aviators have dropped has given us no end of trouble!"

And in an American divisional summary of Jan. 28, 1919, is found this from the interrogation of S—, an infantryman:

One of the things that made a great impression on the German soldiers and which S— believes helped to shorten the war was the propaganda dropped by American planes. Despite orders the soldiers continued to obtain the papers. Many sent them home to their families.

German officials tried to combat this verbal attack by means of counter-propaganda. They sent out *Nachrichtenblätter* (news sheets) to keep up the spirit of the troops. Entertainments, patriotic instructions, appeals from Hindenburg to the troops were all tried, but to no avail. The twenty-first number of the *Nachrichtenblatt der 18 Armee* admitted defeat!

In the sphere of leaflet propaganda the enemy has defeated us. * * * The enemy has defeated us, not as man against man in the field of battle, bayonet against bayonet; no, bad contents poorly printed on poor paper have paralyzed our strength.

While no accurate estimate can be obtained as to the number of Germans who went over to the Allies, German Army Orders reveal that desertions caused grave concern among the offi-

cials. Field Order Ia No. 8915, for instance, says:

Desertions.

Every man going over to the enemy will be punished with death on return to Germany. All his property within the country will be seized. He will lose his citizenship; his next of kin will not have the right to receive an allowance.

It is useless to reckon on escaping the penalty by remission or lapse of time.

(Signed) LUDENDORFF.

But all attempts of Ludendorff and Hindenburg to counteract the allied verbal onslaught were unsuccessful. The German soldiers and people were war-weary, hungry, tired of the Hohenzollerns and Junkers, and full of hope for the future of Germany—these hopes being based on the promises of the Allies. The moral strength of Germany had collapsed.

A serious estimate of the part played by allied propaganda in the collapse of the German Empire is impossible. Propaganda was only one of the many weapons used in the war to combat the enemy. It is impossible to give the percentage of victory due to any arm of the service. Shells, gas, bombs, tanks, airplanes, and so forth, were used to destroy the physical life of the soldiers, while propaganda was used to kill the spirit. And in war one is as important as the other.

The propagandists undoubtedly awakened a spirit of a new freedom and a new nationalism in the hearts of the German people. While attacking the autocratic system, they praised democracy and showed the superiority of the latter type of government to the former. And finally they set a premium upon the overthrow of the Hohenzollern Government, in the form of promises of mild peace terms and aid in restoring the economic life of the new Germany.

When questioned before the *Untersuchungsausschuss* (investigation commission), a German official body inquiring into the cause of Germany's downfall, Dr. Phillips, as its spokesman, stated:

It is difficult to measure the influence of enemy propaganda. But I do not believe that without its successful help the German downfall could have succeeded as it did.

Thus, whatever part—large or small—we may attribute to propaganda in bringing about the downfall of the German Empire, “the fact remains that propaganda is one of the most powerful instrumentalities in the modern world.” And, as history has shown, “the highest aim of enemy [i.e., allied] propaganda—the revolutionizing of Germany—has come to pass.”