



PRIMARY SOURCE READING 24

Mein Kampf

Soon after he joined the obscure far-right National Socialist party, Adolf Hitler tried to use his gang of Brownshirts to seize power in Munich. The unsuccessful putsch, or small-scale revolt, that started in a Munich beer hall sent Hitler to jail. There he wrote a long political essay describing his philosophy of a “master race,” his belief that the Jews were responsible for Germany’s problems, and his visionary goals for himself, the Nazis, and a new German Reich, or empire. The book, titled *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), was published in 1925 and 1927.

Guided Reading *In this selection, read to learn Hitler’s opinion of and use for propaganda.*

Ever since I have been scrutinizing political events, I have taken a tremendous interest in propagandist activity. I saw that the Socialist-Marxist organizations mastered and applied this instrument with astounding skill. And I soon realized that the correct use of propaganda is a true art which has remained practically unknown to the bourgeois parties. . . .

But it was not until the War [World War I] that it became evident what immense results could be obtained by a correct application of propaganda. . . .

For what we failed to do, the enemy did, with amazing skill and really brilliant calculation. I, myself, learned enormously from this enemy war propaganda. . . .

. . . Is propaganda a means or an end?

It is a means and must therefore be judged with regard to its end. It must consequently take a form calculated to support the aim which it serves. . . .

. . . To whom should propaganda be addressed? To the scientifically trained intelligentsia or to the less educated masses?

It must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses.

What the intelligentsia—or those who today unfortunately often go by that name—what they need is not propaganda but scientific instruction. The content of propaganda is not science any more than the object represented in a poster is art. The art of the poster lies in the designer’s ability to attract the attention of the crowd by form and color. . . .

The function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in

calling the masses’ attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., whose significance is thus for the first time placed within their field of vision.

The whole art consists in doing this so skillfully that everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct, etc. . . . [Propaganda’s] effect for the most part must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect.

All propaganda must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is addressed to. Consequently, the greater the mass it is intended to reach, the lower its purely intellectual level will have to be. . . .

. . . The more exclusively it takes into consideration the emotions of the masses, the more effective it will be. . . .

The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence . . . , all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan. . . .

For instance, it was absolutely wrong to make the enemy ridiculous, as the Austrian and German comic papers did. It was absolutely wrong because actual contact with an enemy soldier was bound to arouse an entirely different conviction, and the results were devastating; for now the German soldier . . . felt himself swindled by his propaganda service. His desire to



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fight, or even to stand firm, was not strengthened, but the opposite occurred. His courage flagged.

By contrast, the war propaganda of the [British] and Americans was psychologically sound. By representing the Germans to their own people as barbarians and Huns, they prepared the individual soldier for the terrors of war, and thus helped to preserve him from disappointments. . . . It . . . reinforced his faith in the truth of his government's assertions, while on the other hand it increased his rage and hatred against the vile enemy. . . .

And so the [British] soldier could never feel that he had been misinformed by his own countrymen. . . .

It was absolutely wrong [for the German government] to discuss war-guilt from the standpoint that Germany alone could not be

held responsible for the outbreak of the catastrophe; it would have been correct to load every bit of the blame on the shoulders of the enemy. . . .

. . . As soon as our own propaganda admits so much as a glimmer of right on the other side, the foundation for doubt in our own right has been laid. The masses are then in no position to distinguish where foreign injustice ends and our own begins. . . .

[British] propagandists understood all this most brilliantly—and acted accordingly. They made no half statements that might have given rise to doubts. . . .

. . . The most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly and with unflagging attention. It must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over. . . .

INTERPRETING THE READING

Directions Use information from the reading to answer the following questions. If necessary, use a separate sheet of paper.

1. From what Hitler says and your own study of World War I, what was the aim of Allied propaganda? Why does Hitler believe this was more effective than the German propaganda?

2. According to Hitler, to whom must propaganda be directed? Why?

3. Briefly describe Hitler's recommended propaganda technique.

4. Why does Hitler argue that propaganda must be completely one-sided?

Critical Thinking

5. **Demonstrating Reasoned Judgment** In your opinion, do Hitler's ideas about propaganda apply today in advertising and political campaigning? If so, how?
