

## DOCUMENTS

### *Techniques of Persuasion: basic ground rules of British propaganda during the Second World War*

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The document shown on pages 59–65 can be found in the archives of Britain's second Ministry of Information held at the Public Record Office in London. It is a little known memorandum, dated 21 June 1939, containing a total of 86 basic ground rules which the Royal Institute of International Affairs, who commissioned this enquiry into Broadcasting and Propaganda, considered would be of value to the planners of the embryonic Ministry of Information.

Although planning for the conduct of propaganda in the Second World War began as early as 1935, by the time of the Munich crisis the preparations were found to be hopelessly inadequate. When the Ministry of Information was partially mobilised on 26 September 1938, it did so amidst chaos and confusion. Of the small group of Whitehall officials who then knew of its existence, few were confident of the Ministry's ability to combat effectively the already tried and tested machinery of Dr Goebbels if war did break out. Neville Chamberlain's third flight to Germany accordingly provided the planners not only with a welcome respite, but also with an ideal opportunity to remedy the many deficiencies exposed in their arrangements by the crisis.

Of the numerous lessons to be drawn from the Munich dress rehearsal, one of the most important lay in the field of propaganda techniques. Before 1939 little time or attention had been devoted to this vital area; the main preoccupation had been with constructing an appropriate machinery. Using Lord Beaverbrook's model of 1918 as a blueprint for their new Ministry, the planners, led by Sir Stephen Tallents, had recognised some of the essential truths of propaganda in wartime, such as the inextricable connection between propaganda and censorship. But they had too readily accepted that the methods employed during the final stages of the First World War, which had allegedly proven so effective in bringing the Central Powers to their knees, could equally be applied to a war against the Axis powers. In other words, although the means of disseminating propaganda had since altered radically through the advance of communications technology in areas such as broadcasting and the cinema, the methods adopted towards propaganda in the next war were to be essentially those employed during the last. This partially explains, perhaps, why British propagandists during the initial stages of World War Two attempted to divide the German people from its leadership on lines similar to those followed by Lord Northcliffe's Department of Enemy Propaganda at Crewe House in 1918. It was not until 1941, and more particularly after the 1943 Casablanca conference with its call for Unconditional Surrender, that the Ministry of Information substituted for this approach the themes so clearly illustrated in Vansittart's *Black Record*.

Although there can be little doubt that Britain entered the Second World War relatively ill-equipped to conduct propaganda on anything like an efficient scale, historians have been too quick to devalue the considerable progress made in this direction during the final year of peace. The improvements which took place in the planning after Munich, and especially after the German invasion of Prague six months later, were mainly due to the fact that, as war became increasingly likely, the nucleus of the Ministry of Information was finally permitted to recruit the services of interested experts and outside organisations such as Chatham House. This document reveals that a considerable degree of attention was devoted to the question of propaganda methods and techniques, albeit rather late in the day. The ground rules set out here might appear somewhat fundamental, even naive, but it was because of this and similar investigations that the planners were able to lay the foundations of the basic principles of Britain's wartime propaganda encapsulated in Sir John Reith's maxim that "news is the shocktroops of propaganda" and in the Ministry's general view that it was more effective to tell the truth, nothing but the truth and, as near as possible, the whole truth.

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SECRET.

INTERNATIONAL PROPAGANDA AND BROADCASTING ENQUIRY.

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SS

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HOME SECTION

Propaganda Notions (Various Sources)

I. GENERAL IDEAS FOR PROPAGANDA.

1. In a stratified society persuade the dominant group.
2. To convince the educated minority, propaganda must be subtle and indirect (Mark Antony's speech is a perfect example of cautious propaganda) on the feeling-its-way principle. (Hitler's method is the opposite).
3. As regards the masses of people, appeal to their instincts and not to their reason.
4. Propaganda should fit the pre-conceived impressions, e.g., a Chinaman thinks every foreigner a cunning person who is prepared to use a concealed gun should willness fail.
5. In propaganda we should concentrate on a definite object to fit pre-conceived ideas.
6. Evils against which propaganda is directed should, if possible, be personified (e.g., the scarification by the German Press of President Benes).
7. Essentials of propaganda method are as follows:-
  - (i) Repetition (and from Topical angles).
  - (ii) Colour (Abstractions to be avoided in favour of personalities).
  - (iii) A measure of the truth, or at any rate keeping the lie just in front of the ultimate revelation (the case of the Sudeten Germans).
  - (iv) Building round a slogan ("that scrap of paper")
  - (v) Propaganda should be directed towards a specific objective (pick out key people and study them hard). Then proceed to groups, e.g., during the War the German concentrated on persuading the U.S.A. Congress to stop sales of munitions to all combatants. Similarly, allied propaganda might exploit the minorities in Germany and racial groups abroad.

3. The motive should be concealed. This does not exclude overlapping with open propaganda. Thus the doctored speeches of foreign statesmen reproduced in Germany are a contemporary example of such overlapping. (Again patriotic societies abroad ~~subsidising all~~ <sup>subsidized by</sup>\* armament firms have been found to launch campaigns for bigger defence forces. Again, war scares send up armament shares).
9. Timing. For example, Lloyd George's Saturday afternoon speeches provided hot news for the evening papers, secured full Sunday publicity, and an extra lot on the Monday. Again, propaganda concerning luxury goods would, for example, concentrate on places where trade is booming; whilst it is a well-known practice to hold up bad news until it can be counter-balanced by good news.

One of the best declarations of successful timing was the British declaration during the late war making cotton unconditional contraband. This regulation was issued just when the U.S.A. press was full of the sinking of the 'Arabic,' and had no time for more important matters.

10. The general sequence of propaganda is:-
  - (i) Do the ground-work;
  - (ii) Then the mass attack;
  - (iii) Clear up the remainder.
11. Radio can be isolated to minorities overseas, but cannot pick out classes in this country.
12. Films are similarly handicapped.
13. In propaganda a judicious reticence is as important as positive emphasis.
14. One of the aims of propaganda is to awaken the social conscience. For this purpose the assistance of the psychologist cannot be ignored.
15. According to Hitler, propaganda should use basic ideas and should address itself solely to the masses.
16. One should give clarity and precision to half-formed and nebulous ideas that are shaping the public mind. The introduction of fresh ideas is harder.
17. The possibility of steamships must not be neglected.
18. The best propaganda is the silent murder of the opposition news - Censorship.
19. Under censorship conditions rumour assumes gigantic proportions. Hence whispering campaigns.
20. Trappings and pageantry inherited from the past form valuable propaganda for stability.
21. 43% of film-goers in U.K. pay no more than 7d. Another 37% pay not more than 1/- . Hence the cinema provides the great mass-audience.

\* handwritten amendment reads 'subsidized by' (Ed. note).

22. "No matter how innocent and free from controversy a story may appear, a film producer must handle it with kid gloves and walk on eggs until it is completed."
23. The film cannot be effectively contradicted.
24. Weather reports must be censored.
25. Retaliatory propaganda in peace-time may provoke war by departing from the democracies' principle that every state has the right to organise its own life as it thinks fit without meddling elsewhere.
26. The propaganda of the democracies must demonstrate that war would be fatal to the dictators.
27. We must get hold of all the big financial houses everywhere.
28. A particularly effective means of propaganda is the idealisation of national heroes.
29. Even scientific publications may serve propaganda purpose by being judiciously distributed in isolated numbers. They keep the name afloat.
30. A useful device is to get a neutral to state our national case.
31. The glorification of the Royal Family is an important publicity matter.
32. The ideal function of propaganda is to win popular support for a cause by captivating the emotions and flattering the reason of the public. (i.e. Men like to think that they are acting according to reason even if in reality emotion and other non-rational forces are, as so often, much stronger determinants). Popular propaganda should substitute emotion for reason under the guise of facilitating the process of reasoning.
33. Propaganda is a machine for generating and maintaining enthusiasm. Propaganda should therefore:-
  - (i) never be dull.
  - (ii) never be offensive to its audience.
34. The highest art in propaganda is to maintain the appearance of impartiality while securing the wholehearted adoption of the view propagated.
35. As regards fundamentals many people are vainer and idler than they imagine or admit. Propaganda should take notice of this.
36. "The marching-tune sets the blood coursing faster than do the battle-standards." This maxim should probably be borne in mind despite the fact that the English are not a remarkably musical people.

37. Propaganda measures in time of war should always be tested by the simple question, "Will this measure increase people's desire to serve and to keep on serving?" Exceptions may occasionally occur owing to overriding considerations of Foreign Policy, but this should not affect the general rule.
38. The English public likes competitions (e.g. football pools and crossword puzzles). Propaganda should take note of this.
39. Intellectual reasoning should be as objective as possible. Propaganda is, in its very nature, subjective. It is subjective because:-
  - (i) A specific object (e.g. national victory in a war) should inform all its arguments, methods of presentation, etc.
  - (ii) Propaganda should appeal largely to non-rational elements which are more susceptible to subjective than to objective influence. (e.g. Issues should be presented in personalised form as far as possible). The subjective approach usually has greater dramatic appeal than the objective.

## II. SUGGESTIONS FOR FOREIGN PROPAGANDA.

1. As regards Dominions and Colonies, get hold of the big people here having relations and friends over there.
2. In the East the question of prestige is all important.
3. As regards the Germans, their national inferiority complex is a basic factor in propaganda among them.
4. South America is served by A.P. and Havas of France. England is largely excluded.
5. In the German Propaganda Memorandum on Spain (1935) it is said that it is better to influence smaller rather than the larger Spanish news agencies. Larger ones would demand more money and would not be such unquestioning allies. There is nothing more effective than a good news agency for influencing public opinion. "It is, so to speak, the skeleton, while commenting and reporting are the flesh. Only the two together can make a live body capable of doing the work."
6. South America. The most southerly States of Brazil - Santa Catherina and Rio Grande do Sul - contain large colonies of Germans who for many years have been taught to consider Germany as their Fatherland, and not Brazil. There are said to be 2,000,000 Germans in Brazil.
7. It may be possible to feed anti-British newspapers with French news.

8. The Italian colonies in the United States, South America (especially Brazil and Argentine) and Australia are kept in close contact with the homeland. It might be noted that the Argentine quickly absorbs Italians and turns them into staunch Argentinians.
9. In Australia the Italian colony has been the means of promoting hostility towards Italy and Fascism.
10. The Italian atrocities in Libya give us a useful point. (The ruthless nature of Marshal Graziana's conquest)
11. From the outset Hitler concentrated on colour, symbolism and spectacular displays. (The German thinks in images).
12. The 25 unalterable points of the Nazi programme (stated to be fixed for all time) should form in increasing measure points d'appui for our propaganda against them.
13. Rotarians are banned in Germany: so also is the P.E.N. Club.
14. The only countries where there is a genuinely free press are the British Empire (excluding India and Palestine), U.S., Holland, Switzerland and perhaps Scandinavia.
15. In Argentine provincial journals were offered by Italian and German bureaux free telegraphic news. Subsidies to newspapers in the Argentine as well as in some of the smaller states have been reported.
16. China banned the British film "Jack Ahoy" because the story of naval life included a burlesque of Chinese pirates.
17. Japan rejected the film "The King Steps Out" because it tended to ridicule royalty.
18. Russia leads with community listening-in.
19. Our German propaganda should emphasise the essential conditions under which German friendship can endure.
20. In America the British position about war debts needs repeated exposition.
21. The German war literature must be searched to provide propaganda points.
22. An International paper in Esperanto would probably be necessary.
23. The publication of lists of German prisoners in our publications will tend to make them read by German colonies abroad.
24. We must also produce a magazine for prisoners of war in this country containing such information.

25. We must search Hitler's speeches for propaganda points.
26. We must search allied and neutral literature for anti-German material - especially Spanish literature.

### III. PAST EXPERIENCE IN PROPAGANDA.

1. The German propaganda before Caporetto included the lavish distribution by secret agents of faked Italian newspapers among the troops.
2. As showing the importance of counter-espionage, the deciphering of a Nauen radio message by the Admiralty, proposing an alliance between Germany, Mexico, and Japan, gave the coup-de-grace to German propaganda in the U.S.A.
3. The time factor is vital. Thus the Zinoviev letter - which was the same as scores of others from Moscow - was exposed at just the right moment, when the public were mistrustful of Russia and began to dislike the British Labour Party.
4. Japan distributed free wireless sets in Manchuria.
5. Italy gives young Arabs a free holiday in Italy.
6. The Germans have a special section in propaganda machine to counteract atrocity propaganda, to win over foreign journalists, and to watch the foreign press, so that papers containing undesirable matter may be confiscated on their arrival in Germany.
7. Italy and Germany believe in mass visits. Thus in January, 1918, 1,500 Roumanians went to Rome at the expense of the Italian Government. Similarly, thousands of Italian children abroad are taken to Italy annually for a holiday.
8. Mussolini's habit of personal reception is invaluable propaganda: he impresses and flatters.
9. The Italians have already employed travelling cinema vans in Palestine showing faked films of Jewish atrocities against the Arabs.
10. A special propaganda section of the Red Army was formed and 16 super planes planned for its use. The Maxim Gorki, built in 1933, had a wing spread of 630 feet: it could be heard from 4,000 feet for 200 miles. It also carried a printing plant which could turn out 4,000 leaflets an hour.
11. In Germany cinema attendances have risen despite the injection of more and more propaganda into the programme.
12. In 1934 there were more than 30,000 cinemas in Russia.
13. The foreign films used in Russia are carefully edited by a special Department.



14. During the Great War the U.S.A. Government Films were run at a profit. Overseas exhibitors who refused to show the U.S.A. Government films were boycotted; so too were those who used German films.
15. Poland cut out of "Show-boat" the lines in "Ole Man River":-  

"You and me we sweat and strain  
Body all achin' and racked with pain"

on the ground that they were likely to stir up class enmity.
16. "Italian cinemas in the near East, e.g. add to the respect for Fascism by showing pictures of Italian military might, in contrast with some very dull and staid news items from Britain."
17. During the last War the Germans ran a comic paper printed in Spanish (we ran one in Russia).
18. One of the German failures last time was the use of statistics in amorphous and detrimental masses.
19. Experience has tended to prove that in public meetings addressed to local audiences a speaker carries more weight through local reputation than through national eminence.
20. It is reported from one source that during the Great War it was found that one good poster would do the work of about twenty public meetings.
21. In Mein Kampf it is stated that the colour combination which produces the greatest psychological reaction is red, black, and white. (Hence the German national colours.)

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