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THE STRATEGY OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA

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IT is no news to anyone that Soviet propaganda is full of inconsistencies whether you look at it through time or at the same time. At first there was fervent stress upon the themes of world revolution and the inevitable triumph of communism over capitalism. Suddenly at the Genoa Conference, Chicherin told us of "peaceful coöperation of two social systems during a given historical epoch." And the see-saw between coöperation and war to the death has been going on ever since. For years the Socialist and Liberal parties of the world were vilified by the Russian leaders as "Social Fascists", until suddenly a terrific threat appeared in Nazi Germany. And then the "united front against war and fascism" took top billing. But not for long. Came the Pact, and Stalin drank the health of the Führer. Came the German offensive, and slogans uncongenial to the West sank into the shadow, while Stalin made news by mentioning God in a favorable tone of voice. Came the end of hostilities, and the beginning of a new epoch of separatism and hatred. The United States now rises to the dignity of chief devil, taking the place occupied by the Nazis and the "Anglo-French plutocracies" in earlier times.

If there are differences, there are also consistencies in Russian propaganda. Many of the key symbols and slogans of the Marxist inheritance linger on.

Is there an interpretation capable of accounting for the zig-zags of Russian propaganda? I suggest that there is unity of strategic aim: *to maximize the power at home and abroad of the ruling individuals and groups of Russia.* Propaganda is an instrument of total policy, together with diplomacy, economic arrangements and armed forces. Political propaganda is the management of mass communications for power purposes. In the long run the aim is to *economize the material cost of power.* Even more specifically: *the aim is to economize the material cost of world dominance.*

What will happen if this strategic goal is perfectly attained? There will be no general war. Indeed, it is doubtful that there will be local aggressions of the Korean type. Nation after nation will fall into the Russian orbit through complacency, division and intimidation. The United States will adopt policies that weaken its economic, political and social fabric; the United States will decline peacefully into a secondary place in world affairs. Perfect success by Russian propagandists will cut down the material costs that would be entailed by general war, or by a series of local aggressions, or by colossal preparations for war.

A fraction of the success just described can contribute mightily to the reduction of the material cost of Russian domination. Whatever shortens war, without compromising success, saves Russian resources.

Perhaps it is superfluous to point out that the use of propaganda as an instrument of power is no idiosyncrasy of the Russian ruling class. All ruling classes in large-scale communities resort to propaganda. There are, however, factors in the Russian case that set it somewhat apart. The contrast is particularly great when we think of the United States. The leaders of Russia are operating in a tight, supercentralized garrison-police state, while the leaders of the United States are still dispersed through government, business, education, and other relatively independent institutions. The elite of Russia is oriented toward power, and possesses a tradition of calculating power at home and abroad. In the United States the ruling elements are much less conscious of power as a predominating value, since they are more preoccupied with wealth, respect and other values.

The top rulers of Russia possess a doctrine and a tradition in which the use of propaganda plays a conspicuous part in the execution of total policy. No one is unmindful of the fact that the power seizure of 1917 was prepared by years of activity in which every member of the revolutionary party was supposed to devote most of his energies to propaganda.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the Russian elite emphasizes propaganda out of deference to the human mind, or to the rôle of ideas in history.¹ It is much closer to

¹ The most important study of the perspectives of the Soviet elite is by Nathan Leites (forthcoming).

the mark to say that the tradition of the Russian ruling class is to discount both ideas and the human mind; for the strategy of Russian propaganda acts upon pessimistic assumptions about the capabilities of mankind for enlightenment by peaceful persuasion.

Consider for a moment the doctrinal framework in which propaganda operations are conceived. Distrust of the "ideological" can readily be derived from the stress put upon the primacy of "material" factors in history. This inheritance from Marxism was given a special twist in the lives of the chief conspirative leaders of Russian socialism. Lenin was only too conscious of being in a minority. His conceptions of revolutionary action reflected the helplessness that he felt in the face of the task of winning the Russian masses by peaceful persuasion. He saw in the ideological structure of Russian peasants and workers the imprint of the material ascendancy of the old ruling class. The sluggishness, stubbornness and stupidity of the Russian masses, against which Lenin railed at times, were ideological factors in history. But these gigantic icebergs were frozen into shape by the "material" forces at the disposal of the older elites.

And how were these ideological residues to be broken up and melted down? Not by persuasion, concluded Lenin. Only by sweeping material transformations. But how was this to be reconciled with the use of propaganda?²

It is not necessary to assume that Lenin solved the problem of the interplay of material and ideological factors in a manner free of contradiction or entirely in harmony with scientific knowledge. But the conspirative activists of Russia hammered out strategy and tactics that continue to influence Russian leaders. The making of propaganda is primarily a "material" activity in the sense that it depends upon the control of instruments of production, such as presses capable of turning out magazines, pamphlets and books; and it depends upon hours of labor devoted to processing and distributing the product. It is "material" in the added sense that it is possible to concentrate upon audiences who occupy disadvantageous material

² Concerning the theory of propaganda used by Soviet leaders see Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, 1950).

positions, and who are therefore susceptible to programs for the betterment of their material state. The number of such "susceptibles" depends upon the intensity of the contradictions prevailing at a given time and place. If the material instruments of communication are skillfully employed, a very small concentration of material factors can reshape the ideas of an ever-expanding aggregate. Eventually those in control of the expanded material resources may seize power, and control enormously enriched means for transforming mass ideologies on a colossal scale.

Once the workers have attained the new ideological perspective, they can make sure of perpetuating it intact by utilizing the material instruments of communication which can then be accessible. This is the background for the provisions appearing in Article 125 of the Constitution of 1936 relating to freedom of communication. The Article says that the rights of the individual to free speech (and such) are secured by turning over to the workers and their organizations the printing establishments, stocks of paper, public buildings, streets, means of communication, and other material conditions essential for the realization of these rights.

The standing charge against the capitalist world is that the working masses are full of the illusions disseminated by the press, which is said to be under the control of the plutocracy. Obviously, the assumption is that whoever controls the material instruments of communication can imprint upon the passive mind of the audience images that protect the material relationships then prevailing or in prospect. Thus propaganda is viewed as an activity, low in material cost, by means of which the receptivities created by material contradictions can be made politically effective.

The disregard of persuasion on the part of the Russian elite is apparent in the dogmatic finality with which the eventual goal of policy is treated. The elite possesses a rigid, non-debatable conception of the future. In this future commonwealth man is within the realm of freedom and not of necessity (Engels). The gloss on the doctrine as applied by the Russians is that those who pursue this aim may deny freedom to others until such time as no material contradictions remain which are capable of imprinting ideas hostile to the functioning of such

a free society. Not the least of the menaces that must be obliterated are the streams of communication directed toward Russian audiences from the material facilities at the disposal of foreign elites. The Russian ruling group has no hesitation in using whatever material means are at hand to seal off the Russian audience from such "subversive" exposure.

The directors of Russian propaganda do not ignore the sentiments and assumptions of their current or prospective audiences. But this is not for the sake of sharing with the masses the task of creating a consensus, through free discussion, concerning the aims, major policies and top leaders of the body politic. On the contrary, the scrutiny of the audience is a one-way affair in which the deviation of the audience from some leadership objective raises only a tactical problem: namely, what are the most economical means of overcoming such deviations? At moments Lenin was brutally frank about his contempt for the thoughts and feelings of the masses when they were other than he wanted them to be. In common with other modern tyrannies, the present leaders of the Russian garrison-police state recognize that so much candor is a source of weakness. Hence the Stalinists now congratulate themselves upon having the "most perfect democracy" on earth in which the will of the people is more fully expressed than anywhere else. Thus is revived the mystic conception of democracy which makes it possible for a tyranny to pretend to "intuit", free of representative mechanisms, the most profound sentiments of the people.

Within the framework provided by the secular revelation of the commonwealth of freedom, all questions are reduced to the level of tactical expedients. A decent regard for the opinions and sentiments of others is superfluous or worse; it is an act of pandering to the accumulated errors stamped upon the human mind by the weight of the material at the disposal of previous ruling classes. Honesty is of no value as an expression of rectitude; there is always the higher rectitude of whatever contributes to the ultimate goal.

The major task of propaganda strategy is proper timing in relation to the specific dangers and opportunities of a given set of circumstances for the power position of the Russian elite. It is possible to trace the prevailing offensive and defensive

strategies of Russian propaganda. Many essential features were exhibited in the preparation by Lenin for the seizure of power in Russia. If we go back to the years of deepest depression for the revolutionary movement (after the collapse of 1905), we find that the first task of Lenin was to form primary nuclei capable of further expansion. Lenin and his followers provided the man-hours for propaganda work. They were often able to gain recruits by direct personal propaganda, often preceded and facilitated by the output of the party presses.

When the primary nuclei became sufficiently abundant to operate as a significant part of the power process in trade unions, in political parties and in parliament, a second task took shape. The problem was to find allies without losing independence. Now allies, whether inside or outside of the socialist movement, were full of danger to the towering ambitions of a Lenin (or Leninists). Without allies there is the threat of being crushed entirely by a combination of hostile elements whose strength is potentially overwhelming. The propaganda strategy of Lenin was to keep alive an attitude of suspicion toward allies, while at the same time lulling the ally into complacency, or diverting his attention to a common enemy, or fanning disunity. Propaganda has many means of contributing to the complacency of an ally. There is the direct declaration of mutual friendship and admiration. And there is the nullifying of hostile or disturbing manifestations. The propaganda goal of diverting attention to a common enemy is comparatively obvious, but the tactic of fomenting disunity is exceedingly complicated. Plainly the ally must not be allowed to weaken below a point where his usefulness against a common enemy is lost. But internal tension can absorb attention, and thus divert attention from inconvenient features of the Leninist-led group. The strategy of division paves the way for coöperating with minorities in wrecking or taking over the control of the ally at some future date.

The third stage is the seizure of power, and this sets a somewhat different propaganda task, which is to demoralize the potential opposition, and to gain support, by creating an impression that all further opposition, or noncoöperation, is both useless and immoral.

At any given moment the Lenin-led groups might find it

necessary to assume a defensive posture, which consisted for the most part in masking all hostile potentialities of policy toward an ally; and in redoubling attempts to prevent or to break up hostile combinations by spreading complacency, fear of a common enemy, and disunity.

To recapitulate the strategic rôle of propaganda as a means of reducing the material cost of expanding and defending power (as exemplified by the Leninists, and followed subsequently by the Stalinists): *Stage one.* The creation of primary nuclei in which fully indoctrinated individuals provide the solid corps of full-time labor for the cause. *Stage two.* Coöperation with allies in the arenas of power accessible to the nuclei, who are by this time sufficiently strong to act as "parties", "unions", and the like. The propaganda task is to maintain the sentiment of having a distinctive mission (inside the party or "own" group), while at the same time fostering certain attitudes among potential enemies (including allies). The attitudes include complacency toward the party; the diversion of hostile attention to a common enemy; the spreading of disunity. *Stage three.* Seizure of power. Propaganda demoralization of the opposition and of noncoöperators: spreading fear or confidence in the inevitable triumph of the party, and of the hopelessness and immorality of further opposition or noncoöperation.³

Consider briefly the application of these strategic principles to the seizure of power in countries adjacent to Russia (the present satellites). The first task of propaganda in Hungary or Czechoslovakia was to win enough support to begin to play a bargaining part in the ordinary processes of local and national parliamentarism and administration. This was accomplished by penetrating the trade unions, and other private associations. The second task arose when the party was strong enough to join coalitions, and to work with allies at every level of government (including special attempts to permeate the ministries con-

³ The seizure of power in Russia was but one step in the expansion of the Communist movement, though the most decisive. In relation to most of the world arena, the Soviet elite is at stage one or two. Stage three has been achieved piecemeal in adjacent states. On the internal transformations in Russia since 1917, see especially Barrington Moore, Jr., *Soviet Politics—The Dilemma of Power* (Cambridge, 1950).

cerned with public order and information). The third stage came with the seizure and consolidation of power by *coup d'état* (within a "framework of legality"). It was during the second stage that the greatest versatility was required in the handling of Russian propaganda, since it was necessary to keep in balance the often contradictory tasks of fostering a distinctive sense of mission, complacency on the part of potential enemies (including allies), diversion of attention to common enemies, and disunity. This was the period in which such illusions were useful as that Russian policy has at last "settled down" to peaceful coexistence and to the restoration of genuine coöperative effort. The third stage is less subtle and far more ruthless, since it involves the spreading of terror, often by means of close correlation and coöperation with acts of violence.⁴

Looking at the world picture as a whole, it can be said that Russian propaganda is best served at the first stage (penetrating a new community) by propaganda that possesses high doctrinal content. It is the function of propaganda during this period to provide a professional nucleus of revolutionaries to give skillful direction to ensuing activities. Suppose we ask ourselves why the propagandists of the Kremlin continue to repeat so many of the time-worn doctrines of the Marxist tradition. Clearly the answer is that most of the traditional doctrines are of demonstrated effectiveness in appealing to the disaffected of many lands, whether in the heartlands of modern industrialism, or among the peoples long subject to the economic expansionism of Western states. It is an old story that the dissolution of ancient loyalties and the break-up of old religious faiths and philosophical traditions have been signs of, and in turn contributory to, the vast transformations through which mankind is passing in our historical period. It is an old story that Marxist doctrine has provided a secular substitute for the universality of aim, of cosmic outlook, and of personal identification with destiny which were part of earlier systems. No

⁴ Consult these authoritative and concise case studies: Ivo Duchacek, "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration: Czechoslovakia, 1944-48", *World Politics*, vol. II, No. 3 (April 1950), pp. 345-72, and "The February Coup in Czechoslovakia", *ibid.*, July 1950, pp. 511-32; Stephen D. Kertesz, "The Methods of Communist Conquest: Hungary, 1944-1947", *ibid.*, October 1950, pp. 20-54.

doubt it is an old story that Marxism and liberalism were co-ideologies which were alike in attacking the institutions of a caste society, and in proclaiming the importance of renovating society for the sake of realizing human dignity in theory and fact.

Several of the doctrines carried forward from historical Marxism by the elite of Russia have a plausible ring to millions of human beings who live exposed to the material and ideological tensions of our time. (Note that I now speak only of plausibility, not of truth or falsity.)

Consider the familiar thesis that there is a tendency toward monopoly in capitalistic economies. Can the plausibility of this be denied in the United States, for instance, where monopoly trends have been the subject of lament for years?

Consider the thesis that the capitalistic system generates periodic crises of mass unemployment. In the light of "panics", "crises" and "depressions", can we sweep this entirely to one side?

Consider further the thesis that movements of protest arise among the nonowners in capitalistic societies. This is not implausible in view of the vitality displayed by protest movements in the name of "labor", "socialism" and other political symbols.

Again, think of the doctrine that in parliamentary countries the owners abandon democracy in favor of non-democracy when they feel seriously threatened by movements of protest. Is this altogether implausible in view of the aid received from big industrialists and landlords in the formative stages of Mussolini's fascism, Hitler's Nazism, or Franco's falangism?

Think also of the thesis that imperialism is a result of capitalistic rivalries for the control of raw materials and markets. Obviously this gains plausibility from the scramble for colonies which enlarged the empires of England, France, Germany and Belgium, and which put the United States in the place of Spain in the Caribbean and the Philippines.

Consider the thesis that imperialistic rivalries generate wars among imperial Powers. In this connection it is possible to point to the rivalries between England and Germany before 1914, and the German thrust for "living space" in the recent past.

Think finally of the revision which the "imperialism and war" thesis has undergone in recent years. I refer to the conception of capitalist encirclement of the "Socialist Fatherland", and the promotion of armament and war as means of preparing an attack upon Russia, particularly in the hope of diverting against an outside group the gathering rage of the unemployed masses of a collapsing capitalism. Is it not true that capitalistic countries have been stepping up their expenditures of arms?

These doctrinal lines have an important place in the strategic balance of Russian propaganda appeals. Recruits continue to be sought by means of study groups devoted to the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and other acceptable figures in the canonical list. That these study groups are effective instruments of Russian power has been demonstrated more than once. May I remind you that when the Canadian government looked into the spy ring in Canada, the trail led to study groups organized privately as recruiting stations for persons of high intellect and culture. Wherever Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism is ignored in the advanced educational systems of a country, or tossed aside with conspicuous prejudice by teachers who are obviously ignorant of the subject, the basis is laid for curiosities that may be gratified in private and faintly (or overtly) clandestine study groups. In these intellectual "speak-easies" the doctrinal system is expounded in a pious atmosphere free of the critical, deflating effect of vigorous evaluation on a comparative basis. Study groups are an important example of the tactical principle that it is possible to move toward effective power in an indifferent or hostile society by limited concentrations of superiority of books and man-hours in propaganda work. (The step from private study to espionage or sabotage is not too long for many persons to make.)

It is noteworthy that the greatest successes of Russian propaganda have been scored among nonindustrial peoples. This is a good example of the choice of audience anywhere in the world wherever material or ideological factors have created tension. These activities are vital at all stages of the power-seizing process, but create special resonances at stages one and two above. The Russian elite has become progressively clearer about the potential rôle of the "ex-colonial" victims of "imperialism", especially since so many of the "ex-colonials" live on the con-

continent of Asia within the shadow of the Russian world. The new noncommunist elites of these countries are relatively weak, while the old elites are largely discredited. The sentiment of nationalism can be turned against former "oppressors" and directly toward complacent coöperation with Russia. Further, the resentment of ex-colonials is fed by the rankling memory of the indignities imposed upon them by the "white imperialists". In the traditional literature of socialism the link between race prejudice and capitalism has long been forged. The formula is that capitalists seek to divide the workers from one another, and to drive wages down, by setting black against white, yellow against white, and so on. Seizing upon these cleavages in the respect structure of the non-Russian world, the strategy of Russian propaganda is to identify imperialism and ethnic discrimination with capitalism. For this purpose the chief target is the strongest capitalist Power, the United States; hence, the distorted image of America as a land with Negroes hanging from the lampposts, lynched by miserable gangs of sharecroppers and unemployed workers, incited by ruthless agents of the plutocracy who are commissioned to keep the workers at one another's throats.⁵

The conspirative tradition of pre-revolutionary times has left an imprint upon the channels as well as the content and the strategic-tactical correlation of propaganda with total policy. Consider from this point of view the method of dual organization. This is the use of an open channel of propaganda which is closely paralleled by a closed, secret channel. The technique can be applied in many ways, as when one is labeled "governmental" and the other "party". If the upper corridor is closed for reasons of expediency, the basement is kept in operation (as when the Comintern was publicly extinguished in 1943). The secret channel can be a faction which is entrusted with the mission of controlling the policy of organizations which are nominally independent of party control. Hence the vast network of "come-on" organizations which are used by the party to permeate every national community, seeking to reach the armed forces, the police, the foreign service, business, the

⁵ For the whole picture consult Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Image of the United States; A Study in Distortion* (New York, 1950).

professions, trade unions, coöperatives, schools, publishing houses, radio-television, films, and the like. There is a slot for housewives who hate high prices, for mothers who hate war, and for humanitarians of every hue. Through these organizational networks a great number of special environments are made available for the restamping of minds, and for expanding the material facilities within the reach of the Russian leadership. The Russian technique parallels in a curious way the means by which in a capitalist economy the control of a gigantic network of private corporations is obtained through a series of minority stock ownerships. The parallel includes the use of "fronts" who are called "dummies" in the vernacular of capitalism, and something less complimentary in the private language of Russian propaganda.

Dual control was a congenial method in the hands of conspirator Lenin, who employed a small clique of disciples to continue to do what he wanted to do regardless of the formal prohibitions of his party. One striking example is the secret organization by means of which funds were raised through robbery, counterfeiting, seduction of rich women, and the like. To this day the channels of Russian propaganda continue to use the dual structure appropriate to conspiracy. In this way it is possible to conduct activities of the utmost unscrupulousness.

We can sum up the strategy of Soviet propaganda by saying that the chief strategic aim is to economize the material cost of protecting and extending the power of the Russian elite at home and abroad. Such propaganda is a struggle for the mind of man, from the Soviet point of view, only in the sense that it is a struggle for the control of the material means by which the minds of the masses are believed to be molded. Hence the purpose of Russian propaganda is *not* peaceful persuasion of the majority of the people in a given country as a prelude to the taking of power. Rather, the task is conceived as that of a minority that must remain an ideological minority until it succeeds in accumulating the material means of obtaining consensus. In the early stage of penetrating a new community, the basic task of propaganda is to assist in establishing and shaping primary nuclei of potential leadership at the next stages. When enough strength is assembled to admit of a strategy of coalition, the task is to maintain separatism, coupled with propaganda

designed to prevent or break up potentially more powerful combinations. The fostering of complacency, the diversion of attention to common enemies, and the fomenting of division among potential enemies (including momentary allies) are part of the strategic tasks to be carried through. At the stage of power seizure the strategy of propaganda is that of demoralization, which is sought in synchronization with terror as a means of impressing all with the "inevitable" triumph of Soviet power and the hopelessness, and indeed the immorality, of resistance or even noncoöperation. Possessing a world-encompassing goal that is treated as beyond the reach of discussion or inquiry, the ruling few of the Kremlin have no self-limitations of principle upon the choice of message, channel or audience. Soviet propagandists and their agents can lie and distort without inner restraint, for they are largely immunized from the claims of human dignity in any other sense than the dignity of contributing to the ultimate goal of the free man's commonwealth by contributing to the present and future power of the Kremlin elite.

REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN

CHAIRMAN DUNN: After hearing this brilliant legal analysis, you can well understand why Professor Lasswell is at the Yale Law School.

You have heard from a political scientist who has moved over into law. The next speaker is a law professor who has moved over into political science. Professor Lasswell has spoken to you about how the Soviet leaders look upon this subject of the minds of men. Professor Morgenthau, Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, is also an old friend of mine. I think you will find the same toughness of mind, the same sharpness of intellect in his dealing with the subject.

I am very happy to introduce Professor Hans Morgenthau.

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⁴**The Strategy of Communist Infiltration: Czechoslovakia, 1944-48**

Ivo Duchacek

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⁴**The February Coup in Czechoslovakia**

Ivo Duchacek

World Politics, Vol. 2, No. 4. (Jul., 1950), pp. 511-532.

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