Images Of Control Progaganda In Nazi Germany And Soviet Russia Essay, Research Paper

One of the greatest revolutions in the twentieth century was not political in nature. It however aided in many different political revolutions. This revolution was the communications revolution. The twentieth century has experienced one of the greatest changes in mean of communication including technologies such as radio, television, motion pictures, advanced telecommunications and the Internet. These technologies have been used to fulfill the purposes of many. Some who wished to use this technology to influence other people. A term commonly used to describe the use of media to convince or persuade other people of a certain idea or cause is propaganda. Political leaders often use techniques of propaganda, as the goal of politicians is to convince people that their ideas supercede those of others. Two examples of propaganda being used extensively during the twentieth century is by the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi) in Germany from 1933 1945 and by the Communist government led by Josef Stalin in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from 1929 1953. In examining these two states and their use of propaganda, it can be seen that although both state had radically different ideologies, certain trends in their use of propaganda can be found to be in common. These primarily being: the glorification of individuals or groups as heroes, the glorification of the leader of the state, and the dehumanizing of the state s enemies.

After Adolf Hitler was proclaimed Chancellor of Germany in 1933 he started to establish a Nazi government. It became immediately apparent that the new government would have to get the people s unquestioned support. Although the Nazi party had been relatively popular before Hitler became Chancellor, there was still opposition to be found in some people. One tactic that was used by the Nazi propagandists was to use a hero to symbolize all that could be accomplished under the new National Socialist government. A hero is also useful to rally the people behind something that they can relate to and have sympathy for. The obvious example of this is the Nazi glorification of Horst Wessel. Considered a Nazi martyr, he was in reality murdered and was not really a hero at all. He was however used by Nazi Propaganda minister Goebbels to be seen as a National Socialist hero who was murdered by Communists (Welch, 1983, p. 75). Horst Wessel was an extremely honored figure in Nazi Germany. An example of this opinion was stated in Der Br nnen, January 2, 1934, How high Horst Wessel towers over that Jesus of Nazareth that Jesus who pleaded that the bitter cup should be taken from him. High unattainably high all Horst Wessels stand about Jesus! (Welch, 1983, p. 75) A film that was produced in Germany, in 1933, by the Nazis also glorifies this hero. The film is called Hans Westmar: Einer Von Vielen (Hans Westmar: One of Many). The film was renamed because Goebbels believed the film was not worthy of a hero such as Horst Wessel (Welch, 1983, p. 77). The film does however succeed in glorifying the Nazi party and particularly the SA and their struggle against the Communists in Germany at the time. In having the character Hans Westmar murdered by Communists; the film creates sympathy for the SA who are viewed as heroes. It also creates a negative view of the Jews and Communists, especially Communist Jews, as the hero Westmar is of course murdered by Communists. The film also attempts to initiate a movement to carry on the work of Hans Westmar (the SA) in order to rid Germany of the Communist Jew (Welch, 1983, p. 80). This film uses a well-honored hero of the National Socialist movement to promote other causes of the party; namely anti-Semitism and anti-Communism.

The Soviet Union also had its heroes to promote. One of the most important heroes in the USSR was the worker, who was always a key element in Bolshevik ideology. In creating an icon out of the worker the Bolshevik leaders could motivate the working classes. If it were seen that harder workers were more glorified than those who did not work hard; then the workers would consequently work harder. This was important for the goals of Soviet leader Stalin who wanted to industrialize Russia during the 1930s with two successive Five Year Plans. During the 1930s, Soviet propaganda artists shifted focus from the single image of a blacksmith, used in the early days of Communist Russia, to represent the worker to a new image of many workers working together for the common good (Bonnell, 1997, pp. 34 35). This was often presented in photomontages of actual soviet workers. Actual photographs took away the feeling of this is what things could be like and now presented the public with the way things are today (Bonnell, 1997, pp. 39 – 40). However, this dominant image of the worker began to loose importance in Soviet propaganda during the 1930s. Other heroes were then becoming more important such as aviators, explorers and geologists (Bonnell, 1997, p 44). This also led to glorifying the ultimate hero of all, Stalin himself.

In a totalitarian state it is very useful to have the leader viewed as a god. If the people of the nation idolize their leader then they will probably support him or her in their efforts and they will also become very nationalistic. An example of this is in footage taken in Berlin in 1940 when Adolf Hitler returns to his capital after successfully conquering a large portion of Western Europe. Large crowds are seen gathered in the streets to greet their leader. Hitler drives by in a car creating a frenzy of devoted German citizens cheering Heil Hitler (Britain Alone, 1980, BBC TV). In creating a demigod out of their leader, Nazi leaders successfully converted the population over to their cause. Weather or not the whole population adored their F hrer cannot accurately be determined. The propaganda was, however, successful enough to keep most of the population under control for the duration of Nazi rule. Unquestionable devotion can also be seen in the many party rallies held in Nuremburg. One of these rallies was captured on film by Nazi propagandists and was widely shown in German cinemas. This film is titled Triumph Des Willens and was produced in 1935 with Leni Riefenstahl directing and features the F hrer himself (Welch, 1983, p. 147). This film has been regarded as the greatest propaganda film of all time (Maltin, 1995, CD-ROM). The film was carefully staged to present Adolf Hitler as a god and to present the glories of the National Socialist revolution and the newly founded Third Reich. The film has many long scenes of marching troops and endless formations Hitler Youth, SA, SS, and German workers. Constant themes throughout the film are positioning Hitler above everything else, the constant image of the swastika and other Nazi party symbols and the pride and superiority of the Aryan race. Hitler s speeches stress unity and strength of the German people. This is probably the best film footage of the Third Reich at the peak of its glory. One can see how an individual can become so easily influenced when presented with such a sense of purpose, order and unity.

In contrast to the way Hitler was glorified; Stalin was not immediately seen as a god in the USSR. The primary reason that Stalin s glory was not immediately seen after he rose to power was because Stalin had an equally god-like predecessor. Lenin, founder of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its leader from 1918 1923, was viewed as an immortal figure that would live forever as an icon, even though he was dead in body. The most extensive propaganda campaigns focusing on Lenin were undertaken after his death during the late 1920s and the early 1930s (Bonnell, 1997, p. 153). Stalin did not become an important figure in Soviet society until after 1931, even though he had been the nation s leader since 1924 (Bonnell, 1997, pp. 158 159). Stalin then progressed to gradually take away Lenin s characteristics of being immortal, in fallible, and perfect (Bonnell, 1997 p. 161). One common technique used to make Stalin appear greater than other figures were to increase his size compared to others in the visuals. A poster, which was published in 1932, entitled Pobeda sotsializma v nashei strane obespenchena (The Victory of Socialism in Our Country Is Guaranteed) shows this well. Stalin occupies a large majority of the upper portion of the picture while behind him a large crowd of people is assembled along with a flag with a very small portrait of Lenin. Stalin also towers over an industrial plant, showing he is not only in control of the people but also the industry (Bonnell, 1997, Figure 4.12). The Soviets also strove to represent Stalin as not only a powerful leader, but also one who cared about his people and his nation. A poster from 1940 was entitled O kazhdom iz nas zabotitsia Stalin v Kremle (Stalin in the Kremlin Cares about Each One of us). It shows Stalin seated at his desk writing a letter. The whole scene looks very close to home; not unlike your own father seated at his desk working on something important late into the night (Bonnell, 1997, Figure 4.17). One of the best examples of Stalin appearing as a father figure is a 1950 poster from a period known as High Stalinism which occurred after World War Two until Stalin s death (Bonnell, 1997, p.243). This poster is titled Spasibo rodnomu Stalinu za schastlivoe detstvo! (Thank You Dear Stalin for a Happy Childhood!). It shows Stalin on a podium being approached by two Russian children; a boy and a girl. The children are well dressed and there are there are two bouquets of flowers, one on the level of the children, and one on Stalin s level. The children are smiling and Stalin appears to have an expression of love and caring on his face as he embraces the boy (Bonnell, 1997, Figure 6.13). This poster is a good example of a trend in posters at this time that reflects the war being over and a hope for a better life for the Russian people.

One of the most well known and alarming facts about both Hitler s Germany and Stalin s USSR was the mass genocide of certain people groups within their own nation. In Germany it was the Holocaust in which Jews and other peoples were persecuted because of their race or one of many other factors. In the USSR it was Stalin s purges of the armed forces and other political opponents. In order for the public not to openly oppose these forms of genocide propaganda was released to create widespread dislike for these targeted people groups. In Germany the Jewish population of the Third Reich was the primary target. Propaganda was released expressing the Nazi party s view on the Jewish people. This being that the Jews were subhuman and not worthy of existence let alone being a part of the Thousand-Year Reich (Hitler and Drexler, 1920, [online]). An extreme example of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda is a film produced in 1940 by the Nazi Propaganda Department called Der ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew). This films goal was to show the public evidance that the Nazi ideology about the Jewish people was fact and that they were not worth of remaining alive. The film is a documentary about the Jewish life in the Warsaw ghettos. The film shows Jewish people living in the horrid conditions of the ghetto and claims that this is how the Jews have always lived. It shows Jewish people bartering for goods and says that the Jews are simply traders and do not live a civilised life. The commentary continues on to label the Jews as a race of parasites (Welch, 1983, p. 294).

The method of dehumanising the enemy is also seen in the Soviet propaganda of this time. Up until the early 1930s a method of using caricatures to represent Communist enemies was used. These caricatures had standard characteristics to represent a certain enemy. The Tsar was represented by a crowned figure, the capitalist with a top hat, and enemy officers with a military cap. Although these caricatures were of humans; they were represented in a ridiculous fashion, one that does not glorify the characters at all (Bonnell, 1997, p. 214). One can see these different caricatures in a 1932 poster titled Schastlivyi grazhdanin, znakomyi s etimi tipami tol ko po knigam (It Is a Happy Citizen Who Is Acquainted with These Types Only from Books)(Bonnell, 1997, Figures 5.10). These caricatures represent enemies of the USSR during the Five Year Plans in the early 1930s. These enemies included the Kulaks, who were wealthy farmers who were strictly opposed to collectivisation on farms; (a plan initiated by Stalin to increase agricultural output). The dehumanising of the enemy continued to become more subhuman as time went on. A 1933 poster Brak podarok klassovomu vragu (Spoilage Is a Present to the Class Enemy) represents a class enemy as a hunched over overweight man who does not look appealing in any way (Bonnell, 1997, Figures 5.13). This trend continues into the World War II era, when the fascists were usually represented as some form of animal. (These animals images included: a wolf, a cow, a lion, a tiger, a pig, a crow, a rat, a kitten, a dog, a horse, a donkey, a boar, a monkey or gorilla, a crab, and a snake (Bonnell, 1997, p. 221)). A good example of the representation of the fascist enemy is a poster published in 1941 after the German invasion of the USSR. The poster is titled: Smert fashistskoi gadine! (Death to the Fascist Reptile!) and shows a Soviet soldier stabbing a snake in the throat with the bayonet on the end of his rifle. This method of dehumanising state enemies was probably not as effective for the purpose of the state as the glorification of the state leader or a national hero. However there are always two sides to a political agenda and making a clear statement of public enemies was obviously just as important to propaganda creators in Germany and the USSR as the glorification of their own leaders and heroes.

The use of propaganda during the twentieth century has been often and in many different forms and styles. Almost every political movement has been supported by propaganda. Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia are just two examples of these methods of control. These two examples show that the ideology presented in propaganda is not necessarily a determining factor in the style or themes used in the propaganda. Both Germany and Russia used the same methods of promoting their ideals. They used films, visual art, fine arts, and radio to spread their beliefs across their respective nations. Although the individual ideas promoted are radically different the themes used are not. Propaganda examples from both nations can reveal certain common themes including the glorification of heroes, an all-powerful leader and the degradation of the nation s enemies. It can be concluded that since two separate nations used the same themes and media that there must have been some degree of success. As one looks back at these two regimes one may wonder how people could have supported these radical and often horrific forms of government. Propaganda is defiantly one of many answers.

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