Nazi Propaganda in Germany

# What is propaganda? Why do we only think of war when we imagine it now days?

Propaganda in quite general terms is the manipulation of the public to alter the previous opinions of a subject. In the present, propaganda exists mostly in politics with the party leaders exaggerating negative aspects of other parties or of public concerns, so as to make their presence as the head of state a very beneficial idea. However, with the massive influences of social media, isolation of small ideals has been all but eliminated. If the party leader, president or prime minister releases false information, people are bound to release the truth. This often goes beyond settling disputes however, as the resolve often exaggerates the counter evidence the researchers have found, and so rumours get made. Propaganda was not always a rather petty issue as in both World War 1 and 2, the most potent form of disinformation existed. The United Kingdom was the nation to first effectively employ it (that was noticed globally). It was Germany however that incorporated aspects of war recruitment propaganda (or even just pro war in general) into their more confining and controlling government. The result was an amazing recovery from both the debts of the First World War and the great depression. While they lacked the man power of perhaps their neighbours to the north (the U.S.S.R), the German way of life had assimilated some incredibly effective forms of propaganda that let them produce the best tanks, the best aeronautical research centres and the most vindictive sergeants. These qualities allowed Germany to hold out as long as it did, and left us with a reminder of how manipulative humans being can be. It was and still is the most intensive form of propaganda. It is propaganda we hope to never be implemented again.

# How is it that what began as assiduous propaganda led to such a beaten country rising to be the most powerful nation of the time? And how did it begin with such innovative changes to media as simple as a magazine?

What is important to remember is not what the propaganda conveyed, but just how efficiently Nazi Germany enforced it, and innovated the new ways. What was perhaps more astounding was how effective it worked considering it was the first time mass propaganda has been used. There was an enormous array of mediums through which the Nazi party occupying Germany at the time accessed the lives of the public, so it is best to look at one aspect. This is the magazines. Today, there are magazines for just about every hobby known to man. This could be hunting, fishing, cooking, fashion, women’s magazines, building, exercising, or even extended opinion pieces. In 1933, there was a rather more restricted variety of magazines, with much less glamour due to mass colour print not existing. By 1939 however, Joseph Goebbels’s document “*Zeitschriften-Dienst*” was sent to the magazine producers. The document outlined many of the conventions the Nazi party had begun to implement across all other media such as radio, books and television. But the time had come for magazines to change. Now rather than being designed for the average German man or woman, magazines were produced for citizens of all ages and sexes. As well as content selected especially for these target audiences, the magazines outlined very specific roles that the target readership should strive to be. For men, there was already an array of content. The most popular was the signal magazine. If you were to ask the world of 1939 (yes the world, signal did make their magazines available throughout the world, even in America) what the most fairest one was it would be the Signal magazine. Signal while not using derogatory images or opinion pieces promoting anti-Semitism, it did promote Germany’s war that was being fought. A new issue would be released every fortnight, always in pristine, glossy format. What was perhaps most noticeable about this magazine was the use of colour photos. War in itself is a pretty sobering thing to watch in the black and white fuzzy tapes we have today. But signal actually found a really effective way of turning the tables on this restriction. They produced many of their photos in each edition in full colour.

Not only that, but each copy would come with a centrefold of a landscape full colour photo of a war scene. To the public, each magazine would be comparable to the Time magazine when we see our favourite celebrities. This comparison is drawn from the excitement and patriotic feeling of seeing such success coming from the country that had previously been absolutely sucked dry by the allies proceeding world war 1s forced reparations. The resultant action was a bit different however; as signal at the time was produced with the single intention of convincing people both Germans and outsiders to support the cause to their fullest. This was a very clever magazine as well as I mentioned earlier they neglected to include Hitler’s opinions on anti-Semitism, so while you could just as easily go out looking for hard core Nazi promotional material, Signal magazine was received well throughout the world. Both for its innovative use of colour and photography and its more respected, (well, more like restrained) nature. At the end of the day, all of the Nazi propaganda was designed purposely to convey aspects, and to neglect the promotion of others. While it is clear Signal magazine was successful in compelling an entire generation of Germans to fight for a cause that was flawed, there was still another audience signal didn’t connect with. This was purposeful. Four other very influential magazines were developed around this same time period; “*Neues* Volk”, “NS-Frauen-Warte”, “Der Pimpf” and “Das deutsche Mädel”.

As I referenced previously, Signal had been designed purposely in that Nazi propaganda was excluded. This was because specialisation had finally been perfected. Rather than try to find the perfect mediation between anti Semitist interpretations of Jews and the more toned down content aimed to promote just war, it was much easier, and effective to just cater to everybody’s needs to a very high standard. Neues Volk was the dark side of the Nazi propaganda in magazines. It began with Hitler’s own personal introduction and rather silly opinions that the Jews were a common enemy. Through time however, people started to believe that Hitler was correct.

Of course Hitler’s goals lay not just at the rebuilding of Germany but also its subsequent domination of the world. Germany was not all that intent on rebuilding the fatherland because it seemed an impossible task. Hitler then was nothing more than an instigator through which Germany was channelling its anger and deep seeded frustration towards their loss of the First World War and the reparations they were obligated to pay. Very few Germans actually understood something was terribly wrong, because not only was it rather well hidden, but those who did act out were dealt with, and made into an example of disobedience. So pressure was put on the people to find their magazine, learn about their ideal role model the Nazi party had deemed appropriate and continue supporting the war. So now all that was left were the woman and children of Germany. And so Ns –Frauen-Warte was designed for the woman, Der Pimpf for the boys, and Das Deutsche Madel for the girls. Frauen propounded rather simple subjects such as parenting during the war with the absence of fathers, simple house-keeping tips, and a very general but strong emphasis on the ideal of the powerful matriarch. Der Pimpf was as expected the magazine equivalent of the army recruiter that comes to school to make war look fun and awesome. Quite simply, it promoted the Hitler youth. Hitler youth was just as it sounds Hitler’s own personal youth reserve force that he would ask to assist in battle once the boys were of age and skill. Lastly, Madel was also like Pimpf in that it presented the girls with pages upon pages of everything a girl could want to be. This would be medics, athletes and educational speakers.

You might have noticed I’ve left out the inclusion of actual Nazi propaganda in those 4 more specialised magazines (ignoring the very blatant Neues Volk). This is because there was a rather minor amount present. While much of the Nazi propaganda at the time of pre-world war 2 had just been invading all aspects of the German way of life, Joseph Goebbels was aware that such a direct approach should not be taken to convince a country. Because sure it is the man of the house that would have decided if he goes to war or not, but having your whole family just ecstatic about their father leaving home to go to war made the entire ordeal much more appealing. It made it seem as if the Nazi party was all for some sort of utopian, perfect society. It was only later that Hitler’s true intentions came to light, and it became general consensus that “Jews were evil”, and were “defects of the human race”. But it is still amazing just how effective the Nazi party and their controlled Magazine producers were in changing an entire generation of media, to convey such a horrendous message through very subtle ways.

The controlling nature of propaganda especially in Germany made for a very high risk high reward nature in terms of future benefit. The reward for welcoming the propaganda into their lives, and accepting it for what it was promises of a better future. And it did appear this way, for so long. But when Hitler began to use methods he neglected to mention inside signal or even the voraciously evil neues volk, people could not call it a day and give up. Hitler pushed the country to its limits and eventually lost the war he had instigated. His people were left in a chaotic mess with people claiming they weren’t aware they were going to be guarding concentration camps or other horrendous acts. All because propaganda had misled them to think that war would result in so much more. The media prior to specialised magazines had a very weak reception. What they did was transport the reader into the very battlefield itself. Not because of the literature, but the pictures. Never before had magazine media been able to create such a surreal ability to imagine yourself truly in the battle itself.