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PUBLIC OPINION IN A TOTALITARIAN STATE

4 June 1948

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COLONEL BABCOCK: The speaker today is one of the founders of the public-opinion course at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. We are grateful for the help that he gave us at that time as well as for his continuing cooperation.

His biographical sketch has been published for your information. However, one thing was omitted. He spent several weeks in 1937 exploring Dr. Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment.

In light of his knowledge of the operation of the Nazi totalitarian propaganda machine and its effect on public opinion, we have asked him today to discuss the dangers to the United States of totalitarian propaganda from any source.

It is with the greatest of pleasure that I welcome once again to this College; Dr. Harwood L. Childs, Professor of Public Opinion, Department of Politics, Princeton University. Dr. Childs.

DR. CHILDS; Colonel Babcock and members of this course: Last year at about this time I had the honor and pleasure of addressing this group, and I felt distinctly flattered to be invited to come here. Naturally, I am even more than flattered to be invited to come a second time. I want to impress upon you the pleasure and honor I have in being here.

The director of your program has asked me to discuss the subject of the organization and administration of the public-opinion function in the Nazi state, with comments on the possible parallels that might be assumed to exist in the Communist state.

There are several reasons, I think, why this subject is especially important and pertinent at this time. In the first place, we are all keenly aware of the effectiveness of totalitarian propaganda in the recent past. We are all more or less aware of the psychological-warfare and propaganda activities of the Fascist and Nazi regimes, as well as of the totalitarian Communist state. Furthermore, we are greatly concerned about the propaganda and public-opinion activities of the totalitarian Soviet Union today.

There are various evidences of our concern about this whole problem at the present time. For example, only a few months ago, in January, Congress passed the International Information and Exchange Act authorizing the informational activities of the State Department and enlarging,

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heimerlandstrasse and had an opportunity to become pretty well acquainted with the leader there. I had the privilege--I suppose you might call it that--of interviewing Hitler, of talking with Schacht, and of listening to the harangues of Haeufstaengel and other Nazi leaders. Of course, I had an opportunity to come in contact with the Nazi press, books, and the Nazi meetings. Out of that experience I attempted to write a story of labor and capital in German politics.

Then in 1937 I went back for another extended stay for the purpose of seeing what had happened to pressure politics as a result of Hitler's coming to power. Instead of pressure groups exerting influence upon the government, as had been the case in 1931 and 1932, I now found that pressure groups were being used by the Nazi authorities as channels for bringing pressure to bear upon the people of Germany. During that period I had an opportunity to attend various festivals: the Berlin Anniversary; a pageant celebrating the Thirty Years' War; the Nazi Rally in Nuremberg; and the Harvest Festival at Bueckerberg, at which I witnessed a mock battle on an extensive scale. That mock battle did much to arouse military enthusiasm on the part of the people. I had the privilege--I still refer to it as a privilege--of being in Berlin on the occasion of Mussolini's visit. I was standing in the office of the American Express overlooking Hitler and Mussolini as they shook hands on the corner of Unter den Linden and Wilhelmstrasse. I have often wondered, since, what I would have done had I had a bomb in my hand and had known what was going to happen within the next few years. However, we are never able to realize all of our opportunities.

Colonel Babecek mentioned the fact that during this period I spent several weeks in Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry talking with the various bureau chiefs and being shown their operations. This was before the Nazis clamped down on foreign visitors being permitted to see their operations. Then, of course, I visited the Reichs Chamber of Culture; spent a good deal of time with the Hitler Youth Organization; visited several Adolph Hitler Schools; followed the educational system; and visited for a day one of the four principal castles for the training of leaders, the one at Grossensee. I attended various meetings of the Labor Front; visited the People's Theaters; became acquainted with some of the officials in Kraft Durch Freude and, because of my interest in pressure groups, undertook to find out what had happened to the agricultural organizations, labor organizations, and the Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie. Interestingly enough, I found that the home of the Christian trade unions had been taken over by the Labor Front; that the home of the old Socialist trade unions had been completely dismantled; but that the Reichsverband, the Federation of German Industry, still occupied its old home, and many of the officials who had been there in 1931 were still there.

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many of the other Nazi propaganda leaders learned their lessons regarding propaganda from the Communists, and quite a large number of prominent Nazis had originally been members of the Communist party.

All totalitarian propagandists appreciate the importance of public opinion. In that respect, they are no different from the leaders in democratic countries. All government officials appreciate the importance of public opinion, whether they are dictators or whether they are liberals and nonauthoritarians. The Nazis and the Communists are as keenly interested in trends in public opinion within their own countries and abroad as the Gallup and public-opinion agencies of this country are. They follow the trends closely. Even in 1937 in Germany the Nazis were following very closely public-opinion trends on the part of the people in that country. To be sure, they did not conduct public-opinion pools a la Gallup. They used other methods requiring weekly and monthly reports from their precinct captains, as we would call them, or Blockwalter, those in charge of the small precincts in the cities and towns. These reports came up through the hierarchy of Nazi officialdom, were sifted, and presumably reached the policy-determining agencies. Similarly in Russia today, Russian authorities are keenly interested in following trends in public opinion. Furthermore, liberals and non-authoritarians are concerned with the way in which public opinion is formed, but the difference seems to be this: The totalitarians believe that the best way to improve the quality of public opinion is for the experts, the elite, to tell the public what they should think; whereas the democratic theory is that the best way to improve the quality of public opinion is to allow the freest possible discussion under certain conditions, on the theory that where competing propagandas and competing points of view have an opportunity to meet one another, the best in ideas and opinion will survive.

Totalitarian attempts to control public opinion are characterized by monopolistic control over the channels of communication. That goes without saying. In both Russia and Germany before the war, and in all totalitarian states emphasis was and is placed upon monopolistic control over the channels of communication; not only over the mass media, but also over the organized groups, which are quite as important, perhaps, as channels of communication; not only over organized groups, however, but also over the educational system. Totalitarian governments, whether they are of the Communist or Nazi variety, take the individual at a very early age and monopolize the approaches to his mind just so far as they can. The totalitarian propagandist undertakes to exploit to the fullest all channels of communication, not merely the radio and the newspaper.

I never discovered any new psychological techniques that the Germans were employing. I think that even at the height of their propaganda campaign they had a good deal to learn from American advertising. My regard, in some respects, for the American advertiser is very high; and

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With respect to the strategy of persuasion, we find the Nazis making extensive use of all the various types of emotional appeal, the use of slogans and dramatization. They realized the importance of developing within the minds of their followers a sense of being and of belonging to a going concern, of belonging to something that had a definite purpose and ideal behind it. I think one of the reasons why we find so much fanaticism on the part of the Communists--and why we find so much of it on the part of a good many Nazis--is the feeling that at last they have found themselves; they have been instilled with a consciousness of a purpose in life, of something that could command their whole attention. Furthermore, totalitarians generally know how to play upon the emotions of people. The Nazis, for example, succeeded in developing a hatred of the Jews, fear of communism, pride in the past, a feeling of injustice, a feeling of superiority, and, above all, that somewhat intangible feeling or sense of destiny. They were very skillful in developing and playing upon the emotions and also in adapting their message to the audience.

When we come to the strategy of conviction, upon which so many organizations in democratic countries lay emphasis, I think we have to admit that the Nazis and the totalitarians generally have never been too successful. In fact, the Nazis tended to despise logic. Mussolini and Hitler together laid more emphasis upon the emotions than they did upon convictions. In this respect, I think we can draw a contrast between the propaganda of the Communists and of the Nazis; it is true that, along with the strategy of persuasion, the Communists do have a logic, they do have a thesis, and they do have a sort of pseudo-scientific approach to their ideology.

Both the Communists and the Nazis also laid a great deal of emphasis upon propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy. I think we can say that it was the Communists who first of all among the great nations of the world in modern times really appreciated the importance of propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy. Even in the twenties they were beginning to build high-power radio stations, were beginning to expand the activities of the Third International, and were beginning to reach out into other countries; and the Nazis and Fascists came along to copy them to some extent. They made use of the familiar techniques of divide and conquer, the Trojan Horse technique, the crisis technique, and the big-lie or bluff technique. Much was made of the big-lie technique employed by the Nazis. It was simply the bluff technique. When I talked with a number of SS officials even back in 1937, they laid much emphasis upon the success they had had on various occasions in bluffing their opponents out of particular positions.

If we look at the over-all picture, we discover that, in contrast to democratic countries, the totalitarian countries have certain advantages in the use of propaganda as a weapon; but they also have certain disadvantages. They have advantages in that they have monopolistic

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Now, what to do and not to do. Perhaps I should not embark on a question of this nature because I understand that this class has already answered this question, or nearly so. At least you have been considering it for some time. It is probably presumptuous on my part to go ahead and give my own views at this late stage. However, I would hate to ignore all the work I did on this particular part of my talk.

It seems to me that what to do or not to do is basically a question of what a sound public-relations policy for the United States should be in peacetime. I am glad to note that within the last six months or so Congress and the State Department, instead of talking about the information policy of the United States or the propaganda policy of the United States, are beginning to talk about the public-relations policy of the United States. It may be that in the course of time public relations will become as obnoxious as the word "propaganda," but for the moment it seems to have a good deal of prestige.

In the first place, I want to say that I can see no reason for establishing, in peacetime, a Cabinet Department of Nonmilitary Defense to outdo the totalitarians in psychological warfare. Psychological warfare, I believe, is a necessary government function in wartime, and it should be, in wartime, definitely under the military authorities and closely correlated with military activity; but I do not believe that psychological warfare should be employed as an instrument of foreign policy in peacetime or even during a period of cold war, for the reason that it would undermine the effectiveness and destroy the credibility of our whole public-relations program. Goebbels succeeded in doing two things: In the first place, he convinced the world that he was the cleverest propagandist the world had ever known; and, in the second place, he convinced the world that no one could believe a word he said. I think that if we undertake to establish in peacetime or at the present time a Department of Nonmilitary Defense or any sort of agency to undertake professedly psychological warfare, we are going to run into that same difficulty; we are going to undermine the credibility of our whole foreign policy. Our success, I think, as a nation and so far as information is concerned, is due in large part to the fact that the people of the world know that we are rather naive, that we are simple minded, that we are farmers' boys, that we go abroad without knowing too much of what is going on; but that fundamentally we are sincere, that we are honest, and that we mean well. I think that is a tremendous asset. I would much rather have that as an asset than the reputation for having a high-powered and very clever propaganda machine.

In conclusion, let me summarize very briefly some of the essentials of a sound public-relations program, as I see it. First of all, such a program must be a truthful program. I know there will be some cynics who will say that we cannot, no matter how hard we try, carry on an informational service or a public-relations service on the basis of the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Well, that is true. No matter how hard a

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QUESTION: You made a statement that propaganda, as such, had to be more or less truthful, that Goebbels' problem was that he got further and further away from the truth. I think we all admit that we must have some sort of a propaganda line in order to accomplish the objectives that are felt to be best for the country. How far can you twist this? I mean, there are two sides to everything. How far can one diverge, you might say, from right straight down the center of the line in order to accomplish the purpose.

DR. CHILDS: I think that we should avoid getting a reputation for having a propaganda line. I think we ought to emphasize the dissemination of information, facts regarding our policies and our way of life, without adopting, in the Communist or any other sense of the term, a "line." I think the minute we do that the effectiveness of our activity is lost. It is the difference, shall we say, between the reputation of the AP and the reputation of the Tass Agency. It is true that the AP has its biases of selectivity, but I think that it has a general reputation throughout the world of trying at least to give an objective picture of the facts; and that is a big asset. I do not think we need to worry about a line.

QUESTION: There is one point you might consider. How about New Deal propaganda? I think there was a very definite picture of the New Deal portrayed as such, and it was always a rosy picture. That was generally true. There were a few comments to the contrary; but whenever the government hand-outs came out, they all portrayed some very beautiful picture.

DR. CHILDS: You are talking now about domestic propaganda in the United States?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

DR. CHILDS: I think the same should apply. I do not think it is the function of the Government to engage in either New Deal or anti-New Deal propaganda.

QUESTION: But don't you think there was such?

DR. CHILDS: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: During your lecture you tied up information, propaganda, and psychological warfare as one. Now, in wartime in this country, taking the political psychology of Americans into account, is it possible to lump these three agencies, that is, psychological warfare, which is propaganda, censorship, and domestic information, under one boss? Should they be? If not, why shouldn't they be?

DR. CHILDS: I think--and I am giving my own opinion--that our experience during the late war showed quite clearly the advantages of separating censorship from the other activities. Furthermore, I think that a sharp

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closely related, it seems to me, to military activity and should be immediately under the control of the military authorities. Possibly censorship should remain, as it was during the late war, on an independent basis. However it is set up, a coordinating committee would be essential.

QUESTION: Do you prefer a committee to an individual?

DR. CHILDS: So far as the coordinating work is concerned, yes.

QUESTION: I would like you to crystal-gaze a bit if you would. It is conceded by both major political parties that the Progressive Party will master 11 to 15 million votes in this next election. Could you comment on how effective a propaganda machine that party would be in spreading the ideologies that are backed by the Communist Party to a great extent for the future?

DR. CHILDS: I'm no good as a crystal-gazer. Furthermore, I am not at all familiar with the data you mention. Do you mean that Wallace will have the support of about 15 million voters?

QUESTIONER: Governor Warren said he would concede him a million votes in California alone, and Mr. Farley stated that he would get about 15 million votes in the election from other political leaders. My point of view is that it will become an effective machine within communities throughout the United States, which is a totalitarian approach to spreading the doctrine. I wonder how effective they would be between 1948 and, say, 1952 in spreading this totalitarian propaganda.

DR. CHILDS: I am afraid I cannot answer that. There are too many uncertain factors in the whole situation. I am not at all sure that Wallace's support will even approximate the figure you mention. Furthermore, I do not know whether you can call such a party a totalitarian party. Nor would I know how to predict how effective their propaganda would be. There are so many uncertain factors that I cannot answer the question.

QUESTION: When a totalitarian group is not yet in power and it is competing with other groups for public favor, the propaganda of that totalitarian group seems designed to gain a mass base, usually among labor or the unemployed or some other wide class. From your observation of the Nazis in Germany before and after they took power, what was the change in their propaganda, that is, the change after they were in power from what it was when they were competing for power?

DR. CHILDS: A good many studies have been made of how the Nazi came into power, and people have ascribed various degrees of importance to different factors. You must take account of the strategy of organization employed by the Nazis, which, I think, was extremely important. To be sure, they laid a great deal of emphasis upon mass appeals, upon the use of

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QUESTIONER: Yes--our international education and informational services.

DR. CHILDS: Much depends on how you define "propaganda." I like to define the term to mean any deliberate attempt to influence the minds of other people. In that respect, of course, education is propaganda; and obviously the work of our State Department would be propaganda. It is obviously designed to influence the minds of the rest of the world by directing their attention toward our policies, toward our aims, toward our way of life. But I don't see anything necessarily reprehensible about that.

It seems to me that the emphasis should be placed, however, upon the dissemination of information and fact and not on the winning of support for an ideology. That will come eventually, but I think we should try to avoid too much argumentative propaganda. As a matter of fact, the indirect approach is much more effective than the direct.

QUESTION: You mentioned, sir, that you did not think it was necessary to curb the propaganda activities of the Communists who might be here or to outlaw them. You also mentioned that the Nazi success was probably due to a sort of boring from within. Now, we have in existence in this continent today certain trade unions in which, we have been told by labor itself, Communists have control. They are key unions, such as those in the communications and electronic industries and the merchant seaman's unions. That puts us in a position, in case of an emergency, of having our whole economy thrown out of gear in a critical moment if we have not done something about curbing their activities, whether by outlawing them or by enlightening the public more about their activities. How do you suggest we go about combating these activities of the Communists in the unions?

DR. CHILDS: First of all, I would like to make the point that it is extremely difficult to draw a line between what you might call spreading ideas as such and the use of force, intimidation, and other means for accomplishing the purpose. I believe in freedom to express ideas. I believe that is one of our fundamental principles. We believe that only by allowing the maximum amount of freedom can we arrive at the wisest policies. On the other hand, I do not believe that this means that a group or an organization like the Communist Party is entitled to use any and all means for spreading its ideas. I think the question comes down to this: What kinds of means are we going to outlaw? Judging from the example of the old German Bund in this country, the Silver Shirts, and other groups of that nature, it would seem to me that we definitely ought to outlaw the use of weapons--presumably that is already outlawed--the use of military uniforms, and the use of semimilitary organizations.

When we come to the question of how we are going to deal with the technique of boring from within, I do not have a pat answer for that. I have never tried to think it through. It is, of course, an important question.

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developing qualities of leadership. The commandant there made much of the fact that every young man was required to engage in parachute jumping simply for the purpose of developing courage. He was required to dive into a lake from a very high platform, even though he could not swim, to develop courage. They pointed out with much pride that, in order to develop leadership qualities, emphasis was laid upon horsemanship.

Students were also trained in the social graces. There was a feeling on the part of the Nazi that, in the rough and tumble of party battles, many of their capable young men had never developed the social qualities they should have had. So at Crossinsee they had a great many dances, they invited the ladies there over the week-ends, and the men were encouraged to rub off many of the rough spots.

They were also trained intellectually and culturally. Many of them, when they came to these leadership schools, were already Ph.D.'s and had already had a good deal of party activity. It was not necessary for them to be trained in discipline and the qualities of a soldier. They already had those qualities, presumably. It was necessary, however, for them to specialize in certain technical subjects.

The ideal of these schools was that the top Nazi should be able to go out into the world and meet on a par the best representatives in the foreign service of England, the United States, or any other country.

One of the Adolph Hitler Schools that I visited near Berlin had as its model the Public School of England. They constantly referred to the Public School in England. They said, "What we would like to do is develop that poise, that initiative, that (shall I say) self-assurance of the young man who comes out of the British Public School. We don't want our leaders to be simply trained robots."

COLONEL BABCOCK: Gentlemen, this afternoon Dr. Childs is going to hold a seminar in Room 226, Building T-5, along with Mr. Ralph Block of the State Department. This is primarily for the Public Opinion Committee. However, if any of the others of you in the audience wish to attend, there will be plenty of chairs.

On behalf of the Commandant and the College, I wish to thank you, Dr. Childs, for your valuable contribution to our studies.

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