

Adolf Hitler, “Propaganda and Organization” (1925)

Abstract

Hitler saw a great deal of political value in the effective use of propaganda, and he believed that the success of any political movement depended in large part on the direction of its leaders and the power of propaganda to attract followers. Followers, in turn, would become *members* of the movement and would be willing to fight for it, in this case, for National Socialism. His theory and notion of propaganda and its uses derived from his early political experiences after World War I, which he laid out in his 1925 book *Mein Kampf*. In this excerpt, Hitler emphasizes the central role propaganda plays in building momentum for the National Socialist movement; it was intended to foster a genuine sense of struggle and conflict amongst the members of a movement and to propel them toward decisive action in its name.

Hitler’s emphasis on organization and order—especially a strict distinction between those who *lead* the movement and those who *follow* it—informed Nazi Party and government structures throughout the Third Reich. Goebbels, too, followed the same principles in carrying out the duties of the propaganda ministry. The Nazis’ use of propaganda has often been credited for the political success of the movement and its leaders, but this document makes clear that the aim of propaganda was not merely to gather followers and gain mass public appeal for National Socialism. Rather, the theories behind propaganda *within* the National Socialist movement also directly contributed to the structure and form of Nazi rule.

Source

Chapter XI

Propaganda and Organization

The year 1921 had assumed special significance for me and for the movement in an additional direction.

After my joining the German Workers’ Party, I immediately took over the management of the propaganda. I considered this section by far the most important. For the first it was less important to rack one’s brain about questions of organization than to impart the idea itself to a greater number of people. Propaganda had to precede far in advance of the organization and to win for the latter the human material to be utilized. [...] For this reason it is more expedient first to spread an idea by propaganda from a center and then to examine and to search for the leading heads in the human material which is gradually being assembled. [...] Every movement, at first, will have to divide the human material it has won into two great groups: into followers and members. The task of propaganda is to attract followers; the task of organization to win members. A follower of a movement is one who declares himself in agreement with its aims; a member is one who fights for it. The follower is inclined to like a movement by its propaganda. The member is induced by the organization to help personally towards acquiring new followers who then, in turn, can be trained to become members. [...] Therefore propaganda will have to see to it that untiringly an idea wins followers, while the organization has to watch most sharply that from the followers only the most valuable ones are made members. Propaganda, therefore, needs not to rack its brain about the importance of each individual it enlightens, about his ability, achievements, and understanding or of his character, while the organization has most carefully to collect from the masses of these elements those who really make possible the victory of the movement.

Propaganda tries to force a doctrine upon an entire people; organization embraces in its frame only those who for psychological reasons do not threaten to become a brake to a further spreading of the

idea. Propaganda works on the community in the sense of an idea and it makes it ripe for the time of the victory of this idea, while the organization conquers victory by the permanent, organic, and fighting union of those followers who appear able and willing to lead the fight for victory.

The victory of an idea will be the more possible the more extensively propaganda works on people in their entirety, and the more exclusive, the stricter, and stiffer the organization is which carries out the fight in practice. From this ensues the fact that the number of followers cannot be too great, whereas the number of members can more easily be too large than too small. When propaganda has filled a whole people with an idea, the organization, with the help of a handful of people, can draw the consequences. Propaganda and organization that means followers and members have thus a definite mutual relationship. The better propaganda has been working, the smaller may be the organization, and the greater the number of followers is, the more modest can be the number of members, and vice versa. [...]

The first task of propaganda is the winning of people for the future organization; the first task of the organization is the winning of people for the continuation of propaganda. The second task of propaganda is the destruction of the existing condition and the permeation of this condition with the new doctrine, while the second task of the organization must be the fight for power, so that by it, it will achieve the final success of the doctrine. [...]

In every really great revolutionary movement propaganda will first have to spread the idea of this movement. That means, it will untiringly try to make clear to the others the new train of thought, to draw them over to its own ground, or at least to make them doubtful of their own previous conviction. Since the propagation of a doctrine that means this propaganda has to have a backbone, the doctrine will have to give itself a solid organization. The organization receives its members from the followers in general won by propaganda. The latter will grow the more quickly, the more intensively propaganda is carried out, and the latter in turn is able to work the better, the stronger and the more vigorous the organization is that stands behind it. [...] The vital and reckless form which at that time I gave to our propaganda has fortified and guaranteed the radical tendency of our movement, since now only radicals with some exceptions were ready to assume membership. Yet this propaganda had the effect that after a short time hundreds of thousands not only agreed with us in their minds, but desired our victory, although they were personally too cowardly to sacrifice anything for it or even to stand up for it.

[...]

Source of English translation: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Complete and unabridged, fully annotated. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939, pp. 846–56. Available online at: <https://purl.stanford.edu/wf256tk4600>

Source of original German text: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Zwei Bände in einem Band. Ungekürzte Ausgabe. Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Frz. Eher Nachf., G.m.b.H. München, 1943, pp. 649–58; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (in collaboration with Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*. Volume 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, pp. 738–39.

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