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# Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda

BY LEONARD W. DOOB

FOR almost a dozen years German Propaganda Minister Goebbels was recognized as a master of his trade by those who fought and by those who acclaimed the Nazi state. This article, based on both the published and unpublished portions of Goebbels' diary, summarizes the

major propaganda principles which he followed.

The author, who served as Policy Coordinator of the Overseas Branch of the Office of War Information during World War II, is Professor of Psychology at Yale University.

AMONG the Nazi documents salvaged by American authorities in Berlin in 1945 are close to 6,800 pages of a manuscript ostensibly dictated by Propaganda Minister Goebbels as a diary which covers, with many gaps, the period from January 21, 1942 to December 9, 1943. The material was typed triple-spaced in large German-Gothic script and with wide margins upon heavy watermarked paper, with the result that the average page contained less than 100 words. About 30 per cent of this manuscript—the most interesting and generally the most important parts—has been very accurately and idiomatically translated by Louis P. Lochner.<sup>1</sup> The analysis in the present article is based upon careful examination of the entire document which is now in the Hoover Institute and Library on War, Peace, and Revolution at Stanford University.<sup>2</sup>

The material undoubtedly was dictated by Goebbels, but it is not necessarily an intimate or truthful account of his life as an individual or propagandist. He was too crafty to pour forth his soul to a secretary. What he said must have been motivated by whatever public audience he imagined would eventually see his words; or—as Speier has pointed out<sup>3</sup>—the document may possibly represent parts of an authentic diary which were selected by him or someone else for some specific purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Lochner, Louis P. [Editor]. *The Goebbels Diaries*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> The writer wishes to express his gratitude to Mr. Philip T. McLean of the Library for making arrangements to have the manuscript microfilmed; to the Yale Attitude Change Project for paying the costs of the microfilm; and to Professor Carl F. Schreiber of Yale University for aid in translating some of the more difficult words and phrases.

<sup>3</sup> Speier, Hans. Review of Lochner, *op. cit.*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Fall, 1948, pp. 500-505.

A section called "Yesterday—Military Situation," with which each day's entry began and which Lochner has sensibly omitted altogether, was definitely not written by Goebbels: the writing was most objective; often the same events mentioned therein were reported again and commented upon in other parts of the same day's entry; and infrequently a blank page appeared under the same heading with the notation "to be inserted later." In the manuscript we have, there are few personal details. Instead it appears that Goebbels wished to demonstrate an unswerving loyalty to Hitler; to expose the ineptitudes of the German military staffs; to boast about his own accomplishments, his respectability, and his devotion to the Nazi cause; and to place on the record criticisms of rival Nazis like Goering and Rosenberg.

The nature of the document would be a problem most germane to an examination of Goebbels' personality or the history of Nazidom, but these topics are not being discussed here. Attention has been focused only on the principles which appear to underlie the propaganda plans and decisions described in the manuscript. Spot checks suggest but do not prove that the words of the diary actually correspond to the activities of Goebbels' propaganda machine. One typical example of the correspondence must suffice. The entry in the diary for November 11, 1943, contained this observation: "There is no longer any talk in the English press of the possibility of a moral collapse of the Reich. On the contrary, we are credited with much greater military prowess than we enjoy at the moment. . . ." On the same day, the *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe* carried an editorial which asserted that the "jubilant illusions" of the British regarding a German collapse have "suddenly changed to deep pessimism; the enemy's strongest hopes are crushed." Two days later the headline of the leading article in the *Voelkischer Beobachter* was "War of Nerves Departs." On November 13 the diary stated that the English "have been imagining that exactly on this day [November 11] there would be in the Reich a morale breakdown which, however, has now been pushed by them into the invisible future." A day later a Nazi official spoke over the domestic radio: "The key-dates chosen by the enemy are now passed: our people have repulsed this general attack. . . ."

All that is being assumed, in short, is that the manuscript more or less faithfully reflects Goebbels' propaganda strategy and tactics: it

is a convenient guide to his bulky propaganda materials. He always magnified the importance of his work, no doubt to indicate his own significance. The truth of what he dictated in this respect is also irrelevant, inasmuch as the effects of his efforts are not being scrutinized.

The analysis which follows, it must constantly be remembered, is based on a very limited period of Goebbels' stewardship, a period in which on the whole Germany was suffering military and political defeats such as the winter campaigns in Russia, the withdrawal from North Africa, and the capitulation of Italy. From time to time, nevertheless, events such as temporary military advances and the triumphs of Japan in Asia occurred; hence there are also suggestions as to how Goebbels functioned as a winner. The writer has checked primary and secondary sources from 1925 through 1941 and after 1943, and is therefore at least privately confident that the principles are not limited to the diary.

In this analysis a principle is adduced—in an admittedly but unavoidably subjective manner—from the diary when a minimum of six scattered references therein suggests that Goebbels would have had to believe, consciously or unconsciously, in that generalization before he could dictate or behave as he did. To save space, however, only a few illustrations are given under each principle. Whenever possible, an illustration has been selected from the portion published by Lochner: the reader has readier access to that volume than to the manuscript at Stanford. The same procedure has been employed regarding references. A quoted phrase or sentence is followed by the number of the page being cited, either from the Lochner book (in which case a simple number is given in parentheses), or from the Stanford manuscript (in which case the number is preceded by the letter "M," and represents the Library's pagination). The concluding sentence of each paragraph, moreover, contains the one reference considered to be either the best or the most typical for the entire paragraph, again preferably from the Lochner book. The writer will gladly honor written requests for additional references.

These principles purport to summarize what made Goebbels tick or fail to tick. They may be thought of as his intellectual legacy. Whether the legacy has been reliably deduced is a methodological question. Whether it is valid is a psychological matter. Whether or when parts

of it should be utilized in a democratic society are profound and disturbing problems of a political and ethical nature.

I. PROPAGANDISTS MUST HAVE ACCESS TO INTELLIGENCE  
CONCERNING EVENTS AND PUBLIC OPINION

In theory, Goebbels maintained that he and his associates could plan and execute propaganda only by constantly referring to existing intelligence. Otherwise the communication would not be adapted either to the event or the audience. As Germany's situation worsened, he permitted fewer and fewer officials to have access to all relevant intelligence. By May of 1943 he persuaded Himmler to supply unexpurgated reports only to himself (373).

The basic intelligence during a war concerns military events. Each day's entry began with a separate description of the current military situation. There is every indication that Goebbels was kept acquainted with Germany's own military plans (162).

Information about Germans was obtained most frequently from the reports of the *Sicherheits-Dienst* (SD) of the secret police. In addition, Goebbels depended upon his own Reich Propaganda Offices, German officials, and written or face-to-face contacts with individual German civilians or soldiers. As has been shown elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> little or none of this intelligence was ever gathered or analyzed systematically. Once Goebbels stated that the SD had conducted "a statistical investigation . . . in the manner of the Gallup Institute," but he said he did "not value such investigations because they are always undertaken with a deliberate purpose in mind" (M827). Goebbels, moreover, tended to trust his own common sense, intuition, or experience more than formal reports. He listened to his mother because, he said, "she knows the sentiments of the people better than most experts who judge from the ivory tower of scientific inquiry, as in her case the voice of people itself speaks" (56).

The SD as well as German officials supplied intelligence concerning occupied countries. Information about enemy, allied, and neutral nations was gathered from spies, monitored telephone conversations, and other classified sources; from the interrogation of prisoners as well as from the letters they received and sent; and from statements in or

<sup>4</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *The Effects of Bombing on German Morale*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947. Vol. I, p. 42.

deductions from those nations' mass media of communication. Here, too, Goebbels often relied upon his own intuitive judgment, and he seldom hesitated to make far-reaching deductions from a thread of evidence. A direct reply by the enemy, for example, he unequivocally interpreted as a sign of his own effectiveness: "a wild attack on my last article" by the Russian news agency "shows that our anti-Bolshevik propaganda is slowly getting on Soviet nerves" (271).

2. PROPAGANDA MUST BE PLANNED AND EXECUTED  
BY ONLY ONE AUTHORITY

This principle was in line with the Nazi theory of centralizing authority and with Goebbels' own craving for power. In the diary he stressed the efficiency and consistency which could result from such a policy (M383). He felt that a single authority—himself—must perform three functions:

a. *It must issue all the propaganda directives.* Every bit of propaganda had to implement policy, and policy was made clear in directives. These directives referred to all phases of the war and to all events occurring inside and outside of Germany. They indicated when specific propaganda campaigns should be begun, augmented, diminished, and terminated. They suggested how an item should be interpreted and featured, or whether it should be ignored completely. Goebbels willingly yielded his authority for issuing directives only to Hitler, whose approval on very important matters was always sought. Sometimes gratification was expressed concerning the ways in which directives were implemented; but often there were complaints concerning how Goebbels' own people or others were executing a campaign. The Nazi propaganda machine, therefore, was constantly being reorganized (341).

b. *It must explain propaganda directives to important officials and maintain their morale.* Unless these officials who either formally or informally implemented directives were provided with an explanation of propaganda policy, they could not be expected to function effectively and willingly. Through his organizational machinery and also through personal contact, Goebbels sought to reveal the rationale of his propaganda to these subordinates and to improve their morale by taking them, ostensibly, into his confidence. The groups he met varied in size from an intimate gathering in his home to what must have been a mass meeting in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin (484).

*c. It must oversee other agencies' activities which have propaganda consequences.* "I believe," Goebbels told Hitler, "that when a propaganda ministry is created, all matters affecting propaganda, news, and culture within the Reich and within the occupied areas must be subordinated to it." Although Hitler allegedly "agreed with me absolutely and unreservedly," this high degree of unification was not achieved (476). Conflicts over propaganda plans and materials were recorded with the following German agencies: Ribbentrop's Foreign Office and its representatives in various countries; Rosenberg's Ministry for the Eastern Occupied Areas; the German Army, even including the officers stationed at Hitler's G.H.Q.; the Ministry of Justice; and Ley's Economic Ministry. Goebbels considered himself and his ministry trouble-shooters: whenever and wherever German morale seemed poor—whether among submarine crews or the armies in the East—he attempted to provide the necessary propaganda boost (204).

Goebbels' failure to achieve the goal of this principle and its corollaries is noteworthy. Apparently his self-proclaimed competency was not universally recognized: people whom he considered amateurs believed they could execute propaganda as effectively as he. In addition, even a totalitarian regime could not wipe out personal rivalries and animosities in the interests of efficiency (M3945).

### 3. THE PROPAGANDA CONSEQUENCES OF AN ACTION MUST BE CONSIDERED IN PLANNING THAT ACTION

Goebbels demanded that he rather than the German Ministry of Justice be placed in charge of a trial in France so that "everything will be seized and executed correctly from a psychological viewpoint" (M1747). He persuaded Hitler, he wrote, to conduct "air warfare against England . . . according to psychological rather than military principles" (313). It was more important for a propagandist to help plan an event than to rationalize one that had occurred (209).

### 4. PROPAGANDA MUST AFFECT THE ENEMY'S POLICY AND ACTION

Propaganda was considered an arm of warfare, although Goebbels never employed the phrase "psychological warfare" or "political warfare." Besides damaging enemy morale, he believed that propaganda could affect the policies and actions of enemy leaders in four ways:

a. *By suppressing propagandistically desirable material which can provide the enemy with useful intelligence.* Often Goebbels claimed that he refused to deny or refute enemy claims concerning air damage: "it is better," he said in April of 1942, "for the English to think that they have had great successes in the air war than for them actually to have achieved such victories" (M2057). For similar reasons he regretfully censored items concerning the poor quality of Soviet weapons, Germany's plans to employ secret weapons, and even favorable military news (272).

b. *By openly disseminating propaganda whose content or tone causes the enemy to draw the desired conclusions.* "I am also convinced," Goebbels stated in the spring of 1943, "that a firm attitude on our part [in propaganda] will somewhat spoil the appetite of the English for an invasion" (302). As the Battle of Tunisia drew to a close, therefore, the resistance of German troops there was used as an illustration of what would happen if the European continent were invaded. Perhaps, Goebbels must have reasoned, General Eisenhower's plans might be thus directly affected; British or American public opinion might exert influence upon SHAEF; or the morale of the armies in training for the invasion might be crippled (M4638).

c. *By goading the enemy into revealing vital information about himself.* At the end of the Battle of the Coral Sea Goebbels believed that the Japanese had scored a complete victory. The silence of American and British authorities was then attacked "with very precise questions: they will not be able to avoid for any length of time the responsibility of answering these questions" (M2743).

d. *By making no reference to a desired enemy activity when any reference would discredit that activity.* Goebbels did not wish to bestow a "kiss of death" on matters which met his approval. No use was made of news indicating unfriendly relations between two or more of the countries opposing Germany because—in Goebbels' own favorite, trite, and oft repeated words—"controversy between the Allies is a small plant which thrives best when it is left to its own natural growth" (M941). Likewise the Nazi propaganda apparatus was kept aloof from the *Chicago Tribune*, from a coal strike in the United States, and from anti-Communist or pro-fascist groups in England. Quarrels between Germany's enemies, however, were fully exploited when—as in the case



of British-American clashes over Darlan—the conflict was both strong and overt (225).

5. DECLASSIFIED, OPERATIONAL INFORMATION MUST BE AVAILABLE  
TO IMPLEMENT A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

A propaganda goal, regardless of its importance, required operational material that did not conflict with security regulations. The material could not be completely manufactured: it had to have some factual basis, no matter how slight. It was difficult to begin an anti-semitic campaign after the fall of Tunis because German journalists had been failing to collect anti-Jewish literature. Lack of material, however, never seems to have hindered a campaign for any length of time, since evidently some amount of digging could produce the necessary implementation. Journalists were dispatched to a crucial area to write feature stories; steps were taken to insure a supply of “authentic news from the United States” (92); a change in personnel was contemplated “to inject fresh blood into German journalism” and hence better writing (500); or, when necessary, the Protocols of Zions were resurrected (376).

Like any publicity agent, Goebbels also created “news” through action. To demonstrate Germany’s friendship for Finland, for example, a group of ailing Finnish children was invited to Germany on a “health-restoring vacation” (M91). The funerals of prominent Nazis were made into news-worthy pageants; the same technique was applied to the French and Belgian victims of British air attacks. German and Nazi anniversaries were celebrated so routinely that the anniversary of the founding of the Three Power Pact was observed even after the downfall of the Italian member (M5859).

6. TO BE PERCEIVED, PROPAGANDA MUST EVOKE THE INTEREST  
OF AN AUDIENCE AND MUST BE TRANSMITTED THROUGH  
AN ATTENTION-GETTING COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM

Much energy was devoted to establishing and maintaining communications media. Motion picture theaters and newspapers were controlled or purchased in neutral and occupied countries. “It’s a pity that we cannot reach the people of the Soviet Union by radio propaganda,” Goebbels stated, since “the Kremlin has been clever enough to exclude the Russian people from receiving the great world broadcasts and to

limit them to their local stations" (453). The schedule of many German radio programs was adjusted when the British introduced "double summer time." A dilemma existed regarding receiving sets in occupied countries: if they were confiscated, people would be cut off from Nazi as well as enemy propaganda; if they were not, both brands could be heard. Inside the Reich, machinery was created to reopen motion picture theaters as quickly as possible after heavy air raids (M5621).

Some kind of bait was devised to attract and hold an audience. What Goebbels called "propaganda" over the radio, he believed, tended after a while to repel an audience. By 1942 he concluded that Germans wanted their radio to provide "not only instruction but also entertainment and relaxation" (M383), and that likewise straight news rather than "talks" were more effective with foreign audiences. Like any propagandist in war time, he recognized that a radio program could draw enemy listeners by providing them with the names of war prisoners. The best form of newspaper propaganda was not "propaganda" (i.e., editorials and exhortation), but slanted news which appeared to be straight (M4677).

Goebbels was especially attached to the motion picture. At least three evenings a week he previewed a feature film or newsreel not only to seek relaxation and the company of film people but also to offer what he considered to be expert criticisms. Feature pictures, he stated, should provide entertaining and absorbing plots which might evoke and then resolve tension; simultaneously they should subtly affect the attentive audience not through particular passages but by the general atmosphere. Evidence for Goebbels' belief in the supreme importance of newsreels comes from the fact that he immediately provided his newsreel company with emergency headquarters after one of the heaviest air raids Berlin experienced toward the end of 1943. "It costs much trouble to assemble the newsreel correctly each week and to make it into an effective propaganda weapon," he observed on another occasion, "but the work is worthwhile: millions of people draw from the newsreel their best insight into the war, its causes, and its effects." He also believed that newsreels provided "proof" for many of his major propaganda contentions: visual images—no matter how he himself manipulated them before they were released—possessed greater credibility than spoken or written words (M335).

Goebbels never stated explicitly whether or not in his opinion some media were better suited to present particular propaganda themes than others. Only stray observations were made, such as that leaflets were ineffective when "opinions are too rigid and viewpoints too firm" (M2065). His one basic assumption appears to have been that all media must be employed simultaneously, since one never knew what type of bait would catch the variety of fish who were Nazi targets (M828).

7. CREDIBILITY ALONE MUST DETERMINE WHETHER PROPAGANDA  
OUTPUT SHOULD BE TRUE OR FALSE

Goebbels' moral position in the diary was straightforward: he told the truth, his enemies told lies. Actually the question for him was one of expediency and not morality. Truth, he thought, should be used as frequently as possible; otherwise the enemy or the facts themselves might expose falsehood, and the credibility of his own output would suffer. Germans, he also stated, had grown more sophisticated since 1914: they could "read between the lines" and hence could not be easily deceived (M1808).

Lies, consequently, were useful when they could not be disproved. To induce Italians to leave the areas occupied by English and American forces and then to shanghai them into Germany as workers, Goebbels broadcast the claim that "the English and Americans will compel all men of draft age to enlist" (462). Even truth, however, might damage credibility. In the first place, some apparently true statements could later turn out to be false, such as specific claims concerning the damage inflicted by planes against enemy targets. Then, secondly, truth itself might appear untrue. Goebbels was afraid to inform the Germans that General Rommel had not been in Africa during the closing days of the campaign there: "everybody thinks he is in Africa; if we now come out with the truth when the catastrophe is so near, nobody will believe us" (352).

Similarly, every feature and device had to maintain its own credibility. A special communique or bulletin was employed, for example, to announce important events. Goebbels was afraid to resort to this device too frequently, lest it lose its unusual character, and hence he released some significant news through routine channels (M5799).

8. THE PURPOSE, CONTENT, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ENEMY PROPAGANDA;  
THE STRENGTH AND EFFECTS OF AN EXPOSÉ; AND THE NATURE OF  
CURRENT PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS DETERMINE WHETHER  
ENEMY PROPAGANDA SHOULD BE IGNORED OR REFUTED

Most of the time Goebbels seemed mortally afraid of enemy propaganda. Even though he had controlled all the mass media in Germany since 1933, he must have been convinced that Germans had not been completely converted to the Nazi cause, or at least that they might be corrupted by enemy efforts. He admitted in January of 1942 that "foreign broadcasts are again being listened to more extensively" even though death could be the penalty for doing so (44). Fourteen months later he noted with dismay that "the English and Americans have greatly expanded their radio broadcasts to the Axis countries and intend to step them up even more" (312).

Goebbels' first impulse was to reply to enemy propaganda. He wrote as though he were a member of a great International Debating Society and as if silence on his part would mean the loss of the argument and of his own prestige. Actually, however, he judiciously balanced a number of factors before he decided to ignore or refute enemy claims (M2593).

In the first place, he analyzed enemy propaganda. If it seemed that the goal of the propaganda was to elicit a reply, he was silent. "The English," he stated on February 6, 1942, "are now employing a new mode of propaganda: they commit General Rommel to objectives which at the moment he certainly cannot have, in order to be able to declare perhaps in eight or fourteen days that he has not reached these goals" (M423). A direct reply would have been equivalent to selling the German armies short. His practice was to expose such traps to his subordinates and then to have them maintain silence in the mass media (M4606).

On the other hand, a reply was made if it were felt that the enemy was transmitting blatant falsehoods. Since almost any enemy statement was considered false, Goebbels believed that only the blatant ones should be exposed. In this category he included claims that Germans had bombed Vatican City, that there had been "disturbances in Berlin" (M4664), that Stalin was adopting a more lenient policy toward religion, etc. (M4971).

Ineffective enemy claims required no reply, since a refutation would either give them more currency or else be a waste of propaganda energy. Enemy propaganda was very frequently branded as being ineffective, judgments which appear to have been either intuitive or rationalizations of an inability to reply. Effective enemy propaganda, however, demanded immediate action. The enemy, for example, was seldom permitted to acquire prestige; thus Goebbels attacked British boasts concerning a parachute landing at Le Havre, a raid on St. Nazaire, and the occupation of Madagascar. Sometimes it appears as though he instituted counter-proceedings not because the enemy was being successful but simply because he was able to do so. When the enemy was thought to be employing horoscopes and other occult propaganda against Germany, a reply in kind was immediately prepared. If the enemy seemed to be scoring an especially important propaganda triumph in its "war of nerves"—specifically at the beginning of the heavy British raids on German cities, after the downfall of Mussolini, or in the midst of strong pressure on Turkey by Britain in the late fall of 1943—the only really adequate reply was considered to be a speech by Hitler himself (251).

Then, secondly, Goebbels examined his own propaganda arsenal before he assayed a reply. He kept silent if he believed that his case, in the absence of facts or arguments, would appear too weak. He was so afraid of the German National Committee which the Russians formed in Moscow that he carried on no counter-propaganda against this group. Sometimes an enemy claim was disregarded and a counter-claim advanced. As Germany was attacked for her treatment of Jews, the policy of "complete silence" seemed unwise: "it is best to seize the offensive and to say something about English cruelty in India or the Near East" (M3064) and also to "intensify . . . our anti-Bolshevik propaganda" (M3225).

Goebbels tried, too, to estimate in advance the effectiveness of a rebuttal. If his own case as well as the enemy's appeared strong but if the enemy's might look stronger because of his attempts to refute it, he withheld his fire. It always seemed better to concentrate on the dissemination of a Hitler speech rather than to reply to foreign critics. Often, however, he believed that an exposé could protect Germans or help immunize foreigners from an enemy campaign that was either about

to be or actually had been launched. Peace appeals by the three allies were therefore anticipated, and his reply to the communique from the Teheran Conference was "biting and insolent; we empty buckets of irony and derision over the Conference" (545).

In the third place, Goebbels believed that his current propaganda had to be surveyed before enemy propaganda could be ignored or refuted. He attempted no reply when that reply might divert attention away from, or when it ran counter to more important propaganda themes. "There's no point in concerning oneself daily with new themes and rumors disseminated by the enemy," he stated, since it was essential to concentrate on the "central theme" of anti-Semitism (M4602). In March of 1943 he permitted "Bolshevik reports of victories . . . to go into the world unchallenged": he wanted Europe to "get the creeps," so that "all the sooner it will become sensible" and cooperate against the Russians (284).

9. CREDIBILITY, INTELLIGENCE, AND THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF  
COMMUNICATING DETERMINE WHETHER PROPAGANDA  
MATERIALS SHOULD BE CENSORED

Goebbels had no scruples whatsoever concerning the use of censorship. "News policy," he stated, "is a weapon of war; its purpose is to wage war and not to give out information" (210). His decision rested upon three pragmatic considerations (299).

Goebbels recognized, first, that often credibility might be impaired if an item were censored: "in excited and strained times the hunger for news must somehow be satisfied" (40). When the Foreign Office censored news which he considered important, he complained that "by that sort of policy we are fairly compelling the German public to listen to foreign and enemy broadcasts" (164). Again and again, therefore, he felt that he had to speak up, although he would have preferred to be silent. Toward the end of 1943, for example, he stated that the problem of evacuating people from the bombed areas "has become so serious that it must be discussed with the clarity it deserves" (M6435).

The usual policy was to suppress material which was deemed undesirable for German consumption, but simultaneously to employ it in foreign propaganda if it were suited thereto. Tales concerning alleged cannibalism by the Soviets were spread in foreign countries, but such material was banned inside Germany lest it terrify Germans whose

relatives were fighting the Russians. Sometimes, however, undesirable material was not censored domestically in order to maintain its credibility abroad (M2699).

Censorship was invoked, in the second place, when intelligence concerning the outcome of a development was insufficient. Here Goebbels wished either to preserve credibility or to have more facts before formulating a directive. Military forecasts he considered especially risky, but he also avoided comments on political events outside the Reich until he could fairly definitely anticipate their effects upon Germany (M5036).

Then, finally, Goebbels estimated the possible effects of communicating the information. Censorship was pursued when it was thought that knowledge of the event would produce a reaction which was undesirable in itself or which, though desirable under some circumstances, was not in line with a current directive. Judged by the kind of news he suppressed, Goebbels was afraid that the following might damage German morale: discussions about religion; statements by officials in neutral or occupied countries that were hostile to Germany or by enemy officials that might evoke sympathy for them; enemy warnings that there would be raids before heavy ones began and—later—the extent of the damage inflicted by enemy planes; dangerous acts which included the assassination of officials, sabotage, and desertion; the unfortunate decisions or deeds of German officials; the belittling of German strength by an occurrence like the escape of General Giraud from a German prison; an unnecessarily large increase in Germans' anxiety; and hints that Germany did not approve completely of her Axis partners (249).

IO. MATERIAL FROM ENEMY PROPAGANDA MAY BE UTILIZED IN OPERATIONS WHEN IT HELPS DIMINISH THAT ENEMY'S PRESTIGE OR LENDS SUPPORT TO THE PROPAGANDIST'S OWN OBJECTIVE

Although his basic attitude toward enemy propaganda was one of contempt, Goebbels combed enemy broadcasts, newspapers, and official statements for operational items. Here he was not motivated by the somewhat defensive desire to reply to the enemy, but by offensive considerations: words of the enemy (Cf. Principle 8) could help him reach his propaganda goals. "In the morning we published in the German press a collection of previous Churchill lies and featured ten points; this collection is making a deep impression on the neutral press and

shows Churchill to be, as it were, the Admiral of Incapability" (M202). In particular the enemy provided a basis for Goebbels' "strength-through-fear" campaign as indicated below in Principle 16. "This fellow Vansittart is really worth his weight in gold to our propaganda" (342), he wrote, and likewise he felt that any discussion in England or Russia concerning reparations or boundary questions after Germany's defeat "contributes significantly to the maintenance and strengthening of morale" inside the Reich (M765).

II. BLACK RATHER THAN WHITE PROPAGANDA MUST BE EMPLOYED WHEN THE LATTER IS LESS CREDIBLE OR PRODUCES UNDESIRABLE EFFECTS

By "black" propaganda is meant material whose source is concealed from the audience. Goebbels disguised his identity when he was convinced that the association of a white medium with himself or his machine would damage its credibility. At one time, for example, he wanted to induce the English to stop bombing Berlin by convincing them that they were wasting their bombs. He claimed that he used rumor-mongers to spread the idea there that the city "for all practical purposes is no longer capable of supporting life, *i.e.*, no longer exists" (M6654). Presumably the tale had a better chance of being believed if German authorities were not connected with it. A most elaborate plan was concocted to try to deceive the Russians regarding the section of the front at which the Germans in the summer of 1942 had planned their offensive. A German journalist, who had first been sent deliberately to the Eastern front, was then dispatched to Lisbon where he was to commit, ostensibly under the influence of liquor, what would appear to be indiscretions but which actually were deceptions. In addition, it was planned to plant "a camouflaged article . . . through middlemen either in the Turkish or the Portuguese press" (226), and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was made to print an "unauthorized" article which was later "officially suppressed and denounced in a press conference" (221). Goebbels sought to increase the number of Soviet deserters by improving the prisoner-of-war camps in which they would be kept—this ancient psychological warfare device rested on the hope that news of the improvement would reach Soviet soldiers through informal channels. Otherwise, except for a security-conscious hint from time to time, the diary made no reference to black operations inside enemy countries (M4235).



Goebbels also utilized black means to combat undesirable rumors inside the Reich. An official denial through a white medium, he thought, might only give currency to the rumors, whereas what he called "word-of-mouth" propaganda against them could achieve the desired effects. This method was employed to offset German fears that "in case more serious raids were to occur, the government would be the first to run away" from Berlin (421). At all times "citizens who are faithful to the state must be furnished with the necessary arguments for combatting defeatism during discussions at their places of work and on the streets" (401). Sometimes, however, rumors were officially attacked when, in Goebbels' opinion, all the facts were completely and unequivocally on his side (518).

#### 12. PROPAGANDA MAY BE FACILITATED BY LEADERS WITH PRESTIGE

Such a principle is to be expected from Goebbels, whose Nazi ideology stressed the importance of leadership. Germans, it was hoped, would feel submissive toward propaganda containing the name of a prestigious leader. Ostensibly Goebbels always anticipated momentous results from a Hitler statement especially during a crisis; he noted routinely that the communication had been received by Germans with complete enthusiasm or that it "has simply amazed the enemy" (506).

Leaders were useful only when they had prestige. Goebbels utilized propaganda to make heroes out of men like Field Marshal Rommel. In the privacy of his diary he savagely attacked German leaders whose public behavior was not exemplary, since they thus disrupted propaganda which urged ordinary Germans to make greater sacrifices and to have unswerving faith in their government. An incompetent Nazi official was not openly dismissed from office, lest his incompetence reflect upon "the National Socialist regime"; instead it was announced that he had been temporarily replaced because of illness (224).

#### 13. PROPAGANDA MUST BE CAREFULLY TIMED

Goebbels always faced the tactical problem of timing his propaganda most effectively. Agility and plasticity were necessary, he thought, and propagandists must possess at all times the faculty of "calculating psychological effects in advance" (204). Three principles seemed to be operating:

a. *The communication must reach the audience ahead of competing propaganda.* "Whoever speaks the first word to the world is always right," Goebbels stated flatly (183). He sought constantly to speed up the release of news by his own organization. The loss of Kiev was admitted as quickly as possible "so that we would not limp behind the enemy announcement" (M6061).

b. *A propaganda campaign must begin at the optimum moment.* Goebbels never indicated explicitly or implicitly how he reached the decision that the time to begin a campaign or make an announcement was either ripe or right. He made statements like this: "we have held back for a very long time" in using an Indian leader, who as a German puppet committed his country to a war against England, "for the simple reason that things had not advanced far enough as yet in India" (107). At one point he stated that counter-propaganda against enemy claims should not be too long delayed: "one should not let such lying reports sink in too deeply" (M2430).

c. *A propaganda theme must be repeated, but not beyond some point of diminishing effectiveness.* On the one hand, Goebbels believed that propaganda must be repeated until it was thoroughly learned and that thereafter more repetition was necessary to reinforce the learning. Such repetition took place over time—the same theme was mentioned day after day—as well as in the output of a single day. An anti-Semitic campaign, for example, continued for weeks, during which time "about 70 to 80 per cent of our broadcasts are devoted to it" (366). On the other hand, repetition could be unnecessary or even undesirable. It was unnecessary when "the material thus far published has completely convinced the public" (386). It was undesirable when the theme became boring or unimpressive, as occurred in connection with announcements concerning German submarine successes. Sometimes, moreover, booming guns at the start of a campaign, though desirable psychologically, could make the propaganda too "striking" and consequently result in a loss of credibility (M6343).

#### 14. PROPAGANDA MUST LABEL EVENTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISTINCTIVE PHRASES OR SLOGANS

Again and again Goebbels placed great stress upon phrases and slogans to characterize events. At the beginning of 1942, for example,

he began a campaign whose purpose was to indicate economic, social, and political unrest in England. He very quickly adopted the phrase "*schleichende Krise*"—creeping crisis—to describe this state of affairs and then employed it "as widely as possible in German propaganda" both domestically and abroad (M762). His thinking was dominated by word-hunts: privately—or semi-privately—in his diary he summarized his own or enemy propaganda with a verbal cliché, even when he did not intend to employ the phrase in his output. He admitted that the experiencing of an event was likely to be more effective than a verbal description of it, but he also recognized that words could stand between people and events, and that their reaction to the latter could be potently affected by the former (M1385). To achieve such effects, phrases and slogans should possess the following characteristics:

a. *They must evoke desired responses which the audience previously possesses.* If the words could elicit such responses, then Goebbels' propaganda task consisted simply of linking those words to the event which thereafter would acquire their flavor. When the British raid on St. Nazaire in March of 1942 aborted, Goebbels decided to claim that it had been made to appease the Russians who had been demanding that their ally engage in military action. The raid was dubbed the "Maisky Offensive," after the Soviet envoy in London. Sometimes news could speak for itself in the sense that it elicited desired responses without the addition of a verbal label. A military victory was not interpreted for Germans when Goebbels wished them to feel gratified. Most news, however, was not self-explanatory: Goebbels had to attach thereto the responses he desired through the use of verbal symbols. The most regulated news and commentary, nevertheless, could produce undesirable and unintended actions; even a speech by Hitler was misinterpreted (M4677).

b. *They must be capable of being easily learned.* "It must make use of painting in black-and-white, since otherwise it cannot be convincing to people," Goebbels stated with reference to a film he was criticizing (M271). This principle of simplification he applied to all media in order to facilitate learning. The masses were important, not the intellectuals. All enemy "lies" were not beaten down, rather it was better to confine the counter-attack to a single "school example" (M2084). Propaganda could be aided, moreover, by a will to learn. Cripps' appeal

to European workers under German domination to slow down on the job, for example, was ignored: "it is difficult to pose a counter-slogan to such a slogan, for the slogan of 'go slow' is always much more effective than that of 'work fast'" (107).

c. *They must be utilized again and again, but only in appropriate situations.* Here Goebbels wished to exploit learning which had occurred: the reactions people learned to verbal symbols he wished to transfer easily and efficiently to new events. He criticized English propaganda because "its slogans are changed on every occasion and hence it lacks real punch" (M1812). The context in which people's reactions occurred was also important. "I forbid using the word 'Fuehrer' in the German press when applied to Quisling," Goebbels declared, "I don't consider it right that the term *Fuehrer* be applied to any other person than the *Fuehrer* himself. There are certain terms that we must absolutely reserve for ourselves, among them also the word 'Reich'" (66).

d. *They must be boomerang-proof.* Goebbels became furious when he thought of the expression "Baedeker raids, which one of our people so stupidly coined during a foreign press conference" (M2435): it interfered with his own effort to call British raids wanton attacks on "cultural monuments and institutions of public welfare" (M2301). "There are certain words," he added, "from which we should shrink as the devil does from Holy Water; among these are, for instance, the words 'sabotage' and 'assassination'" (93).

#### 15. PROPAGANDA TO THE HOME FRONT MUST PREVENT THE RAISING OF FALSE HOPES WHICH CAN BE BLASTED BY FUTURE EVENTS

It was clear to Goebbels that the anticipation of a German success along military or political lines could have certain immediate beneficial effects from his viewpoint. The confidence of Germans and the anxiety of the enemy could be increased. Such tactics, however, were much too risky: if the success turned out to be a failure, then Germans would feel deflated and the enemy elated. His own credibility, moreover, would suffer. For this reason he was wildly indignant when, after the German army withdrew, the enemy ascribed to him "premature reports of victories" at Salerno. Actually, he claimed, the announcements had come from German Generals (457).

Often the false hopes seemed to spring from the Germans themselves, a form of wishful thinking which occurred spontaneously as they contemplated the possibility of an offensive by the German armies, as they received news of a single victory, or as they imagined that the enemy could be defeated by political events. Goebbels, therefore, frequently issued warnings about "false illusions" and he prevented particular victories from being trumpeted too loudly. At other times enemy propaganda strategy was thought to be committing the German armies to military goals which they could not be expected to achieve (118).

16. PROPAGANDA TO THE HOME FRONT MUST CREATE  
AN OPTIMUM ANXIETY LEVEL

For Goebbels, anxiety was a double-edged sword: too much anxiety could produce panic and demoralization, too little could lead to complacency and inactivity. An attempt was constantly made, therefore, to achieve a balance between the two extremes. The strategy can be reduced to two principles (M6162).

a. *Propaganda must reinforce anxiety concerning the consequences of defeat.* Enemy war aims were the principal material employed to keep German anxiety at a high pitch. "The German people must remain convinced—as indeed the facts warrant—that this war strikes at their very lives and their national possibilities of development, and they must fight it with their entire strength" (147). Lest the campaign of "strength-through-fear" falter, no opportunity was missed to attack enemy peace terms which might appear mild. Anti-Bolshevik campaigns attempted not only to stiffen German resistance but also to enlist the cooperation of all neutral and occupied countries. On the one hand, Goebbels tried to convince himself in the diary that Germans would not be misled again—as they had been, according to his view, in World War I—by enemy peace terms: they "are quite accurately acquainted with their enemies and know what to expect if they were to give themselves up" (M6684). On the other hand, he felt very strongly that Germans were most vulnerable to peace propaganda. He feared, for example, that American propaganda might be directed "not . . . against the German people but against Nazism" (147) and "we can surely congratulate ourselves that our enemies have no Wilson Fourteen Points" (47).

Occasionally it became necessary to increase the anxiety level of

Germans concerning a specific event. On February 24, 1942, after the first disastrous winter campaign in Russia, Goebbels "issued orders to the German press to handle the situation in the East favorably, but not too optimistically." He did not wish to raise false hopes but, perhaps more importantly, he did not want Germans to "cease to worry at all about the situation in the East" (99).

b. *Propaganda must diminish anxiety (other than that concerning the consequences of defeat) which is too high and which cannot be reduced by people themselves.* Air raids obviously raised German anxiety much too high, but they were a situation over which Goebbels could not exercise propaganda control. In other situations involving a demoralizing amount of anxiety he could be more active. "To see things in a realistic light" when the military situation in Tunisia became hopeless, German losses were portrayed as being "not of such a nature that as a result our chances for [ultimate] victory have been damaged" (M4542). In contrast, he attempted to use the same principle in reverse—the so-called "strategy of terror"—against his enemies. Leaflets were dropped on English cities "with pictures of the damage done by the English in Luebeck and Rostock, and under them the Fuehrer's announcement of his Reichstag speech that reprisal raids are coming" (193).

#### 17. PROPAGANDA TO THE HOME FRONT MUST DIMINISH THE IMPACT OF FRUSTRATION

It was most important to prevent Germans from being frustrated, for example, by immunizing them against false hopes. If a frustration could not be avoided, Goebbels sought to diminish its impact by following two principles:

a. *Inevitable frustrations must be anticipated.* Goebbels' reasoning seems to have been that a frustration would be less frustrating if the element of surprise or shock were eliminated. A present loss was thus endured for the sake of a future gain. The German people were gradually given "some intimation that the end is in sight" as the fighting in Tunisia drew to a close (352). They likewise received advance hints whenever a reduction in food rations was contemplated; the actual announcement, nevertheless, always disturbed them (M1484).

b. *Inevitable frustrations must be placed in perspective.* Goebbels considered one of his principal functions to be that of giving the Ger-

mans what he called a *Kriegsüberblick*, a general survey of the war. Otherwise, he felt, they would lose confidence in their régime and in himself, and they would fail to appreciate why they were being compelled to make so many sacrifices (M4975).

18. PROPAGANDA MUST FACILITATE THE DISPLACEMENT OF  
AGGRESSION BY SPECIFYING THE TARGETS FOR HATRED

Goebbels had few positive gratifications to offer Germans during the period of adversity covered by the diary. He featured enemy losses, quite naturally, whenever he could and whenever Germans were not over-confident. Only once did he praise Germans for withstanding the enemy as long as they had. By and large, the principal technique seems to have been that of displacing German aggression on to some out-group (M6220).

Favorite hate objects were "Bolsheviks" and Jews. Goebbels was disturbed by reports which indicated that "the fear of Bolshevism by the broad masses of European peoples has become somewhat weaker" (M4572) or that "certain groups of Germans, especially the intellectuals, express the idea that Bolshevism is not so bad as the Nazis represent it to be" (335). Anti-Semitic propaganda was usually combined with active measures against Jews in Germany or the occupied countries. German aggression was also directed against American and British pilots, but on the whole the United States and Great Britain did not stir Goebbels' wrath, at least in the diary (147).

In enemy countries Goebbels had a strong penchant to engage in "wedge-driving": he sought to foment suspicion, distrust, and hatred between his enemies and between groups within a particular country. He thus assumed that the foundation for hostility between nations or within a nation already existed for historical reasons or as a result of the frustrations of war. His task was to direct the aggression along disruptive channels (46).

19. PROPAGANDA CANNOT IMMEDIATELY AFFECT STRONG COUNTER-  
TENDENCIES; INSTEAD IT MUST OFFER SOME FORM OF  
ACTION OR DIVERSION, OR BOTH

In almost all of his thinking about propaganda strategy and objectives, Goebbels adopted the distinction between what were called *Haltung* (bearing, conduct, observable behavior) and *Stimmung* (feel-

ing, spirit, mood).<sup>5</sup> After a heavy raid on a German city, he generally claimed that the *Haltung* of the people was excellent but that their *Stimmung* was poor. He wished to have both of these components of morale as favorable as possible. *Stimmung* he considered much more volatile: it could easily be affected by propaganda and events; it might be improved simply by offering people some form of entertainment and relaxation. *Haltung* had to be maintained at all costs, for otherwise the Nazi régime would lose its support and people would be ready to surrender. Germans, in short, were compelled to preserve external appearances and to cooperate with the war effort, regardless of their internal feelings. As more and more defeats and raids were experienced, Goebbels became convinced that *Stimmung* had to be almost completely ignored (M6452).

Goebbels clearly recognized his own propaganda impotency in six situations. The basic drives of sex and hunger were not appreciably affected by propaganda. Air raids brought problems ranging from discomfort to death which could not be gainsaid. Propaganda could not significantly increase industrial production. The religious impulses of many Germans could not be altered, at least during the war. Overt opposition by individual Germans and by peoples in the occupied countries required forceful action, not clever words. Finally, Germany's unfavorable military situation became an undeniable fact. When propaganda and censorship could not be effective, Goebbels advocated action or, in one of his official positions (for example, as Gauleiter of Berlin), he himself produced the action. Diversionsary propaganda he considered second-best (M3508).

Consider his propaganda with reference to military defeats. For a while he could describe them as "successful evacuations" (461). For a while he could even conceal their implications. Eventually, however, they were too apparent, especially after the heavy air raids began and the difficulties of fighting a two-front war increased. Then he was reduced not quite to silence but certainly to despair. At the end of the fighting in Tunisia he was forced to conclude that the following propaganda themes were not proving impressive: "our soldiers there have written a hymn of heroism that will be graven eternally on the pages of

<sup>5</sup> Lochner has ignored the distinction and has generally translated both as "morale," a term which Goebbels likewise occasionally employed in an equally ambiguous manner.



German history; they retarded developments for half a year, thereby enabling us to complete the construction of the Atlantic Wall and to prepare ourselves all over Europe so that an invasion is out of the question" (360). He tried to divert Germans through another anti-Bolshevik campaign, but this too was insufficient. What Germans really needed were "some victories in the East to publicize" (M4433). German losses in Russia, moreover, plagued Goebbels. Whenever possible, he tried to offset news of defeat in one section with reports of victories in others, but by 1943 he simply had no favorable news to employ as a distraction. *Stimmung* was doomed, and even *Haltung* worried him: "at the moment we cannot change very much through propaganda; we must once again gain a big victory somewhere" (M3253). Most fortunately, that victory and ultimate triumph never came.