

PRESS PROPAGANDA AS A TOOL OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION – THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Research concerning social communication is important for analysing techniques of reinforcing power. In the article, press propaganda is regarded as one of key tools of social communication in the contemporary world. The purpose of the article was to outline the definition of propaganda, which seems neglected in our times, as well as the conditions and specificity of using it, based on the historical perspective. Information obtained, based on selected examples, contributes to the development of knowledge of tools and the role of social communication. Cited historical events allowed to draw conclusions on the influence of propaganda on the daily life of citizens, including those, who gather knowledge and build their opinions on the basis of press releases. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the possibilities of conscious intensification of propaganda activity to spread the views aimed at the development of societies and regions. The article has five major parts, with introduction and conclusion: the first, which content is related to the definition of propaganda, the second presenting selected theoreticians and practitioners of propaganda, the third describing the beginnings of press propaganda within the territory of Poland, the fourth showing the possibilities of application of propaganda at the verge of the 19th and 20th century, and the last showing an example of actions of the Nazi occupants concerning the press propaganda in the territory of Poland during World War II. Publications of authors such as, in the theoretical part, S. Kuśmierski or H. Jabłoński, and, in the practical part, A. Bullock, E. Rudzki or S. Piotrowski were particularly helpful in studying the topic.

Keywords: social communication, propaganda, press.

1. Introduction

The etymology of the word “propaganda” is found in the Latin “propagare” meaning efforts to graft plants, speeding up grapevine propagation. Gradually, the word started to mean all methods of supporting and popularising anything – including dissemination of thoughts, beliefs or principles. The element of acquiring supporters of an idea or a campaign quickly started to gain highlight. It was reflected in the name of the organisation established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 – “Congregatio de propaganda fide” (Congregation of spreading faith). Its purpose was

the popularisation of Catholicism by, among others, organising missions aimed at getting new followers.

In the modern times, attempts to define the term “propaganda” were made by many scientists. Depending on the type of their education, such definitions were constructed by emphasising the meaning of different elements. Consequently, in literature, we face three different trends:

- defining the phenomenon of propaganda from the point of view of social psychology,
- referring to the sociological tradition,
- presenting propaganda in political science categories.

In line with the psychological perspective, the central point of the phenomenon of propaganda is the issue of attitudes. One of the greatest researchers and theoreticians of propaganda, H. Lasswell, defined it as the “use of collective attitudes by manipulating symbols, half-truths or even lies to reach objectives usually hidden from the society” (Kuśmierski, 1987, p. 182). Next researchers, psychologists L. Doob, D. Kretsch and R. Crutschfield, were under the influence of the concept of H. Lasswell and called it in the literature the “theory of propaganda success”. The concept was relatively simplified, as it limited all human behaviours to the stimuli-reaction pattern and treated the object of propaganda as isolated from other influences, outside the social context. The theory of propaganda success assumed, that the listener is passive and constitutes an easy (defenceless) target of propaganda efforts of the speaker.

The point of view of T. Parsons is an example of a definition of propaganda with the majority of social elements. He believed that: “Propaganda is an attempt to influence attitudes and, through this, directly or indirectly human actions, with the use of language stimuli, written or spoken words” (Kuśmierski, 1987, p. 184). Propaganda aims to exert impact on wide masses, leading to clear changes of a social system (understood as a functioning whole, striving to relative permanence and cohesion), the most important elements of which are the institutional patterns governing social relationships and conduct, intertwined with commonly accepted moral norms. The task of propaganda is to reinforce these patterns, which means that the fundamental function of propaganda (within this meaning) is to control the society.

The interpretation of propaganda within the scope of political science is very diverse. It derives from different political standpoints of researchers, as well as focusing on various elements, treating propaganda as, for example, a part of historically shaped structures, a technique of reinforcing political power or as an element of political structures. In consequence, as an example, on the one hand, there is the definition of French political scientist, M. Duverger, treating propaganda as an “activity usually directed by one social class or one social group to destroy the influence of other classes or groups” (Kuśmierski, 1987, p. 189) and, on the other hand, we have the definition of F.G. Wilson: “Propaganda is the primary technique of controlling and directing mass campaigns in controversial issues of the modern world” (Kuśmierski, 1987).

2. Theoreticians and practitioners of propaganda

The significance of propaganda was valued by many practitioners of politics. They included, among others, the leader of the revolutionary workers' movement, W.I. Lenin. Active in the beginning of the 20th century, the most outstanding theoretician of Marxism, he worked out a system of views, an ideological trend being a theoretical basis of operation of the communist parties. He believed that "the art of propaganda (...) consists in influencing, in the most effective way, a relevant audience, making a certain truth embedded in its memory, as clearly and permanently as possible" (Lenin, 1950b, p. 304). Propaganda was to perform an ancillary role, with respect to politics and socialist ideology, educating masses in its name. "Socialist work (...) consists in propaganda of the theory of scientific socialism, popularisation among workers of correct knowledge of the contemporary social and economic system, its grounds and its mutual development, of various classes of the Russian society, their mutual relationship, struggle of these classes against each other, of the role of a working class in this struggle, its relationship with collapsing and growing classes" (Lenin, 1984, p. 421). Lenin believed that the method of providing propaganda contents "(...) should be adapted to individual and local conditions" (Lenin, 1950a, p. 292). The fundamental element of well-organised propaganda was clarity, in practice consisting in the use of a simple language, "definitely rejecting the heavy artillery of complicated terms, foreign words, learned, ready, but not yet understandable for the masses, slogans, definitions and conclusions not known to them" (Lenin, 1954a, p. 286). Lenin appreciated the significance of mass media, and specifically of the press, in the propaganda activity: "We should change the press from an organ of sensation, from an ordinary apparatus of informing about political novelties, from an organ of combating the bourgeois lie, into a tool of new education of the masses in economic terms, into a tool of familiarising the masses with how work should be organised in a new way" (Lenin, 1954b, p. 207).

A. Hitler, the leader of the German fascist movement, and from 1933 Chancellor of the Third Reich, was also a theoretician and practitioner of propaganda. Due to his demagogy, based on the idea of nationalism, he met the audience's expectations perfectly. He was aware that, in political activity, the most important thing is to gain support of the masses for promoted ideas: "A political movement should avoid everything that may reduce or weaken its power of affecting the masses (...) for the simple fact that no great idea, no matter how lofty and wonderful, may be implemented without the effective strength embedded in the popular masses" (Bullock, 1975, p. 75). Hitler believed that the best method of gaining support of the society is emotional stimulation: "A remarkable stability of the masses results from emotional grounds of their attitude. It is always more difficult to fight with faith than knowledge. A driving force of almost all great revolutions on the globe has never been scientific cognition, which took hold of the masses, but always fanaticism which pushed them, and frequently, a kind of

hysteria pushing them to action. Everyone, who wants to inspire the masses, must know the key to their hearts. This key is not objectivism, an ineffectual attitude, but firm will, supported, if necessary, by force” (Bullock, 1975, p. 75).

3. Beginnings of press propaganda

Jan Parandowski noticed in his book – “Word Alchemy” – that “Propaganda did not wait for its name to begin to exist and function” (Parandowski, 1956). The lack of knowledge of a scientific definition of this term did not prevent the Queen of Poland, Marie Louise, the king who “was bored by ruling” – played a substantial role in the history of Poland. To gain the support of the nobility for her political projects, she established the first weekly in Poland. “Merkuriusz Polski” was published for the first time in Cracow on 03/01/1661. The newspaper tried to create the atmosphere favourable for queen’s plans. People devoted to Marie Louise could expect praise in the paper. News from the world were chosen in such a way, as to show that the queen’s actions were correct. Inconvenient events were diplomatically concealed. For example, when a coup d’état took place in Copenhagen, it was written: “Danish king Frederic, after the terrible and dangerous wars with Swedes, not only enjoys peace, but also the Danes have granted him succession in Denmark, just like he was a hereditary king in Norway” (Rudzki, 1990, p. 153). The said ruler became an absolute monarch, but this information did not reach the readers. It was feared that it would put the nobility off queen’s plans, who wanted the election of John Casimir’s successor when the monarch was still alive. The nobility could regard it as an attempt to limit its privileges.

Another queen – Marie Casimire – followed the example of Marie Louise. The wife of King of Poland, John III Sobieski, out of concern for proper fame of her husband and suitably popularising his actions (in relation to the victory at Vienna in 1683) ordered “to make a newspaper like it should be” (Rudzki, 1990, p. 219). Certain “twisting of facts” was not alien to Queen Marie. The newspaper, for example, contained information that also Prince Alexander stood out in battle (the favourite child of Marie Casimire, six-year old at that time and staying with mother in Cracow).

Methods of this type were used by monarchs or people holding the highest state positions. Initially, a small range of the press caused a very limited influence of propaganda and, consequently, a low chance of manipulation of opinions in the society. However, gradually, with an improvement of the technique and a change of social relationships (e.g. an increase of the number of educated and literate people), popularity of the press was growing, while ideas spread by it could exert impact on the citizens’ attitudes.

4. Press propaganda at the verge of the 19th and 20th century

The period of the peak development of the press took place in the second half of the 19th century (Jabłoński, 1985). Its strongest development occurred in England, where journalists could enjoy high liberty, political freedom, technical novelties, as well as the lack of the restriction of taxes. An election law reform of 1884 introduced a new group of citizens – a group of potential voters open to the press information, and thus to its influence. It contributed to a growth of the English political press. The position of the daily “Times”, belonging to the Waters family, was the strongest. Journalists of the “Saturday Review” described its position: “It is unnecessary to explain that this country is ruled by the “Times”, and English freedom is thirty million cives romani, despotically ruled by one daily” (Jabłoński, 1985, p. 286).

One of the most liberal press laws at that time was introduced in 1881 in France. It contributed to the outstanding development of the publishing market. Created conditions resulted in the fact that, on the eve of World War I, in Paris, citizens’ views were shaped by 41 political dailies, total circulation of which amounted to almost 6 million copies a day.

At the end of the 19th century, also in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and the United States, there was high liberty of the press, guaranteeing a relatively free exchange of political thoughts.

The situation was different in the German Reich, where the press law applicable since 1874, although quite liberal, gave the possibility of enormous pressure on the German press in the form of high penalties for breaching the provisions. The term “lèse-majesté” could include almost everything what was written. The first Chancellor of the Reich, Otto von Bismarck, perfectly aware of the fact that the press is a dangerous opponent in a political fight, published his own press (e.g. “Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung”) and made many others dependant on him through subsidies. Introduced Acts against socialists gave him the basis for destroying the left-wing press. Until the end of the 19th century, the German socialist press had no chances in terms of propaganda, compared to the right-wing newspapers.

The 1920s witnessed growing popularity of democratic ideas, which resulted in the freedom of press in many countries. The right to free expression of opinions, including preventing the introduction of censorship, was guaranteed by constitutions: German (1919), Czechoslovak (1920), Estonian (1920), Irish (1922), Romanian (1923) and Turkish (1924). The emergence of authoritarian political systems quickly limited this freedom in many European countries.

On the eve of the outbreak of World War II, we could say that there was free press only in such countries as: France, England and the United States. Conditions created by authorities were favourable for free expression of political doctrines – easiness of establishing newspapers and the lack of censorship. The situation in Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Switzerland or Turkey was different. There, the press was under the control of the state. Its freedom was limited. Censorship, the necessity of obtaining consent of authorities to establishing a newspaper, press laws making it possible to confiscate and suspend dailies

opened up an opportunity for repression of left-wing newspapers and favouring publishing houses sticking to the line set by ruling parties. Complete subordination of the press to the state authorities in the name of “interest of the nation” could be observed in such countries as: Italy, Germany, Spain or Brazil. The most popular political currents were nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism. These doctrines were eagerly propagated with the use of press, while journalists of these newspapers were mainly the members of a ruling party. Their work was directed by ministries of propaganda, giving advice, suggestions, documentation and even ready articles.

5. The Nazi press propaganda in the Polish land during World War II

The consequence of the awareness of the ability of propaganda activities to shape social opinions was that, during World War II, one of the first orders of the Nazi occupation authorities in Poland concerned the issues of propaganda. It informed that publication and popularisation of all kinds of printing works, appearing periodically or non-periodically, required permission. On 31/10/1939, in Łódź, the General Governor, Hans Frank, and Minister of Propaganda of the Reich, J. Goebbels, worked out a programme of press and publishing activity in the territory of Poland. At that time, both dignitaries displayed willingness to liquidate Polish mass media centres and the entire information system. The Polish press was replaced by the German press in the Polish language. In territories occupied by the Reich, in the course of World War II, it was an unprecedented case. In the Polish society, such publishing houses were contemptuously called “rags” or “collaborationist rags”. From 1940, German propaganda started, carried out on a wide scale, with use of all available means of influence. Its primary goal was to prevent the spreading of a resistance movement in the Polish land and recruit civil population to cooperation with the occupant.

The first editions of individual publications contained information on the role, which would be performed by a newspaper. For example, “Radom Daily” (*Dziennik Radomski*, 1940) undertook to provide readers with information on political events, current internal matters of the country and, next to it, feature articles, humorous sketches, anecdotes, stories to ensure good humour of readers. It sounded paradoxically compared with the then reality. “In the times when, every day, on the streets of cities and villages, hundreds of Poles were killed by the German Gestapo, spiritual tormentors similar to them – editors of “rags” – announced an improvement of humour of the Polish population. Words directed to Polish readers were filled with irony and mockery (Adamczyk, 1979). Indeed, in the times when underground press called for defence of young people against transportation to the Reich, the “Kielce Herald” wrote “Work ennobles. Many thousands of people who, to date, had reported to work in Germany, came to realise this” (*Kielce Herald*, 1943).

The anti-Polish activity of German propaganda strived to mentally break the nation and make the society accept the permanence of the Nazi rule. It was manifested in the attempts to discredit the pre-war Polish government or destroy faith in the alliance of western powers. "For a week, English stations have been suffering blow after blow", "A heavy defeat of the allied fleet in the Mediterranean", "British isles in German hands", "Crushed legend of the queen of the seas" – these are only some of the titles. The government abandoning the Polish nation, as well as England's failure to honour its obligations towards Poland were the subjects frequently raised by articles of "rags". These actions were aimed at shaping a conviction in the Polish nation of a caring role of Germany towards Poland.

Next to anti-Polish actions, Nazi newspapers promoted anti-Soviet and anti-Communist attitudes. In the New Year's address of Adolf Hitler from 01/01/1942 (reprinted, among others, by "Kurier Częstochowski"), the Fuhrer announced a programme of destruction of a capitalist-Jewish-Bolshevik alliance. He persuaded that it was his steadfast last will, which would be remembered by many generations. The attack of Germany on the Soviet Union was reflected in, as an example, the following titles: "The fate of the continent in German soldiers' hands", "Destructive might of the German attack surprised the world again", "Stalin's line broken".

Extermination of the Jewish population was a separate problem. The "rag" press became a platform of the German policy in this field, from the first anti-Jewish orders, popularisation of a definition of Jew, to the creation and setting boundaries of ghettos. The attitude to this community was shaped, for example, by accusing Jews of contributing to the outbreak of World War II.

When the situation in the fronts showed an unavoidable defeat of Germany, Nazi propaganda began mass agitation among the Polish population, persuading it to participate in the fight with the Soviet Union. It was based mainly on criticising Soviet policy. For example, in the "Kurier Częstochowski", it was written: "If Germany losses the war, Poles will be crushed by the red hellish machine" (Kurier Częstochowski, 1942). At the same time, the German propaganda "flirted" with the Polish society. Slogans of "the great civilisation and Christian mission in defence against communism" were spread. In an attempt to win over the Polish society (or at least ensure its neutrality in the fight with the Soviet Union), "neorags" were published – the press still slandering the Polish authorities and the Soviet policy – providing it with a kind of advertisement. Sales on the streets or confiscations made by the Gestapo were to give the appearance of illegality and underground nature of these publications. Furthermore, organisations associating Poles and having their crypto-underground newspapers were established on the occupant's initiative. One of such newspapers was "New Poland", published by an organisation under the same name (financed by the Gestapo of Radom). It was distributed primarily in the area of Radom and Częstochowa, faking its "underground" nature (it was thrown at doors of apartments, left in entrance gates to buildings, it was stealthily sold on the streets). The purpose of these organisations was to shape public opinion in favour

of the occupant, by causing psychosis of fear of the Bolshevik danger, threatening not only Poland, but also the whole western world.

Despite common aversion to the “rag” press, the society had to use its services out of necessity. By publishing job advertisements, the press, in a sense, performed the function of an employment agency. It was also purchased as it contained the occupant’s orders and a list of persons sentenced to death or hostages.

Of course, such an enormous ideological pressure had to exert a certain influence on the readers, yet, generally, the German propaganda campaign did not bring intended results. The attitude of the Polish nation to the occupant’s activities is excellently illustrated by the statement of Styrrer, the head of the Nazi radio in the Polish language: “A Pole, in substance, says the opposite to things spoken by the German side. A Pole treats everything provided by the German side as something directed against them” (Piotrowski, 1956).

6. Conclusion

The “rag” press performed a harmful role with respect to the Polish society, concealing the truth, covering up true goals of the German policy, claiming that the occupational rule had a beneficial nature, discrediting the Polish society, tendentiously selecting information, presenting facts in an incomplete manner and giving different dimensions to them. In this way, the image of the daily life was deformed, and the vision of citizens was shaped by unilateral information. However, these activities were not the first undertakings of this kind in the history of Poland or the world. And certainly not the last ones. Propaganda, including press propaganda, is still thriving. Today, it took on the form of slightly different names: social communication, political marketing, neurolinguistic programming or even, to a certain extent, behavioural economy or economic psychology, and others, seemingly separating itself from the legacy of “propaganda” evoking negative associations. However, this phenomenon is still present in daily life of citizens, including those, who gather knowledge and build their opinions on the basis of press releases. History shows that the use of propaganda techniques may contribute to both spreading morally unacceptable views and desired actions, aimed at development of the society and regions. Proper use of the means of propaganda influence by authorities of local communities is a value, which may contribute to the development of a region in favourable directions. Learning from past experiences is a chance for the identification of chances and threats arising from this type of influence, thus, it is knowledge desired among policy-makers.

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