

On the First World War propaganda and the image of enemy

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Propaganda took from press of few particular countries in years span of
1914-1918

The propaganda during the First World War was the most important source to forward it and an effort of whole nation-states, together with money, food and weaponry. With this one previous sentence we could end this short paper treating on the propaganda during La Grande Guerra. But obviously that would steal us more in-depth understanding of the whole complicity of the process. Because the First World War propaganda was unique. Unique in a sense that never before had been so popularly used and with such success, and never again so far for so long without causing dissent from some group of society. That incredible achievement had been done by consolidating both propagandist sources, public propaganda steered by state and the private one created by non-governmental organisations or private citizens.

To start the war only a temporary moment of illusion of invincibility, of sure success laying ahead was needed. The spur of enthusiasm and a lot of promises during first months. But with the enrollment for longer and longer terms to the military. With deaths of thousands per day, with the disillusion caused by natural hardship of war, of lost family members, whole fortunes and perspectives this spur of the moment slowly started to be lost. The will of populations would be dried up and consent would start to change in either a wish of immediate cease of hostilities or angriness against own government. Of course in the past every ruling elite used specific authorities to keep in line ordinary man-o-war. But in the new type of war — the total war — that would be not enough. Every part of society had to be incorporated in the propaganda machine. Only it could play then the role of a cementing element used to remind civils why war is being fought and why it is the fight for them and their own purpose. Naturally those who saw the front, saw the atrocities of enemy or lost something or someone in such events would not need reminding why they have to keep fighting. Soldiers in regiments would fight at first because of duty, because of the fact it was proper or to protect their own home. But that was idealistic and idealism met with reality starts to be shaken. They would then fight for their brothers, brothers-in-arms. For dead friends, dead family members, the others and because of others. Yet that might sometimes not be enough. Not in the conflict of a longitude like this. Because sooner or later it comes into thinking on those more peaceful days simply questioning and asking why and what for am I doing this actually? Then they would have to be reminded, reminded again of their duty, of atrocities. But by whom? By the state and by families who also would have to be firstly reminded by the state, religion, artistic and scientific authorities why it is needed. Why it is the highest necessity.

This role was exactly what the propaganda should be for. To keep people reminded why they are in a situation they currently are. In such propaganda there cannot be a place for doubts, for second-thoughts. No. It has to be simple, able to carry forward on its own, able to stay in mind. Lastly — able to occupy something more than just ground, to occupy minds, minds of soldiers and civilians. With them of the whole nation.



This is exactly how propaganda of Grand War looked like. It was wrong, oversimplified, showy, bright, moving. It was to be why we use the word „propaganda" today for. To this propaganda not only have been the old throne and altar union incorporated. But also new ideas. Ideas preached by democracy demagogues and by the Bolsheviks revolutionaries and by tradesmen, lawyers, university professors and scientists. All dissent was to be silent by reminding what may come in case of a loss. The enemy. The notion of enemy which had been created years ago not only by political and social Darwinism but also by history spanning up to antiquity. The propaganda of war used in its depictions of enemy popular myths, humour, mockery. But which also strengthen patriotism showing that death will be better than what may wait for us. Vengeance as the most powerful of emotions spearheading new offensives and keeping morale high, needed to be shown. Children murdered by the enemy, the rape of Belgium, destroying of civilisation. In the end also destroying of dominance of the white man, of political and social order. Enemy killing for pure satisfaction, not because of war. But also the enemy like us we hold by wrong governments or despots or for backdoor dealings by those who lied to this enemy. Their officers, tsars, Kaisers, Presidents, Parliaments. Their propaganda. Finally by showing the enemy in a way which will dehumanize them. Make them either weaker to be killed or so diabolic that common existence and peace will never be possible without the total victory of one side. By showing that enemy is the one that has no right to succeed neither honour to do that, nor self-determination. He is not worth of winning this fight. This is what the propaganda during First World War has done. On all sides, on all fronts, in every army, in every country. Thanks to the new possibilities of waging soft power and influence on own societies and on those of enemy it lead to massive use of all medias at once for gaining higher moral grounds and to allow doing whatever is necessary to win while still keeping myth of self-righteousness in every case. Because the opposite was the barbaric enemy without any guilt or any human features and emotions. Of course the first and foremost way of spreading propaganda were old ways such as articles, books and newspapers publications. All writing was necessary, however bad and however misguided in reality; when it was aimed against enemy, it was to be right in eyes of society. But of course more than everything mind control is enabled by image and image construction. This was role of artists and caricaturists. Caricatures in newspapers become in the end almost or as important as the text in it. Made people to think, to feel, to hate and to love.. and to pay. Pay for army like in

case of most European countries — buying obligations and state-actions on the market for hard currency. Sending money, giving, donating property to army, to state. Be it German Anleihen or be it British state-bonds; the most important were to buy and to pay for them. That was achieved by evoking patriotism, emotions of solidarity with those who risk their lives on fronts or at first stages of war — evoking to visions of normal citizens for gains in such bonds after war. Later that lead even to bigger payments for such papers emission in new editions — again and again; for the sheer sake of keeping them afloat and not to make them worthless. Moreover that made people pay again and again just to avoid the most black prospective of losing it all in the case of lost war and cost of war-reparations (again the German and Austrian case). In other countries it took the form of consenting to war by wives and mothers of future-to-be soldiers which decided to join the army (the British case). In the US it were mostly pleas for speeding up industry and nation-economy which could be done by lowering wages and later of course by appeals for joining the army by Uncle Sam. In France it could have been appeals for repopulation or enticing with prospective of regiment courtesans waiting for the bravest of the bravest. Each state had its specific way of propaganda. But each and ever state used all possible medias to spread it. Other than newspapers or books and articles (like in the case of a German scientist condemning spreading lies about German offensive on Belgium and atrocities done by them there in so called Manifesto of ninety-three) it was of course the use of leaflets dropped from planes on enemy lines. That were also new plays in theatres, new poetry, new music on gramophones, new pieces in operas, new songs in pubs and schools. Each and every one of them was necessary for this kind of war, the struggle of nations. But the most important was the new medium of silent cinemas. Chaplin's role in California productions which inspired thousands and got into hearts and minds of thousands others during years between 1914 and 1918. His influence was not only seen on screen as a figure of general knowledge keeping minds revolving around war but also as encouragement for charities in sake of army equipping for war over the sea (like his New York one which gathered more than thirty thousand observers and participants).

That all was used especially to provoke previously mentioned two general feelings having power to overtake minds and help to keep support during the four years of harsh war. Patriotism and the will of vengeance on enemy. To produce those two the propaganda had to be especially clear, succinct and sharply pointed against the enemy. Depictions of such foes must have been the best designed under specific society. Best in this case should not be considered in graphical terms but instead in terms of using stereotypes and making them easily recognizable for the reader. There have to be created a specific convention of depicting the enemy and whole enemy countries and societies. There was the need of specific construct for each of those foes. Thus mugs for Kitchener, ashtrays for Foch and specific substances, animals and other artefacts were used for special personas and whole nations. Galician rooster symbolised French, bulldog become symbol of Brits (both in their own propaganda — vide Union Jack with centre bulldog symbol of Great Britain and smaller ones at ends of crosses in this flag symbolizing New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa and Canada; and bulldog with awful, distorted face and its owner with same one) together with Lion (of Albion and Normandy lions on coat-of-arms), bear for Russia, Uncle Sam or Jewish banker for US; and other symbols. Like eagles, double headed eagles, black eagles, golden ones and personifications of Austria, Germania, Marianne/Frankia, Britain, Italia as woman deities.

But every country has had its preferred way to show the enemy. The way which would also at the same time glorify its own state and bring this state the role of either liberator from chains or the saviour of whole world from Armageddon. Germany at the beginning of the war showed France and Britain as distorted black men robbing from valuables white Germans and other white men. It was an affront to the fact that France used black soldiers from colonies against the Europeans. Britain instead was showing Austria-Hungary as always a slave or just an instrument of politics for distorted German Emperor. It viewed itself as a pigeon of peace to the German people being under the constant threat of Prussian-military punishment by officers — either in Chaplin movie Shoulder Arms of 1918 or in placards with propaganda. The same was also sometimes used against Austrians (like this showing regiment defecating on officers order). For German's Brits were always opulent tradesmen lurking for stealing their treasures and envying their industry or Britain which as an Island is one stone separated on sea full of U-Boats. The Russians are always completely drunk, always with ammunition which does not work, with plans which show inaccurate or obviously distorted maps. As beggars and robbing thieves stealing from their own dead. Sending whole battalions without heed on anything, like just so called cannon fodder and looking only not to be beaten up by the Tsar and to get their next shot. Always uneducated barbarians, alphabetic half-morons touched by Mongolian-syndrome, looking like Huns (though that designation was also used

in one British school song about German-Hun destroying house built by Jack) not possessing modern technology. Always with Asiatic and wild faces from heavy-drinking and with long beards. Britain always steering hand of US Presidents (like in Dictator in Der Wahre Jacob from 1917) or holding them on short leash. Russian Tsar always dancing or playing like Nero over burning Rome — on pile made out of Russian skulls (again Der Wahre Jacob, 1907). For Americans it was the war for spreading democracy and against Germans always murdering innocent civilians — as such was depicted at least in their propaganda. Thus Germans under constant look of officers bringing Lusitania and other hundreds of ships with only civilians aboard down, killing prisoners-o-war without pardon. For French it was Kaiser who with distorted face as big child-giant was pushing millions into the abyss without morality and guilt. For Germans Brits were always using their partners, doing nothing but riding over them literally with quadriga pulled by Russian bear and French Marianne depicted like old-hag vel prostitute. For Russians again Germans were always Teutonic Knights murdering whole nations made-up from Slavs hand in hand with Muslim Turkey crucifying Armenians and Greek Christians. Germanic barbarians clad in steel, dehumanized and obsessed with blood spilling over their Prussian eagle and flag of Second Reich. With thousands of dead women and children standing up from graves to denounce Kaiser-murderer. Russian Saint George was reminding that it was still war of true Christianity against Muhammad-followers and Papist-Austrian Kaiser. German emperor was devil incarnated with frenzied eyes burning with hell fire city after city, town after town, village after village. He was bringing inferno to hide his terrifying crimes in soil and ash. Antichrist on earth bringing hundred-headed dragon, Luciferus in human skin, eating flesh of his enemies. Dragons which can be only killed by St George on symbol of Russian vitality — proud horse and rider with Cossack soul. With Slavic joyfulness screaming slava and hurra while trotting and charging against steel and robotic, dehumanized, iron-horse braking to pieces on large and green Russian soil or toppling his iron-clad knights with spot-on arrows into the mud. Before war popular were also depictions of Powers bringing themselves to common annihilation in road leading into arms of personalised by skeleton death — like in Dreadnought Fever.

The number of such depictions used in the propaganda is staggering even for later standards and can understandably be used as one of best starting points of the soft power in modern wars and strengths of belligerent countries or those which hold influence over other states. Of course nobody will say that propaganda ever caused war nor that it was sole reason of its prolonging, but despite that — in perspective of this day — we can say it changed a lot. Not only in lives of people who lived then and there, but most importantly there where it was created to hold influence — in minds of people of that time. To what point it biased and distorted view of the German propaganda was later responsible for mythos of undestroyed and invincible army of Second Reich at the end of war? To what extent this mythos created also by propaganda, was later responsible for born of stabbing-in-the-back by socialists and — as added later — one minority (big in Austria-Hungary and lesser in Germany) in causing Austrian bad-painter-turned-dictator? We may never know, but it is the Historian's duty to ask every question about the past.

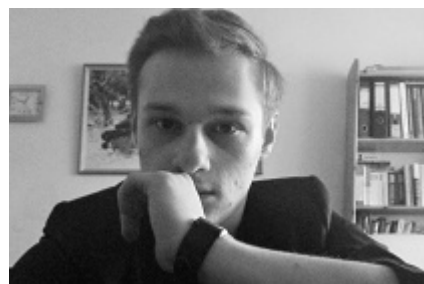
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