
The Round Tablette

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Written by Dr. Chris Simer

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Welcome to the November session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker, Randall Bytwerk, author of *Bending Spines*, will discuss the Propaganda used by the Nazis to gain Power in Germany in the 1930s and to support the Hitler regime.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with our annual **Deutsch Lecture**, we offer a word of explanation. It was Dr. Deutsch's custom to speak on a topic of his choosing at the November meeting. These lectures were always well attended due to his great scholarly reputation and his vast knowledge on virtually any World War II topic. With his death, it was decided to remember him through, not only this Round Table, but also by this lecture series.

Winning "the narrative war" or "media warfare" using "propaganda" is a key part of modern warfare. Propaganda is any message, delivered in a variety of media, designed to produce a desired effect upon the targeted audience. In their rise to power and during the war, the German National Socialist movement managed a most effective and sustained propaganda effort that was central to the entire Nazi phenomenon.

A chapter in *Mein Kampf* was devoted explicitly to propaganda and its importance to the movement. Dr. Josef Goebbels, the head of the Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment was a master of the propaganda art. The National Socialists were pioneers in the use of mass media such as motion pictures, radio and, by the 1930s, even television. They were, on an unprecedented scale, able to manipulate public opinion and people's perceptions of reality in ways archetypal for today's forms of narrative construction and thought control.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Hitler's squalid little political party competed for Reichstag seats in the failing Weimar using many of the same techniques as its rivals used. Tactics like sound trucks, pamphlet distribution, brilliant posters plastered everywhere, and massed marches of uniformed SA stormtroopers who engaged in street fights, were also used by the Social Democrats, the Communist, and by right wing parties. The Nazis differed in scale with national campaigns even in the smallest village or community that harped on the same

message – of the Nazis as the only redeemers from the corrupt status quo. "Our Last Hope" as one poster put it. At the center of all this was the mesmerizing imagery of Hitler as the national savior, whose oratory inflamed every crowd. Early Nazi propaganda simplified the choices before the people in ways familiar to any observer of contemporary propaganda. Their opponents were all irredeemably evil and the only choice was Hitler – or national collapse.

Once in power, the Nazis harnessed the full force of the mass media to promote their approved views of reality and to highlight the authority and the ever-growing cult of personality around Hitler himself. The popular film star Leni Riefenstahl directed the globally successful recording the 1936 Olympics, *Olympiad*, showcasing the "New Germany." Her earlier, enormously influential *Triumph of the Will* documentary of the 1934 Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg is still considered to be one of the most compelling propaganda films of all time.

The use of film and the use of newsreels to disseminate the news the regime thought Germans should be allowed to see were all precursors of modern media manipulation through video. The National Socialists also made the "Volksempfänger" or People's radio sets available for a low price so that Hitler's speeches could reach the whole nation.

In an interesting footnote to history, the Nazi regime was among the very first governments to begin broadcasting on television, on a limited basis in 1935. Television sets were provided in "Fernsehtuben" or TV bars in Berlin and Hamburg and a few other locations. They broadcast cultural and political content, including the first live coverage of the Olympic Games in 1936.

All propaganda is aimed at producing a desired effect. In the 1930s, the goal was primarily to celebrate the Third Reich's accomplishments, to reinforce national unity under Hitler, and to foster the personality cult around Hitler himself. As the decade progressed, however, more sinister messaging began to appear in the propaganda of the regime, corresponding to the adoption of increasingly overt anti-Jewish legislation. Films like *Jud Suss* (1940) more casually and *Der Ewige Jude* (1940) much more explicitly fostered anti-Semitism and were propaganda preparation for the Holocaust.

With the coming of war, the regime was compelled to direct several different streams of propaganda and expanded its scope as more and more territory fell under Nazi control. The

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

regime consistently focused on was to bolster support on the home front. During the early years of battlefield successes, they celebrated German invincibility and superiority. As the course of the war turned against them, the Nazi propaganda emphasized the virtues of sacrifice and loyalty. Another theme as war progressed was the evil nature of the Reich's enemies. In 1943 Goebbels proclaimed the theme of "Total War" focused on the idea of the entire nation in arms against her foes. The mythology of secret weapons and brilliant secret plans of a tireless Fuehrer laboring for the Reich helped to sustain overall German morale almost up to just the final last weeks of the war.

Propaganda was also directed against enemy forces, to undermine their morale and divide the Allies (the American GI carrying on with British women in the UK while British soldiers sat in the front lines, for example). Propaganda was used to recruit people in the occupied territories to fight against Bolshevism and to join the Wehrmacht, the *Waffen-SS*, or to "volunteer" as workers inside Germany. They also attempted to blame the British for the war and for the treacherous attack on the French navy in the 3 July 1940 Battle of Mers-el-Kébir.

The employees of the Propaganda Ministry faced daunting challenges as the war progressed and German victories became scarce. To continue to drive internal support for the regime, scenes of party operatives helping local communities cope with war shortages or contribute to the war effort were common in the newsreels. The terrible effects of the Allied bombing campaign were downplayed unless used to prove the diabolic nature of the "air pirates." In the last months of the war, scenes of dead German civilians and the rapine practiced by Red Army troops against German populations was presented in explicit detail to demonstrate the barbaric nature of the regime's enemies and to foster a "fanatical will to victory" as Goebbels put it.

Alas for the propagandists, reality always wins in the end. The last newsreel of Hitler, bent and bowed, presenting Iron Crosses to Hitler Youth in the ruins of Berlin was meant to show that those loyal to the Nazi Party had not lost their will to fight, but it instead only underscored the inevitability of the defeat the German people were about to suffer.

FURTHER READINGS:

Randall Bytwerk *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004)

Susan Bachrach & Steven Luckert, *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009)

Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Brand* (London, UK: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd 2021)

Ian Garden, *The Third Reich's Celluloid War: Propaganda in Nazi Feature Films, Documentaries and Television* (Cheltenham, UK: The History Press, 2016)

Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Press, 1973).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 19 Dec. 2023, *Gen. Grant as Commander-in-Chief* – www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley,
15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 -
320-616-6050.

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall
Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100 -
<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN -
Air show – TBA - 320-564-6644 -

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA July
2024 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 -

www.wotn.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org

Friends of the National WW II Memorial –.

<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org>.

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association

info@wnha.net

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -

www.cafmn.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -

crazyjerry45@hotmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2023-2024

2023

12 Dec. Pearl Harbor – Air Battles

2024

9 Jan. Casablanca Conference

13 Feb. 99th "Viking" Battalion

12 Mar. Selling the War – Bill Maudlin

26 Mar. Coast Watchers: Hawaii, England

9 Apr. War of Supply–Mediterranean

14 May Dieppe's Lessons for Normandy

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supporting the HCDWW2RT.**

