

INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

If there is one well-established commonplace, self-evident and completely reliable, it is the difference between information and propaganda. Any honest man knows that in our times information is indispensable. It is, indeed, a positive acquisition, and to know each morning what is happening in China or the decisions of our own government is one of those advantages that distinguish us from men of earlier days. Moreover, Alfred Sauvy has shown us that information is the key to democracy. There can be a valid democratic way of life only if the people are correctly informed on the political, economic, and social questions which the democracy, as sovereign, must decide. This, too, is part of our self-evident truth. And if information is, by nature, completely honest, unadorned, and clear, then propaganda, we know, is falsehood, desire for power, Machiavellianism, crooked in intent. This reassuring contrast enables us, as men correctly informed, to sleep peacefully and, it goes without saying, to be invulnerable to propaganda.

But, when we examine the problem more closely, we run into difficulties. We can point out at the start the impossibility of giving a clear definition of propaganda at the present time. Every author who writes about it offers his own account; every shading is represented, from the extreme of "everything is propaganda," including the Mass and primary school, to the other extreme that claims for propaganda no specific characteristic, therefore no existence. I will not venture along these paths in quest of a

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definition that would separate us further from our object, but I must remind the reader that the areas are not plainly delimited.

In 1949 the United States Congress, having studied the government's information services, concluded, after hearing numerous reports, that it was unable to distinguish between information and propaganda. This is not the frivolous opinion of hasty politicians. In 1922 Walter Lippmann, in his classical work *Public Opinion*, presented theses on information very much akin to those supported by Sauvy. Little by little he abandoned hope of the possibility of disseminating true information and, in 1939, on the brink of war, he acknowledged that propaganda and information were singularly confused.

We will grant those who insist upon good, serious, documented, honest information the difficulties involved. It is quite true that it is difficult to find a corps of competent statisticians, suppress secret diplomacy, obtain the publication of complete and clear budgets of a nationalized or a large private enterprise; but this is not the problem. All the difficulties connected with establishing correct information are based upon circumstances beyond our control. Even in regard to the free flow of information—a facet to which Americans are most attached and which seems to them to be the key to the problem of information—the difficulties are great but not insurmountable.

The only point which to me seems serious is the following: in the opinion of most writers, when difficulties concerning the organization of information are resolved, everything will be resolved. This is a dangerous illusion because actually nothing will be resolved. The fundamental problem regarding information resides elsewhere, within the close relationship between information and propaganda, which cannot be separated from one another. Furthermore, we must first of all accept a few facts about propaganda. For example, propagandists have for a long while realized that a lie is not good for their purposes, that "truth pays," that propaganda must be based upon facts. We must also note that there is collusion between the propagandist and his target; that the latter (usually unwittingly) provokes the act of propaganda, which therefore is not objective in character but is achieved by the psychological collusion of opinion.

Current propaganda is a little more subtle than the kind we customarily fortify ourselves against and which we judge with composure.

We can rapidly pass over the easily ascertainable fact that the means of propaganda are the same as those of information: material means (news-

paper, radio, television, movies, lectures) but also psychological means, since one must be able to “pass on” information—it must be made known and in such a way as to capture the public’s attention. What good would a fine information service do if nobody read its compact and boring pamphlets, if nobody listened to the learned disquisitions on the radio? Even more important is the task of convincing the listener that the information is fair and credible. Every means of persuasion must therefore be utilized. Actually, information that limits itself to a mere exposition, presented objectively with all the dryness of bare facts, would reach practically nobody and would weary an audience immediately. Indeed, one must always take into account the reality of the individual one addresses. Who is this man that we want to inform? He is, first of all, a man who has little time and much work to do. He can become informed only during his moments of leisure. And those whose profession it is to be informed know how much time it takes and how difficult it is merely “to keep up to date.” To take a very small, concrete example: it takes at least two hours a day to read and completely digest the contents of an informative newspaper like *Le Monde*; and still one cannot claim to be sufficiently informed. What man has two hours a day at his disposal for this purpose. And what man will subject himself, after work, to the additional fatigue thus incurred? Information, therefore, must be condensed, absorbable in capsule form; but then is it truly information? Moreover, this information must be presented in a pleasing, seductive, and arresting manner. Balance sheets, statistical analyses, comparison of sources. Come now! The tired man requires a pleasing formula, a striking account that seems to him to synthesize a great deal of information. And, what is more, it must be easily assimilable, since serious information presupposes in the reader a considerable fund of prior knowledge. It is not enough to know how to read. A complete knowledge of history, geography, politics, economy, is necessary. Otherwise the information means nothing at all. Only a man who begins with a relatively large fund of knowledge can understand what he is being told.

But it is not merely a matter of knowledge; intellectual development is necessary as well: a capacity for synthesis and above all a well-trained memory. These are not natural gifts. A man who is not trained to this kind of work cannot be accurately informed. And even those who should have an adequate memory are apt to show unfortunate tendencies in this regard. Quite recently, on the subject of people’s republics, we watched our intellectuals seriously assert the exact opposite of what they had said

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a few months before—not even alluding to their former stand and demonstrating that there is frequent loss of memory. Yet there can be no information without a sustained memory on the part of the listener. The informed must possess such qualities that the organization of an honest, scrupulous, truthful body of information can have only one effect: to point up the differences between men. Far from contributing to democracy, this inevitably leads to a separation between those who really understand political and economic problems and those who are so much more ignorant that the information is all the more effective because nothing enables them to assimilate themselves to it. And if one must pitch information on the level of the man who, after five or six years, has forgotten all that he learned in primary school, if one has to spare him an intellectual effort that he is unable to make, if this information has to penetrate indirectly—then is it still information? And where exactly is the boundary between propaganda, a massive affirmation of simplified facts, and information made up of general formulas, elementary themes, over which the reader has not the slightest control or power?

I know very well that I will be told: “Everything depends upon the intention of the man who directs the operation. If he wants to ‘influence’ the public, then it is propaganda; if he is attempting to seduce or direct, then it is information.” Such purely subjective distinctions seem evanescent to me. Who can say what lies in the heart of man? Who can say whether the attitude of this man is constant or whether he varies in his intentions? And let us not forget the ever pertinent truism, “Hell is paved with good intentions.”

Even the purest information is not necessarily free from a wish to influence. It is natural that the state, for instance, should want to make known its accomplishments. It is natural for a government to want the public to understand its motives in reaching a decision. Let us suppose that a government, in adopting a measure, does so because it believes it to be good, just, and beneficial to the country. Yet, in our times, this government can rule only with the approval of public opinion. This is one of the triumphs of democracy. But the public is not aware of the motives that guided the government; in order to inform opinion correctly, the government must explain the real nature of its decisions, give its reasons, show why it believes the decision to be a fair one. Even if we place ourselves on the level of information, and if we are convinced that the government has no intention of influencing the public, nevertheless the task of keeping

the public up to date, of providing it with the elements it needs to form a judgment, would inevitably seem to amount to a *pro domo* harangue. And indeed how can we expect that a government that believes a certain measure to be good will not attempt to share the reasons for its decision with the public? One can readily believe that a government has a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the situation than an ordinary citizen; therefore, if the citizen were given the facts relating to a problem, he might tend to share the government's opinion. But would this not constitute propaganda, since the diffusion of certain facts definitely modified the citizen's opinion and led him to adhere to the government's policy?

We must go even further. When a government restricts itself to spreading information about its accomplishments, isn't this necessarily a glorification of its work? Yet isn't this indispensable? The public has to know about an accomplishment in order to judge it properly. But doesn't the mobilization of all informational services with a view to disseminating news about a certain decision give this decision an emphasis, an esteem, a forcefulness that brings us singularly close to propaganda? Isn't emphasis on an endeavor because it is a governmental one another means of influencing public opinion? The same is true even of quite neutral problems. For example, in the United States the Department of Agriculture maintains a highly developed informational organ for the purpose of explaining decisions and enlisting the co-operation of the mass of farmers. But it soon becomes apparent that this informational device is actually propaganda. The Department of Agriculture is very important in the opinion of the public; it also has means of indirect propagandizing throughout the entire country, although it was not originally created in order to laud or win support for certain measures but merely to explain the reasons for them or their consequences. Yet at present one cannot get along without this kind of psychological intervention. How many perfectly sensible economic measures have failed merely because of a lack of public information! Thus, information is by definition a distortion of public opinion. But where and to what extent does the transition from information to propaganda take place? Moreover, opinion itself, through modifications and elaboration, can transform into propaganda what in the beginning was information. Lyautey is an interesting case in point. He was very clever at utilizing information for all his undertakings in Morocco; he gave his achievements an indispensable publicity, knowing the importance of the psychological factor. However, one must concede that he did not make

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propaganda. Moreover, the global structures of propaganda were not yet so well known in his era. Yet with the aid of the information and the pictures he spread, public opinion established a kind of myth, which is one of the remarkable characteristics of propaganda. Had there been no information about Lyautey's work, there would have been no Lyautey myth. The latter is a product of information. And yet this myth is comparable in every way to those created by pure propaganda.

The influence of information must be viewed from another angle. Actually, if honest information is to bear fruit, it alone must reign. All propaganda must be eliminated if the public is to be truly educated. Of course there will be state propaganda (which must have the wisdom to limit its intervention to a purely informative service—to accept the control of enlightened public opinion). There will also be foreign affairs propaganda as well as propaganda about individuals. Indeed, it is not possible to permit really honest information to compete with one or several types of propaganda. First of all, since we know that propaganda always states facts and always appears to be information, we must ask: How will the public differentiate between information and propaganda? Which of two contradictory versions of the same fact carries with it the assurance that it is purely objective? One has absolutely no means of judging, no reason to accept the truth which the honest informant gives his audience. Moreover, propaganda employs psychological methods of influencing; it attempts to predetermine a decision; it involves one in a current of thought and violates both conscience and will, while information must respect freedom of choice and belief. The man who informs honestly must say: "Here are the facts, believe them or not as you see fit." And so from this point on the struggle is not an equal one: propaganda will always triumph over information.

Finally, experience teaches us another advantage of propaganda: the use of the myth. We must have no illusions; when facts are presented in all their brutality and nakedness, and when, in contrast, a mythical, expository system is presented, man spontaneously chooses the myth and refuses to acknowledge reality. Our so-called realistic era probably abounds in myths to a greater extent than any other since the beginning of historical times. Information, therefore, cannot achieve its ends as long as propaganda is at work. Why is it that when the state (for it alone, in the last analysis, can either perfect a widespread and independent information service or else guarantee and support a private enterprise providing free information) disseminates honest information, men will accept the free play of

propaganda which makes a mockery of an honest endeavor? If the real facts as they are presented are denied by the propaganda of a party or of a foreign country, they are no longer accepted as facts. Wherever there is propaganda, information, if it is to survive, must utilize the same weapons. It must engage in a struggle against the inaccuracy of the facts proclaimed by propaganda. But to engage in battle on these grounds is to begin another kind of propaganda, for it no longer suffices to say, "Here are the facts"—they have to be proved, and the individual must be reached and convinced: the very things propaganda has attempted to do. Any kind of propaganda, therefore, forces the informant to engage in counterpropaganda. If one wishes to avoid this conflict and preserve independence, objectivity, the dispassionateness of information, then all kinds of propaganda must be forbidden. Strict control must be exerted over the press, the radio, and so forth. This would call for a rigorous censorship. Only controlled information could come through—information devoid of trends and influences. In other words, the guaranty that information would have its full educational effect would rest on authoritarian measures. But can one guarantee truthful information under a system of censorship, when its free flow seems to be precisely the key to its very nature?

Up to this point we have come up against the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between propaganda and information. But there is another kind of difficulty which jeopardizes the objectivity of even the most honest kind of information. Information must transmit facts and only facts. It must acquaint the public with what is happening. So we have to ask ourselves the question, "What facts?" And these two words involve us in a labyrinth of difficulties. The man in charge of information is in the same position as the historian; the facts that are brought to his attention are but a small part of those that actually occur. The historian working in archives knows that the document he has in hand is but the survivor of many—one thousand or ten thousand—which have disappeared. The texts that have disappeared might contradict, complement, minimize, or enhance the one he has in hand, but we will never know. It is equally certain that all the monuments commemorating some historical event have disappeared, and consequently the event has disappeared with them. Yet, of the millions of events that occur in the world every day, only a few are brought to the attention of the public information services. The reason for this is merely that the great majority of facts have not been recorded.

Furthermore, we must not believe that facts which have been collected

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are more objectively important or significant than others. Many essential facts which might have had enormous repercussions are not known, while entirely trivial ones are brought to the public's attention. For example, accidents or murders are given a good deal of space, although they have no objective importance. On the other hand, a fact like the rapid reduction of infant mortality in North Africa between 1918 and 1936 was practically unknown even to the people in charge of information. It was only around 1935, when this phenomenon became widespread, that anyone took notice of it. Yet, from the start, it was a decisive factor the importance of which we can evaluate only today. Similarly, when a reporter travels abroad and sends in his information, we can be sure, without questioning his good intentions, that what he sees is less important than what he does not see. Monuments, architecture, receptions are less significant than the standard of living. But it is impossible to evaluate the standard of living on the basis of a few schematic data. We know how difficult it is to do so in our own country, in view of the great divergence of opinion on the subject. How, then, obtain accurate data about other countries? Similarly, cultural manifestations are less important than the prison system, concentration camps, police methods, etc. But in every country in the world all these are strictly outside the realm of information. We must realize that often chance plays a large part in the access one has to information, to say nothing of the essential facts which are deliberately camouflaged in every country. But there is also a dual decision that the informant must make. At the start he obviously is responding to the peculiarities of his profession. Really to know facts about a given country or a category of phenomena, one must be a specialist. A man responsible for spreading information would tend to stress the angles peculiar to his profession; he would, for example, gather information that had meaning for him but not for others; or he might not see certain events or phenomena and would perceive what he himself had to transmit only from a single perspective, from a very limited point of view. Furthermore, it is difficult not to consider the fact closest to one as the most important. Here again we make the same mistake that history does when we attribute the same importance to the French Revolution as we do to the entire history of Egypt or the whole of the European Middle Ages. It is obvious that French events are more important than others in the eyes of a French observer because they are closer to him. Therefore, even under an honest system of information, French opinion would be fed above all by French reality. Yet this gives rise to rather serious difficulties: for instance, the Frenchman's conviction that the inter-

national importance of France is always great. Inversely, it is regrettable that American newspapers devote such scanty space to information about France.

Doubtless one might reply that these two shortcomings of objectivity could be eradicated by a plurality of informants, by pooling all world information, by elaborating a complex and coherent system of information. There is a good deal of truth in this, but, besides the extreme difficulty of setting up such an organization, I do not believe that it would really overcome the difficulties we have outlined.

Let us go even further. The informant gathers facts, a considerable number of them. Daily cables filled with thousands of items of information pile up on his desk. It is impossible to feed them all to the public. To transmit all the facts brought to his attention is not the task of the informant; once again we must compare him with the historian. All the documents in an archive must necessarily be published; but this is not history. Only specialists will know how to make use of the published documents. Similarly, if the informant publishes all the information on his desk, only specialists who spend all their time on politics, economics, and social problems will profit by it. But we must not forget that all of public opinion—the average public—must be informed. Consequently, the informant must select the facts and decide which ones he will transmit and which he will ignore. He has to use his judgment, just like the historian. What should he keep? The most significant facts, the most important ones—but in relation to whom? The richest people?

The historian knows only too well the difficulties of selection. Yet the informant's position is more difficult for two reasons. First, inasmuch as the historian knows the sequence of events, he can attribute greater importance to some of them because of their consequences. But the informant does not know the sequel of what he reports. Second, the historian is guided by a kind of consensus that has evolved in the course of an event (this consensus can be dangerous and can be a source of error, but it exists); the informant, however, is at grips on his own with entirely first-hand knowledge of an event.

And after he has chosen, more or less wisely, the facts which he will bring to the public's attention, he runs up against a second difficulty: how should he present these facts? All on the same level, in the same way, giving them equal importance, so that it will be entirely up to the reader to select and establish his own scale of values? Should information be a kind of daily dictionary in which the articles are alphabetically classified? Obvious-

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ly, this is out of the question. Besides, despite appearances, this would not constitute true objectivity; one would be caught in the following dilemma: either to present facts of unequal importance as if they were all alike, and thus falsify reality, or to establish a hierarchy of facts—emphasizing certain ones and giving them a prominent place. If the scale of values corresponds precisely to reality, then the informant would be respecting reality. But it is not possible to be objective in establishing a scale of values or in classifying facts. The difficulty arises simply because the informant is a man and cannot function mechanically. There is no assurance that his decisions would be valid.

Finally, we run into a third difficulty: what level of analysis should satisfy us in regard to information? This is a very serious problem, not only for information, but also for the social sciences, politics, and economics as well. Should we merely mention the most general facts, national or even international in scope? Should the phenomenon of macroeconomy, macropolitics, be a subject of information? Actually, as soon as such a phenomenon is observed, we perceive that it has deeper roots, that it relates to local facts, to economic or political circumstances of a more limited scope, to fortuitous events. Should one, then, aim at this deeper level of microeconomy or micropolitics? But sociologists are immediately aware that it is difficult to stop even there, since all social phenomena go back to the individual. It is the individual who must be studied, the individual case that must be examined; only after one has gathered a good deal of information about individuals can he draw general conclusions. And if one does not go as far as to collect information about the individual, at what level should he stop?

This problem of levels of analysis has another angle. We perceive in the social domain as well as in the physical that what is correct at one level of importance becomes incorrect at another. In probing one level of analysis, it becomes apparent that the global facts observed at a different level dissolve and do not correspond to reality. Without even interpreting facts, informants can transmit radically different aspects of a same phenomenon merely because they have chosen a different level of analysis.

Thus, whether it is a matter of the selection of facts, of their respective classifications, of the importance attributed to them, or of the level of analysis in regard to a phenomenon—it is always the informant who decides. He has no a priori method, no universal criterion, no scientific framework. While information is supposedly objective (under the most favorable circumstances, where there is no deliberate wish to falsify facts, no systematic interpretation), actually it is subordinate to the subjectivity

of the informant. We know that our subjectivity is at the mercy of our presuppositions, our prejudices, our pre-established attitudes. Lenin is doubtless right when he states that in the bourgeois, capitalistic world all the facts are interpreted, quite unconsciously and unwittingly, according to bourgeois ideologies. And to his claim that the deliberate workings of Marxist interpretation rectify one's vision of the facts, the only refutation is to argue that one is confronted with two opposing interpretations of reality (neither of which, it is certain, corresponds to reality) and that one chooses between them for ideological reasons alone. But to believe that in selecting facts the informant has not the slightest desire to orient, educate, or influence opinion is to picture him as superhuman. He thinks he is telling the truth and indeed he will respond to some truths that seem self-evident. In all the serious newspapers or news reviews one easily discerns a few of these truths, shared by a great number of readers. By coincidence, the informant's prejudgments are precisely those of his audience.

We often hear it said that the best way of combating propaganda is to disseminate correct information. Just as a truthful account dissipates error, so the clear and courageous statement of reality is the best weapon against the fallacious arguments of the propagandist. We must acknowledge, albeit with all the reservations of the ideas we have just presented, that there is some truth in this statement; only "some" truth because, from an entirely different point of view, we must admit that the existence of information is a necessary prerequisite of propaganda. Indeed, in order for propaganda to exist, there must be some reference to current political and economic realities. The dogmatic, historical argument is only indirectly effective as propaganda, its true power residing in the interpretation of events. Propaganda operates only when opinion is already aroused, troubled, or oriented in a certain direction by political or economic events. It is grafted upon an existing psychological reality—not a permanent one, but rather a reality whose immediacy is produced by the event. Moreover, these psychological realities do not last long; they have to be maintained, kept alive; they give rise to public opinion by virtue of the fact that they are prolonged and kept alive. Yet public opinion is precisely the broad foundation of propaganda. If no public opinion about politics or economics exists, no propaganda is possible. This is why the propaganda of most ancient countries was addressed to those circles that had to do with political life, not to the masses who were indifferent to such problems. And why were they indifferent? Because they were not informed.

The masses will become interested in political and economic problems,

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in the great ideological debates that relate to them, only if there are mass media of communication by which information can be disseminated. But it is then, too, that propaganda can become widespread. The best arguments used by propaganda will derive from the facts that information has given to the public. We know that the most difficult people to reach are the peasant groups, who are the most refractory mainly because they are the least informed. Through analysis of rural groups it has become plain that propaganda begins to have its effect precisely when information has been disseminated, when the facts are known, and concern about certain problems has been aroused. If I do not know that there is a war going on in Korea, that North Korea and China are Communist, that the United States has occupied South Korea, or that the United States of America represents the United Nations in Korea, what meaning can Communist propaganda about American bacteriological warfare possibly have for me? Propaganda means absolutely nothing unless information has been at work beforehand. This is so true that anyone who attempts to mobilize opinion by propaganda in a politically ignorant milieu must begin by creating an extensive, thorough, and serious information service. We observe an example of this in Communist China. Their ultimate propaganda will be all the more effective because information has been ample and, we must admit, objective and serious. We must repeat that it is not to the advantage of propaganda to base its claims on errors but rather on precise data. It even seems that opinion is all the more sensitized to propaganda after it has been informed (I say "more," not "better," sensitized) the more ample the knowledge of political and economic facts, the more sensitive, delicate, vulnerable is opinion. The intellectual is more easily overcome by such propaganda, particularly the kind that toys with ambiguity.

And so, not only does information offer propaganda a basis in fact without which it could not operate but, even more important, it provides it with an opportunity to function. For actually it is information that creates the problems that propaganda will exploit and to which it will claim to offer solutions. Indeed, propaganda exists only when a totality of facts has become, in the eyes of those who constitute opinion, a problem. It is when "problems" are raised in the public mind that the propaganda of a country, a party, or an individual completely evolves. Because, on the one hand, propaganda exacerbates the problem and, on the other, holds out the hope of a solution. But it is difficult for it to create, out of whole cloth, an economic or political problem. There has to be some real basis for such a problem. It does not necessarily exist objectively in reality—it is enough that there might be some reason for its existence.

Thus, for example, if daily information introduces a man into the complexity of economic facts, he will experience difficulty in understanding the reality of these facts because they are many and multiform. From then on he will feel that economic problems exist. But this assumes a different and more acute significance if public opinion should refer to his personal experience. If we consider a man who is not informed about what is going on in his country, in the world, and who has no other source of information than his personal contact with the external world or the conversations he might engage in with his neighbors (whom he will imagine to be in the same position as he), then, as we have said, propaganda cannot function. This is true even if the man is experiencing personal difficulties that stem, in reality, from the social or political situation. Propaganda had no effect on the people of the fourteenth century, even when some villages were pillaged by soldiers, because man, when confronted with a personal experience, responds by spontaneous or group reflexes; but he is responding to a limited local situation. It is the hardest thing in the world for him to objectify his situation, to think of it as the pattern of a universal phenomenon, and to establish an attitude that is in harmony with such objectivization. This presupposes a deliberate and considerable intellectual effort. Propaganda becomes possible only when one is aware of universal problems, when one's attitude is objectivized. And this is precisely what information can do for those individuals who have a limited experience of social reality. Thanks to information, a man becomes part of a context; he is apprised of the reality of his own situation in relation to all of society. And it is this which will lead him to take political and social action. Take, for example, the problem of the standard of living. The workingman knows nothing about wages outside his personal experience; he only knows about the money he earns and spends, plus, of course, what he learns from talking to his neighbors. If he is dissatisfied, he might feel rebellious. Eventually he might rebel against his immediate superiors, his bosses. But we know that individual reaction does not end there. This was the great discovery of the nineteenth century. Actually, information will teach each workingman that his situation is the same as that of thousands of others, that workers can pool their interests and act. At the same time information enables the worker to locate his situation within the context of the economy as a whole and to understand that industrial relations are world wide. Finally, information will teach him to value his personal experience. It was thus that class-consciousness sprang up among the workers during the nineteenth century, far more as the result (and the socialists are right in

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maintaining this) of information than of propaganda. Also this represented the transition from a spirit of revolt to one of revolution. Because of the dissemination of information, people became aware of the fact that their personal situation had been raised to the dignity of a social problem. We are speaking now not of the elementary kind of propaganda that a few leaders address to a few rebels but of the complex, modern propaganda that is based upon mass movements, upon knowledge of important, general, economico-political facts, and upon involvement in a certain worldwide current created by the sameness of information received. Information, we must remember, is an element in mass psychology.

And this concludes our reference to the preparatory role played by information to the advantage of propaganda. The large number of individuals who receive the same information often react in the same way. They have identical "centers of interest" (the general problem presented to them by the press and the radio); their opinions tend to agree, and this constitutes one of the essential elements in the formation of public opinion.

More than that, it leads to the development of common reflexes, shared prejudices. Of course, there are exceptions. Some individuals, because they already harbor other prejudices, or have "wilful personalities," or are basically negative, do not react to information in the usual way. But this is more rare than one would suppose. The convergence of the individual's attention on a category of problems, on certain aspects that have been stressed by information, very quickly results in what is called "mass psychology," which is one of the prerequisites of propaganda.

Finally, information is not only a basic prerequisite of propaganda; it creates a need for the intervention of propaganda. What, really, is the situation of the man who is exposed to information, who wants to be informed, who is the recipient of a good deal of daily news? First, we must remember that pure information transmits only detailed facts. The event that has just occurred, no matter how important, is always a unique fact. Information cannot be world wide. The informant's task might be to relate one fact with another, to reveal its antecedents and give its context, and perhaps even to provide some interpretation or explanation; but this is not pure information. Moreover, this kind of thing can be done only in regard to the most important events; usually a single fact alone is given to the public. But if ten thousand details, which represent the daily or monthly situation, are all revealed at once, the average man of good will would be confused and would get nothing at all out of the facts. He would have to have

a remarkable memory to relate to one another events that occurred three weeks or three months apart. The facts that information transmits bear upon a considerable range of topics and of geography and on a wide variety of problems. But an important event of the same order does not occur each day. If we look at information bulletins somewhat carefully, we see that subjects vary about 80 per cent each day. Of course certain important topics (Indochina, Germany, Morocco, Algeria, Hungary, for example) are, or have been, continuous; but, generally, the information given is only superficial. Usually further details are printed two weeks or a month after the first mention. And so one must have the patience to do some research in order to achieve any kind of continuity of news. The average man has neither the memory, the time, nor the desire to do this kind of research. He finds himself caught, therefore, in a kind of ceaseless kaleidoscope consisting of thousands of pictures, each following the other at an extraordinary pace and all devoid of any real continuity. It is unbelievably difficult for him to form a judicious opinion from the thousands of small brush strokes, so variable in color, intensity, and dimension, with which the newspaper presents him. And so the world appears like a stippled canvas. A thousand details make a thousand little points. But there should be some precise juxtaposition of these points. There is none; there are empty spaces, blanks, that prevent a continuity of vision. One should be able to step back and see the panorama from a distance. But the law of information is that it is provided daily. A man can never step back to get perspective because he is immediately the recipient of another batch of information that blots out the preceding one, requiring fresh clarification for which he has no time. Endlessly changing scenes—*pointillé* scenes. For this reason the average man who likes to keep up to date has a tremendously incoherent impression of a world that seems absurd, without rhyme or reason—a world that changes with terrifying rapidity—and he is unable to understand the reasons for these changes. Furthermore, since the information usually deals with accidents (in the literal sense of the word), he gets a catastrophic impression of the world. This is a terrible and worrisome period. In the end a man feels that he is entirely overcome by problems and events. He no longer feels adequate. He has a very strong sense of being overwhelmed. He is aware of his impotence, his smallness. He perceives no connection between his own possibilities of action and the complex situations which propaganda suggests. He begins to have feelings of inferiority and fear. Yet man cannot accept such a situation. He cannot accept the thought of being part of an absurd, incoherent world (he would

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have to be heroic; and even Camus, who has portrayed this attitude as the only honest one, cannot really maintain it). Nor can he accept the fact that the problems that spring up before his eyes cannot be resolved or that he himself is made to feel inadequate and helpless to stay the course of events. A man who wants information is in desperate need of a framework within which to classify information. He needs explanations, broad answers to general problems. He needs coherence, an affirmation of his own worth. All this is the direct consequence of information. The more complex the phenomena, the more simple the explanation must be; the more detailed the pointillism, the more schematic must be the framework; the more difficult the problems, the more global the solutions must be; the more threatening the sense of personal inferiority, the more a man's worth must be exalted. But all this is propaganda, and only propaganda can provide it. Of course a superior man, a man of tremendous culture and intelligence who has a constant supply of energy, can seek his own answers, can accept absurdities, and can decide for himself what action to take. But we are not speaking of the superior man (naturally, we all think of ourselves as such) but of the average man.

In analyzing the reasons for propaganda's success, we begin to feel that the principal one is that it responds exactly to the needs of modern man. We cannot give a complete analysis of this statement here, but we must at least point out two elements: man's need for explanations and his need to feel worthy. We have demonstrated that these two needs result—not entirely but in great part—from information.

Effective propaganda must provide man with a global view of the world. This is not so much a matter of dogma—which is entirely too intellectual—but of vision. This vision would include, first of all, a general, historical, economic, and political panorama which is the very basis of propaganda's power because it is the apparently objective justification for the propagandist's activities. It is always necessary to show that we are part of the current of history and progress. And this panorama enables the individual to classify correctly the facts with which information has provided him. It offers a criterion for shaping an opinion: to stress some facts and ignore others, depending upon whether they fit into the framework or not. This corresponds to man's essential need not to have his vision blurred by an unrelenting gray canvas of undifferentiated facts which shuts perspective out.

But propaganda must also explain the event, answer the question "Why?" and give the reasons for political and economic situations. Information seems less formidable when it gives news for which the individual has

ready-made explanations or a ready answer. Propaganda's great power is precisely that it furnishes modern man with simple, global explanations, broad, dogmatic causes without which, engulfed by information, he cannot live. Man is doubly reassured by propaganda: first, because he sees in it an explanation which he can readily understand of the events as they occur; second, because he is promised certain solutions to problems which arise when his limited personal experience yields to objectivity. But propaganda also teaches him that these problems can be solved only if he participates in the actions proposed for their solution. This is how it makes the individual feel his worth. Overwhelmed by information, he regains his balance, thanks to propaganda. He had acquired a sense of his extreme helplessness in a world that had become too vast and too complex, and now he becomes aware of his own importance. Propaganda tells him that his adherence is essential, that his intervention is being relied upon, that his action is decisive, and that nothing can be solved without him. While information is necessary for self-awareness, propaganda is necessary to prevent self-awareness from turning into despair. Man is enriched by the conviction that he can intervene effectively in political life. Furthermore, propaganda teaches him that the extraordinary problems which information has revealed can be solved, but on condition that a certain party, a certain nation, a certain movement, triumphs; and that he, an ordinary individual, will be the artisan of this triumph and will be clothed in glory. Thus information receives its answer and is put in its true place. It does not produce further obstacles; on the contrary, it becomes another reason for action. We saw this swing of the pendulum from propaganda to information when a group called "Combattants de la Paix" was publicized. The propaganda in this instance stressed the individual's awareness of his own worth and the conviction that his personal decision has an enormous bearing on the destiny of peoples.

In the light of these facts it is apparent that the relationship between propaganda and information is complex and difficult to assess. Their boundaries are vague and undefined. Almost inevitably information turns into propaganda; it makes propaganda possible, feeds it, and renders it necessary. It creates a need for propaganda in man, which in turn opens the door to psychic aggressions and to sentimental, political seductions. Once again, let us refrain from erecting the kind of Manichean world that propaganda suggests—one side white, the other black, a good side, a bad side—saintly information, on the one hand, diabolical propaganda, on the other. The truth about the devil is that he created ambiguity.