

# ENEMY PROPAGANDA IN THE UNITED STATES

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**A**CCORDING to accepted traditional appearances, the second World War began in September, 1939, with the sudden invasion of Poland. After Poland, Germany, France and Great Britain, with her Dominions, war involved progressively Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Albania.

It might seem enough.

But in reality the World War had begun years ago, materially, with the Nazi-Fascist invasion of Spain, the first of the Anglo-French defeats, and spiritually had begun even before, through all the countries of the world. It is because the present totalitarian war was and is a war with the bitter characteristics of a religious war, that it was possible for the dictators to wage it for years, before the visible battles of iron and blood, and to win unseen victories on England and on France, as when men on the two sides of the Channel applauded first, as a victory, their own encirclement in Spain and, later on, the treason of Czechoslovakia and her dismemberment—calling it “peace for a generation,” as Chamberlain said when he landed at Croydon, back from Munich.

How was it possible for Hitler and for his former master and present slave, Mussolini, to achieve even before 1939 such astonishing results? The success was possible as result of a skilfully used weapon, half-mystic half-realistic: subtle propaganda persuading the upper classes of the whole world that the dictators were defending Europe and America against Bolshevism.

One realizes how important it has been that the first of European dictators has been a demagogic newspaper-man; only one thing he knew, but he knew it well: the publicity part of the profession. It was he that first discovered the basic maxim of totalitarianism in this standardized world of ours: “A lie is a lie when it is timidly expressed; a lie remains sometimes a lie when it is repeated only a hundred times; a lie always becomes a truth when it is repeated thousands of times.” When

they succeeded—through this system—with the invention of a Bolshevik Spain (which never existed, because Spain is the most individualistic nation in the world), the dictators did not doubt any more of their victory on free Europe; and they went on making an application of their method even to the United States. And not without a certain amount of success, since I found—after my arrival in America from France in July, 1940—even serious and honest American historians convinced that at least certain dictators must have some popular backing in their own countries. If that is so, one wonders why those dictators do not give freedom of opinion to their press and freedom of vote to their subjects, and why they have suppressed even “fake” elections for civic magistrates, so dear to the hearts of the Italians since the thirteenth century?

The truth is that while the dictators shout their confidence in their blinded masses, they are far from being so sure. They shout because they are afraid. Is it not a fact that as soon as hundreds of thousands of Italians were sent out of the great Fascist prison, they showed their minds, in Albania and Greece, by refusing to fight against a small nation whose freedom had been dear to our Italian fathers? Indeed, many gallant Italian volunteers went through the whole nineteenth century to fight and die for Hellenic independence, which means for the same ideals that inspired the six hundred thousand Italians who gave heroically their lives for a free Italy in the first World War.

I have been with them; I know what they thought. They hoped to make Democracy safe for Italy, for the world. We were wrong, all of us, if we thought that Democracy is a stable place to reach and to live in, comfortably. The truth is just the contrary. Democracy must be a constant progress, a militant faith, because she is in front of us, not behind us, even in America. That is why no desertions, no defeats, no disasters prove anything.

But have we really been confronted by essential defeats and disasters of Democracy?

Many pragmatists believe so, and some of them already bow a smiling approval to prospective masters of tomorrow. In reality, even contemporary European history, tragic as it is, proves that they are wrong. Why? Because the only conclusive argument against Democracy would be the existence of some free nation having been converted to accept totalitarianism. No such nation exists. It is only through violence that they have been subjected to totalitarianism, all of them: Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Poland, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium.

I alluded already to Italy; but what about France, the latest victim of dictators and traitors? I have lived in France most of the last three years, and I can bear witness that the immense majority of the French think only of the day when they will get rid of invaders and of would-be dictators.

To-day, the dictators—inventing a new psychological trick—try to make us believe that they are creating a “new order” in Europe, a new economic order which the Fifth Columns might hail as an improvement on the Europe of yesterday, stupidly divided by customs walls and by national hatreds. But the truth is that although this time propaganda and Fifth Columns may rely on blood and terror, there is not one example of any nation wishing to participate in the newly advertised Nazi “order.” All the peoples of Europe refuse to join a system based on hatred of Democracy. When it happens, as now in France, that certain leaders try to collaborate with Nazism, most of their compatriots know what they are—traitors. But the dictators have won so many victories through propaganda—from the conquest of Spain to the invasion of France—that they still continue in all the democratic countries their constant secret work of demoralisation.

This work takes the most varied forms, as when, in the United States, politicians and writers—while not daring to declare that they sympathize with Nazism—try to persuade their followers and readers that totalitarianism is one of the new political philosophies which the free nations should try to understand. No, Nazism and Fascism have no philosophy; they are based on pragmatic theories which change from day to day—as their crusades against Stalin and their successive alliances with Stalin should prove to everybody. Opportunism, gangsterism, systematic cheating will never form a philosophy. These are simple, naive truths. But it is necessary to repeat them, since transitory material successes find admirers ready to accept pseudo-philosophical reasons inciting them to bow to forthcoming violence. I feel quite sure that even in Attila’s time some Roman rhetoricians wrote pamphlets in Italy and in the Gauls showing the invader as an inevitable “wave of the future.”

But Nazi-Fascist propaganda knows well American optimism and American courage; that is why the dictators do not use here this tune, although it was so effectively played in the England and France of Munich time. To undermine American Democracy a subtler weapon is used—subtler because it may

look indigenous, after many decades of happy American life. That weapon is *Complacency*.

Complacency may become more dangerous than Fifth Columns. Why? Because—on the day America will decide to do so—it will be easy for her to discover at once the Fifth Columnist language. Guarded as it is, it has a glossary of its own, which may be easily detected; for example the pseudo-melancholy phrase “Yes, we must admit it, an epoch is finished;” which is treason, because it means: “We do not want to suffer and to fight for the America of Jefferson and Lincoln; after all, life may be just as pleasant in a world where it will be forbidden to speak of the ideals of true Christianity and of Humanism.” But too many millions of free Americans still believe in Christian and humanistic ideals. That is why the instrument used to undermine American will to freedom is Complacency.

How does Complacency become dangerous to American security? Let me give a few examples out of many. Learned economists declare that even in case of a totalitarian victory in Europe, the United States would have all the time needed to become supreme in Latin America, since the dictators would be busy for years in organizing the Old World. It is not so; history is made by passions, not by interests; and for the dictators it would be a question of life or death to have all the Democracies destroyed, since the very existence of a great Democracy would mean a lasting hope for the enslaved nations of Europe. Another manifestation of a Complacency unconsciously helping the enemies of the highest American ideals is a new fashion to speak of American Democracy as of a smooth “way of life,” where the liberties matter not much more than the material comforts.

American higher education may render the most precious service because it may destroy this Nazi-Fascist Trojan horse—Complacency—without coming out of the field of intellectual serenity. I know quite well that my deep devotion to the American universities, which made me feel for years a free man among free men, must not make me forget that I am a stranger, and that nothing is more indiscreet for a stranger than to offer warnings. But how could I hide my impressions of the long crisis which brought about the collapse of France? I have lived through the long tragedy; I have warned in vain for years some of the French leaders when they happened to be honorable. The first line of defence which failed was not the 1940 Maginot Line; what failed much before was French higher education.

They knew well what they were doing, the internal and external enemies of French democracies, when, little by little, they conquered newspapers and publishing houses, faculty chairs and places at the French Academy. Two or three years before the war, it was already bad form in France to express faith in the progress of Democracy; and many of those who had remained loyal republicans had been so crushed that they did not dare to repeat with Spinoza: "If we mean by peace slavery, then nothing is worse. Peace must be the harmony of strong souls, not the impotence of the slaves." Almost nobody in France dared to point out the shameful contradictions of the French pre-war tragicomedy. For example, when "Sanctions" were adopted against Fascism which had invaded Ethiopia, all the French who for three generations had most hated Italy as the living triumph of the liberalism of Cavour and of the humanitarianism of Mazzini began to shout for the first time their love for Fascist Italy, simply because Fascist Italy was the complete negation of the free traditions of Italian thought, from Dante to our *Risorgimento*.

One must not be surprised by Hitler's victories; on the contrary, what is surprising is the fact that, with so many accomplices throughout the world, he did not conquer more. Before invading Poland he had won the first and most important of his victories in France; he had shaken the revolutionary but nationally loyal faith of half the workmen through devilish Bolshevik propaganda; and, on the other side, he had destroyed the faith of the French upper classes, young and old, in the ideals of the French Revolution. When Pétain suppressed the three words "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*", he did not do so in order to please the Germans; he did so to show to the French upper classes that he knew what they wanted and that he was ready to serve them.

If such a collapse was possible in France, it is clear that many were the causes. But in the moral field there is only one:—the French thought had become static, it had ceased to be dynamic. Too many in France had forgotten that Democracy is a constant creation which each generation must deserve and fight for. Even French patriotism—in its most legitimate form—became a reason of defeat, when it was preached as a unique goal, men forgetting that the world has become too small for patriotisms which are not widened by a higher ideal of human solidarity—such as Mazzini asserted even when he was struggling, from 1830 to 1848, for the freedom and independence of Italy.

Why, in spite of certain failures, do I think that what happened in France—this nation infinitely more generous than her so-called “*élite*”—is impossible in the United States?

Because in the United States there is an historic reason of pride and hope which was lacking to us old nations. Rightly, Washington said that the liberty of the world would one day depend upon the success of liberty in the American experiment.

No nation ever had a higher reason for pride—but also for responsibility. Because of their historical formation, only the Americans may show us the way to a future universal federative brotherhood. In our old countries, people without imagination may smile at the expression of so distant goals. But America cannot, must not. Already America is a country to all of us. Born an Italian, I will die an Italian; I love my country even more in her sorrows and trials than in her glories. But I know that there is only one oath which I might take with joy, feeling that I remain faithful to the highest traditions of my people—the oath taken by those who become American citizens.

If American education succeeds—as in so many colleges I have seen it succeed—in molding the young generation with the idea that the most American of duties and ideals is to work for and believe in a universal democracy, America will have nothing to fear from Fifth Columns and Dictators.

That is why this American ideal is at the same time to-day the most immediate of American interests.

That is why the salvation of the world is probably in the hands of the American historians, philosophers, and professors most trusted and liked by American youth.