

Propaganda: Formation of Men's attitudes

The necessity for Propaganda

In *The necessity for Propaganda*, Jacques Ellul rejects the common belief that propaganda is simply the work of a few evil men that want to dominate the passive population¹. He argues that it is impossible for a modern state, regardless of its political alignment, to govern properly without the use of propaganda².

With the rise of the technological society, we see an increase in the general public's interest in partaking in political discourse. Ellul mentions how powerful yet unstable and fluctuating public opinion is³. The government here must employ propaganda to convince the masses that the state's doings are legitimate and in accordance with the general public's interests⁴.

Ellul points out how propaganda can function as a soothing mechanism for the average man within modern society, as one is not automatically adjusted to the living conditions imposed upon him. Fast-paced lifestyles, increasing working hours, noise, crowdedness, the housing crisis, and so on create a sense of lacking personal accomplishment and meaning in one's life. Additionally, mass media platforms constantly relay news from around the world, often dominated by unusual disasters or horrific events.⁵ All these factors contribute to the average man's feeling of unimportance, making him feel like merely a number within the structure of society⁶. This, in turn, generates tension and built-up emotions that demand release. Here, propaganda intervenes as an instrument for alleviating these

¹ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 118.

² Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 138.

³ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 124.

⁴ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 126.

⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 143-145.

⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 149.

tensions by providing an enemy that can serve as a punching bag for society to use.⁷

This is a tactic almost always employed by authoritarian regimes to shift blame from their own actions onto a specific group within society, often based on ethnic, religious, or political differences. An example of this is Trump's persistent attacks on Latino populations in the US, carried out with the use of his special enforcement agency, ICE.

We have seen this tactic being deployed countless times throughout history where regimes justify their actions by creating false narratives of personal danger (The Nazis' fear of the Worldwide Jewish takeover) or by creating narratives of moral superiority (The French justifying their colonialism by calling it a "mission to spread civilisation")⁸

In the end of the chapter Ellul mentions how the propagandee is a close accomplice of the propagandist by helping fulfill propaganda's function by unconsciously complying with it⁹. I'm not sure I fully agree with this opinion, but my opinion might change once I have read the entirety of the book.

I wonder what Ellul would think of the current global events in-terms of how propaganda is being deployed specifically in the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 151.

⁸ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 158.

⁹ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 160.