

## Cleaning Out the Library Shelves

Goebbels' chief competitor in Nazi propaganda control was Alfred Rosenberg, a close friend of Hitler, a one-time editor of the official Nazi newspaper, and a fanatical anti-Semite. Rosenberg ran an organization called the Fighting League for German Culture. The Fighting League organized book burnings throughout Germany—works by Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Mann, H. G. Wells, Maxim Gorki, and hundreds of other authors were officially approved for burning. Some of these authors were Jews, others (like Thomas Mann, the German Nobel Prize winner) had written approvingly of Jews, others were simply too liberal or too communist. Nearly 2,500 writers fled the country after the first round of book burnings. Goebbels matched Rosenberg by blacklisting more than 12,400 titles, all of which were removed from libraries and confiscated from bookstores. Using propaganda and advertising, he made *Mein Kampf* into the national best seller—nearly 6.2 million copies were sold.

Did all this propaganda fool the German people? Not altogether. One German worker joked to a foreign correspondent: "I told my wife that if I die, don't let them put it into the newspaper, because no one will believe it." Many Germans stopped trusting the news they heard or read, and they blamed the sad state of their culture on the Ministry of Propaganda.

The propaganda did succeed, however, in making many Germans believe the myth of Hitler's leadership. They loved the Fuhrer so much that many created small "Hitler corners" in their homes, shrines in which Hitler's portrait hung. During the war, it was even believed that a home with such a shrine was safe from enemy attack.



"Hitler corner" in a German home. Many Germans thought their little shrines were good luck charms. Here a devoted German girl honors Hitler by decorating the shrine with fresh flowers.

■ Not every German was a member of the Nazi Party. That was not Hitler's goal. The goal was to make every German believe in Nazi ideas and ideals. The tool for accomplishing that goal was propaganda. Albert Speer, Nazi Minister for Armaments and War Production, in his final speech at his trial after the war, summed up much of the meaning of controlling the masses through propaganda:

Hitler's dictatorship differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. His was the first dictatorship. . . which made complete use of all technical means for the domination of its own country.

Through technical devices like the radio and the loudspeaker, 80 million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.

Albert Speer in Snell,  
*The Nazi Revolution*, p. 7.

■ Alan Bullock, one of Hitler's biographers, said that Hitler's downfall was caused by the very propaganda that he created. Hitler came to believe that he really was capable of working miracles, that he really was historically chosen to be Germany's savior. Bullock observed, "If ever a man was destroyed by the image he had created it was Adolf Hitler."

■ Albert Speer observed that it was "the technical means"—radio, telephone, telegraph, and loudspeakers—which allowed Hitler to control the people. Others believe it was propaganda that made the difference. As Goebbels said, "Any lie, frequently repeated, will gradually gain acceptance."

1. Which of these opinions do you think is correct?
2. How could the German people know that they were being subjected to propaganda, and still come to love Hitler as the Fuhrer? (Hint: You may wish to read again the statement of William Allen describing his reasons for joining the Hitler Youth.)

■ The Talmud (*Shabbat* 55a) calls truth "the seal of God." Only truth can sustain order in the world. Lying twists language—it causes confusion. The truth is orderly—it makes sense at once.

3. This is a lovely teaching, but is it true? Can you always tell a lie from the truth?
4. What tests can you use to see if a government is lying to you?

■ Imagine yourself as an American reporter who last visited Germany in 1930, just after the Great Depression began. The year is now 1941, and you are sent to Germany again.

5. What changes do you notice? What role did the press and the media play in these changes?