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Author

Bruins, Christine

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THE RED WEDGE:

Towards a Perspective of Soviet Propaganda in Light of Evolutionary Biology

Christine Bruins



From the inception of the Soviet Union in 1921 onward, the content and nature of Soviet propaganda exhibits increasing alignment with advantageous biological traits, particularly the human aptitude for indoctrination. Drawing from evolutionary biology, psychology, and history, Soviet propaganda, particularly posters and newspapers, will be analyzed as a vehicle of education and advertisement. As Neo-Darwinist theory will show, the human propensity to accept ideologies contrary to fundamental mechanisms of individual survival suggests that the ability for indoctrination confers some evolutionary benefits. As the Soviet Union's political situation changed between 1917 and 1932, propaganda experienced transformations in accordance with both politics and human evolution. Methods employed under Stalin proved more adept than those previously employed by Lenin at appealing to innate biological predispositions, including the human desire for societal stability through hierarchical organization and the desirable positive associations among 'in-group' members when a defined contrasting 'out-group' exists. In this light, the history of Soviet propaganda effectively illustrates unconscious modifications within propaganda machines to better appeal to human biological traits that have been selected for under the processes of evolution.

Subject categories: Propaganda, Politics, Russian history

Keywords: Soviet Union, Stalin, Lenin

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the twentieth century the Russian Empire was economically and politically 'backward.' After more than four centuries under the rule of autocratic monarchies, the Empire was drastically behind its industrialized and democratic competitors. The vast empire, whose expanses constituted one half of the Earth's land mass, was rife with the desire for drastic change. The February Revolution of 1917 marked the end of aristocratic rule. Eight months later, the socialist Bolsheviks seized power via coup following the October Revolution. As the head of the self-instated Bolshevik Party, Vladimir Lenin prioritized propaganda as a way to educate and appeal to the masses. Marxist ideology provided the Bolshevik Party doctrine by which Lenin was to both lead and teach the destined ruling class, often referred to as the proletariat, in Russia's quest for socialism and its ultimate goal, worldwide communism. As Lenin was succeeded by Stalin as the ruler of the Soviet regime, the empire experienced a transformation from a fragmented, stratified society into an increasingly nationalistic hegemonic hierarchy. Propaganda was a vital part of the regime's existence, and though it is impossible to definitively qualify its effectiveness, there is no question that Soviet propaganda, and its increasing efficacy, was inextricably tied to the longevity of the state.

The following study will examine propaganda, particularly trends in posters and newspapers, in the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1934. Concepts from an overarching evolutionary theory of human motivation, and more specific notions of the advantageousness of the human propensity for indoctrination, will be applied to a chronological assessment of propaganda (henceforth, the word "propaganda" will refer exclusively to Soviet propaganda). The selected propaganda is a representative sample of the most commonly employed forms; this study is not intended as a complete analysis of propaganda, but as a

demonstration of the proposed linkage between mechanisms of propaganda as they changed over time and their increased appeal to the human psyche.

The hypothesis of this thesis asserts that over time, propaganda evolved to more effectively appeal to traits that have proven evolutionarily advantageous due to their persistent selection throughout human evolution. Soviet propaganda evolved to be increasingly attractive to human instincts as it appealed to people's unique propensity for indoctrination. The ability for people to be indoctrinated, or "accept ideologies contrary to what is generally believed to promote an individual's survival," has led to the prominence of group selection in humans (Peterson and Somit, 21). The majority of social animals evolve under forces that select for individual fitness; an individual is benefited by passing on its own genes as well as by assisting its kin in propagation, since relatives share a large amount of genetic material. However, humans exhibit group selection, commonly defined as selection favoring groups not necessarily related as kin but under some unifying belief or ideology, and this establishes that there are pressures influencing human evolution beyond that of natural, kin-based selection.¹ Here, an assessment of propaganda will lead to the conclusion that changing trends in the message content and tonality of propaganda allowed it to achieve a higher degree of accordance with the human trait of indoctrinability, as well as other traits that have been selected for throughout human evolution.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The foundations of the growing field of evolutionary psychology are reliant on a set of specific hypotheses about adaptation and selection. These include several mechanisms of Darwinian – natural selection: the "evolution of individual survival mechanisms"; sexual selection: the evolution of traits that are

¹ Case in point: later forms of propaganda mandated a hierarchical society under Stalin's rule and created a strong community of educated Party supporters by defining the Kulaks as an 'out-group' and promoting nationalistic sentiments

selected because they are attractive to mates; inclusive fitness: the genetic benefits derived from altruism towards kin; and reciprocity: the “development of traits that promote mutually beneficial reciprocal relationships with non-kin” (Bernard 2008, 243). An encompassing theory of human motivation, or “purposeful behavior,” was constructed based on these hypotheses and unifying biological, behavioral, and cognitive approaches (Bernard et al. 2005, 129). It essentially proposes that human motivation is aimed at achieving the basic goal of inclusive fitness, which means that all human behavior is oriented towards propagation of our individual genes (Bernard et al. 2005, 129). This is ultimately achieved by altruism amongst our directly related family members, or ‘kin.’

Evolutionary biologists Peterson and Somit state that “homo sapiens [are] the only species capable of creating and, under some circumstances, acting in accordance with cultural beliefs that actually run counter to innate behavioral tendencies,” which they term ‘indoctrinability’ (Peterson and Somit, 10). These innate behaviors are described by Neo-Darwinian theory, which combines natural selection and more recent knowledge about genetic inheritance patterns. A key tenet of Neo-Darwinism suggests that an individual will behave in ways that will maximize the number of that individual’s own genes that will be transmitted to the next generation. However, the human propensity for indoctrination has allowed natural selection to occur, at times, without direct benefit to an individual’s genetic lineage. When a “given behavior is consistently manifested by a species, there is probably a sound evolutionary reason for that behavior,” therefore, humans’ continual expression of indoctrinability suggests that it confers an evolutionary benefit (Peterson and Somit, 53). Hence, while humans are inarguably under the influence of Neo-Darwinian selection, people also experience group selection due to indoctrinability.

“Our species’ unique evolution of cultural systems of social control have helped shape our genetic makeup,” allowing us to reach record levels of social complexity within the animal kingdom (Peterson and Somit, 17). “That

uniqueness may be due to group selection acting on culturally transmitted variation and then, as an effect, on gene frequencies. Cultural group selection appears more feasible than genetic group selection," observe Peterson and Somit, who substantiate this claim with the fact that group boundaries lead to cooperation between in-group members and subsequent discipline of "free-riders" (Peterson and Somit, 92). Fundamental to the proposed hypothesis of this paper is the idea that "indoctrinability facilitates acceptance and identification with a group's characteristics and thus serves as an in-group demarcation. Because of our evolutionary history, the in-group tends to coincide with tribe, ethnicity or nation, groups whose supporting myths and ideologies deploy symbols of familial and kinship solidarity" (Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Salter, 6)². The benefits to humans derived from in-group membership, groups such as a community, political party, or nation – and not necessarily constituted of related kin – have shown to be great. So great are the benefits that over time, evolutionary selection has selected for these cultural groups over groups tied by genetics, such as large familial units. This has allowed for the extremely complex social organization developed by modern humans, while simultaneously preventing selfish, parasitic individuals – deemed "free riders" – from taking advantage of within-kin altruism. Group selection dictates that an individual will not necessarily receive all of the benefits of kin-based altruism solely on the basis of being related if they are not an integral part of the network. Group selection does not promote the subsistence of an individual by genetic relation alone; participation and contribution to the cultural group serve as prerequisites for selection. For example, due to the evolution of group selection within humans, an individual's total cooperation with the political party in power could be more beneficial for that person regarding the propagation of their genes than altruism within their own family of political dissidents.

² The referenced 'in-group' corresponds to the levels of social domains beyond that of the individual, including material, kin, non-kin coalitions, and the larger society and culture of which we are a part.

Group selection has at times taken precedent within humans over selection based solely on kin. Indoctrinability in humans streamlines social values, thereby facilitating cooperative groups, which confers benefits to adaptations that emphasize culture. These “cultural solutions to group adaptive problems are a low-cost alternative to changing our body shape or neural wiring” (Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Salter, 103). Additionally, the human propensity for indoctrination affords people the ability to create homogenous cultural environments with a large group, “thereby opening new opportunities for social and economic networking,” opportunities that would not exist if family loyalty alone was the basis of selection (Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Salter, 139). Therefore, cooperation based on the same values or beliefs appears to be more unifying and more readily achieved by indoctrination than by cooperation based on genetic similarities. It takes millions of years of genetic mutations to change human physiology, keeping in mind that evolution is not a directed process but the accumulation of random changes that, if advantageous, are selected for over thousands of generations. Through a Neo-Darwinist lens, the claim of group selection trumping kin selection as a primary mode of human evolution is theoretically and evidentially substantiated.

Beyond increased networking capacity and social complexity, the in-group cohesion allowed by indoctrinability in a linguistically capable species likely serves to diminish conflict (Peterson and Somit, 79). A society is capable of increased stability if the citizenry accept streamlined values. Across the spectrum of social species, societies are set up in hierarchical systems. The prominence of hierarchical systems implies that there is a direct correlation between their organization and societal stability. Hierarchies inevitably have a dominant member or small group in power at the top that presides over the submissive party below. If humans are propagating under group selection and the most stable, therefore lasting, groups are arranged hierarchically, it can be inferred that hierarchy is a product of evolutionary selection (Peterson and Somit, 53). If

hierarchy is a correlate of stability as hypothesized, one might further conjecture that increasingly stringent hierarchy causally results in increasing stability. Accordingly, the extremity of political hierarchy within the Soviet Union definitively escalated from the Revolutions onward, thereby conferring increased societal stability.

Among evolutionary biologists, religion is often cited as the ultimate manifestation of indoctrinability, though the ensuing debate about the underlying cognitive processes of religious belief is the subject of an array of academic and public discussion. Cognitively, religion promotes feelings of integration, control and wellbeing by releasing endogenous neurotransmitters (Peterson and Somit, 269). It is thus suggested that information is capable of the same stabilizing and soothing effects, which offers an additional explanation regarding the human appetite for ideologies. This idea enumerates that “acceptance of an ideology correlates with the degree to which embracing it increases the likelihood of attaining physiological homeostasis” (Peterson and Somit, 10). Accordingly, not only is an ideology an agent of stability and comfort, but in uncertain and trying times, the desire for stability and comfort increases, which in turn increases an individual’s affinity for embracing the ideology. Indoctrination serves the positive functions of integrating individuals into work and social groups, such as the Soviet Union’s Communist Party and proletariat class. Membership within an in-group can instill “pride, energy, commitment, a sense of power and well being, and operational competence,” which are all desirable characteristics that were made easily obtainable with proper Party involvement, especially under Stalin (Peterson and Somit, 326). Therefore, “highly cohesive group evolutionary strategies...tend to be characterized by intense socialization pressures (i.e., indoctrination) directed at producing within-group altruism and economic cooperation,” which is congruent with the Bolshevik Party line (Peterson and Somit, 347).

At the behavioral level of social signaling, the methods used in both initiating and resolving disputes between groups are functionally similar across the primate order. This homology supports indoctrination, for which the propensity is only found in humans, as an advantageous trait that has been enhanced by selection (Peterson and Somit, 59). Though all primates use the same strategies to deal with group relations, humans have developed the most complex social structures. Thus, our ability to be indoctrinated, the key applicable difference between us and the primates, is responsible for our more complicated societal arrangements.

A final addendum to the details of motivational theory by evolution pertains to art, and therefore to the pictures and texts of Soviet propaganda. Evolutionary biologists hypothesize that “art can release simple aesthetic pleasures and different moods; it can also exploit the same mechanisms to trigger messages of a non-aesthetic but political or ideological character and thus manipulate our attitude towards norms and values” (Peterson and Somit, 286). With a scientific understanding of human behavior, our sensitivity to certain visual and auditory stimuli can be traced back to “archaic biases built into our perceptual apparatus” where the construction of a pattern-recognition and evaluation program was necessary for survival (Peterson and Somit, 288). Ethologically, art serves as an effective agent of indoctrination because it has the capacity to represent ideas – be they the future, togetherness, or unity – in ways that speak to our preferences. These preferences exist due to the evolution of a recognition system termed ‘innate knowledge,’ which allows for “recognition without prior individual experience of the object” (Peterson and Somit, 288). Propaganda appeals to our built-in visual recognition system – we inherently judge if an environment appears to have good characteristics, even if we have never seen it before. The representations presented in propaganda are naturally appealing situations; therefore pleasant messages are triggered in association.

In conclusion, according to an evolutionary theory of human motivation, human behavior is oriented towards personal genetic propagation and continuance of lineage. Though usually achieved through kin selection, which explains altruism within family units, humans have evolved within the broader mechanism of group selection. Because humans have the propensity to be 'indoctrinated,' where indoctrination is the purposive inculcation of an identity or doctrine, we can function in socially constructed in-groups. Over time, these groups have proved beneficial because no debt is owed to free-riders that, by kin selection, are a liability to an individual's success. Also, indoctrination allows for stability within in-groups, which is also linked to a hierarchical societal order. As such, increased hierarchy within an in-group should lead to increased stability, and stability is evolutionarily beneficial for all members of an in-group because it increases chances for individual genetic propagation, the fundamental goal of evolutionary selection. Groups that are especially cohesive are usually deeply indoctrinated so that in-group altruism is achieved. Ideas appear to be subject to a similar selection process as genes and specific ideas make humans feel involved and important. When these neurologically stimulating ideas are presented together as an ideology, humans are especially prone to accept that ideology. The embracement of an ideology is even further enhanced in uncertain times due to the cognitive stabilizing effects. Finally, art can influence our values and beliefs through its representative power – we have an 'innate knowledge' of how things should appear and experience comfort when things look as they should according to our evolved recognition system for detecting safe environments. Our ability to be indoctrinated has led to the human phenomenon of group selection over kin selection, thereby allowing us to become the most socially complex creatures on earth.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As it existed prior to the Revolutions of 1917, the Russian Empire stretched from Poland to the Pacific Ocean and from the Arctic to the Black Sea. Russia was a great European power in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth; but while it competed with the likes of Britain, Germany, and France, Russia was widely regarded as economically and politically 'backward.' The peasantry comprised approximately eighty percent of the population, and feudalism was not abolished until 1861. Furthermore, the initiation of Russian industrialization was slow relative to the rest of Europe (Fitzpatrick, 11).

Russia had existed as an autocratic monarchy since the early fourteenth century. It was not until after the tumultuous year of 1905 that the last Tsar, Nicholas Romanov II, instated the Duma as an elected parliamentary body and legalized political parties and trade unions (Radetsky, 16). Despite Russia's retarded modernization, it was comparable to its western competition in industry by World War I. Russia's industrialization was enabled by the geographic centralization of the country – most plants were in the capital St. Petersburg – and large size of the plants, as well as the ability to borrow already established technology from Western Europe, thereby skipping some of the slower processes of industrialization (Fitzpatrick, 14). Rich culture, especially within the artistic realm, flourished in a pre-Revolutionary Russia that was dominated by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Politically, the working class of Russia had notoriously harbored revolutionary sentiments from its inception onward. This zeal for protest is often attributed to limited 'trade-union consciousness,' a term coined by Lenin to describe the metered amount of representation given to the industrial proletariat class under the monarchy (Fitzpatrick, 16). The Revolutions of 1917 began spontaneously but were driven by a cadre of Marxist revolutionaries who grew in both numbers and distaste for the 'bourgeois' while under Tsar Nicholas's reign. The Social Democratic Labor Party was formed in 1898 and eventually split into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, the latter of which was led by Vladimir

Lenin and would become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Radetsky, 21). On February 23, 1917, several thousand women took to the streets of Petrograd, the renamed capital, to protest a shortage of bread. Thus began an avalanche of protests, primarily regarding disapproval of the Russian involvement in World War I and the Tsarist government. The barrage of protests culminated in the end of Russian aristocracy – Nicholas abdicated the throne after only twelve days of revolution (Smith, 6).

After the monarchy had been taken down by the revolting proletariats and middle class oppositional political parties, the former methods of autocracy, from the army to the factories to the farms, were actively dismantled with victorious excitement. In June, after several months of governmental power struggle, Lenin returned to Russia following nearly two decades of exile. He declared the necessity of the defense of the proletariat and the truth of Marxism. The compounded effects of Russia's deteriorating economy and increasing nationalism among the large non-Russian conglomerate within the Soviet Union led to a rejection of the democratic discourse and embodiment of class struggle popularized in February. The Provisional Government was inaugurated in February; however its lack of legitimacy and the shifting sentiments of the people led to seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party in October and establishment of Lenin's doctrine of anti-capitalist socialism.

The Bolshevik Constitution of 1918 proclaimed the "abolition of all exploitation of man by man, the complete elimination of the division of society into classes, the ruthless suppression of the exploiters, the establishment of a socialist organization of society, and the victory of socialism in all countries" (Smith, 40). Following an attempted assassination of Lenin at a speech in Moscow, the country was swept into a civil war at the conclusion of 1918. The civil war was between the Cheka, or Red Guard (which became the Red Army under the Lenin-appointed charge of Trotsky) and the White Army, fighting in the name of the 'bourgeois' notion of democracy. Russia was officially 'red' by

November of 1920 after Trotsky's ruthless attacks forced the last remnants of the White Army deep into Siberia. Having lost all previously held support, the White Army general was executed and thrown into a river (Radetsky, 59). The early 1920's were relatively peaceful; the most notable political event was Lenin's implementation of the New Economic Program (NEP). NEP was a response to the extant failures of the economic system, which had resulted in severe inflation and famine throughout the countryside. It combined a "peasant economy, a state sector subject to 'commercial accounting,' private trade and industry, a state and cooperative network of procurement and distribution, a credit system, and a rudimentary capital market" (Smith, 101). In other words, rationing and state mandated distribution of 'subsistence items' ended and permission was granted to cooperatives and individuals to lease small scale private enterprises. The fundamental goal of the program, "to squeeze the rural sector in order to raise the capital necessary for industrial investment," was effectively reached with the establishment of stable currency in 1926 (Smith, 103). Though effective, the NEP was derided by some citizens due to its capitalistic notions of 'trade,' a term still regarded as bourgeois.

Lenin died in 1924 and, explicitly against his will, was succeeded by a Stalin, a high-ranking official known as 'Comrade Index Card' in light of his administrative duties within the Party. Stalin ruled under his slogan 'socialism in one country,' which, in its obvious deviation from Lenin's international goals, was an indication of the different direction in which Stalin intended to guide the USSR.

In 1927, Stalin launched a "massive, no-holds-barred program of industrialization" to make the "Soviet Union into a modern, self-sufficient state" (Radetsky, 86). The First Five Year Plan and its constituent industrialization, collectivization, and revolution of culture completely replaced all NEP-related agendas and activities. Stalin advertised the Plan, and its supposed emulation of the United States' Industrial Revolution, as the answer to Russia's

'backwardness' and as the necessary mechanism of Soviet modernization. Though Stalin's goals were "ludicrously unattainable," the Plan was 'completed' a year ahead of schedule in 1932 with the building of thousands of factory towns, huge public-works projects, the construction of the Moscow subway system, the collectivization of peasantry into an 'agricultural proletariat,' and the liquidation of the kulaks (rich peasants) as a class (Radetsky, 81). At the Seventeenth Party Congress, only two years later, Stalin proclaimed that the foundations of socialism had been successfully laid. The aftermath of the First Five Year Plan, especially the collectivization of farms in an effort to increase yield and efficiency, is often cited as one of the most devastating events in Soviet history. While the kulaks were sent to Soviet forced labor camps, called Gulags, the collectivized peasants were reinstated into virtual serfdom. In efforts to reach established agricultural quotas and secure permanent collectivization, Communist Party members would destroy entire villages if they were thought to be a distraction from the collective – stealing an ear of corn was punishable by death. A widespread retaliatory trend among the peasants was to kill and eat all of the collective's livestock, but this instigated a famine so severe that it essentially "starved the peasants into submission" (Radetsky, 89). Collectivization's detrimental effects were deeply felt until 1960, when grain procurement reached levels comparable to the pre-Revolution years for the first time since the initiation of socialism.

To deter from the failure of collectivization, Stalin launched a propaganda campaign, of which the aforementioned claim of laying the foundations of socialism was paramount and wherein he reported he was "dizzy with success" thanks to the achievements of collectivization (Radetsky, 88). By the mid-1930's Stalin had greatly expanded the Gulag system, and thus began the Great Purges in an effort to rid the Soviet Union of treasonous conspirators. Stalin went on to replace over eighty percent of the Party officials during the height of the 'Great

Terror' in 1937 and enforced total censorship in all jurisdictions, constantly rooting out 'political dissenters' from all walks of life.

Stalin remained in power through World War II and died in 1953. Stalin's interpretation of Bolshevik Marxism and ruthless determination led to the death of millions by famine and execution. Through the 'cult of personality' erected around him and his policies of collectivization and coercion, Stalin created a hierarchical and hegemonic state under an ideological doctrine that was essentially putty in his hands. He was succeeded by Khrushchev, who began the process of de-Stalinization with his 'Secret Speech' in 1956. The Soviet Union as it existed under post-Revolutionary authoritarian control began losing steam in the mid-1980's, but did not officially fall until 1991 when a military coup on Gorbachev created more confusion than revolution and Yeltsin grabbed the unmanned reins. Archives are still being opened to this day and we continue to learn of the intricacies of the Soviet Union as it was run following the 1917 Revolutions. The amount of historical information and academic introspection on this time period is overwhelming and it is hoped that this brief historical background provides a fair and representative chronology of the events pertinent to this thesis.

CASE STUDY

It is important to state at the onset of this argument that propaganda cannot exist without social and political values and an audience. According to a general definition of propaganda as "the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotion, and thereby behavior," propaganda will inherently evolve with the utilizing regime (Kenez, 17). In some regard, studying the changes in propaganda over time and attributing the modifications to the forces of evolutionary selection is synonymous with attributing the modifications of society as a whole to the desire for increased evolutionary fitness. While this may be true in the Soviet case to an

extent, it does not appear that the reign of Lenin, or particularly Stalin, was carried out in an effort to create an altruistic cohesive in-group that would benefit from group selection. It seems more accurate to describe the ultimate goal of Stalin's time in power as ultimate domination and to thereby achieve the highest probability of individual evolutionary success. Therefore, a clear distinction exists between the transformation of propaganda under the conscientious jurisdiction of Lenin and Stalin and the transformation of Soviet society in response to political and social circumstances. The evolution of propaganda as it occurred in the Soviet Union was a natural progression and thereby confers a glimpse into the larger trends of evolution – though the mechanisms of propaganda were directed by individuals, the vision of those individuals was unconsciously intended to aid in evolutionary fitness. Hence, the ultimate trajectory of propaganda is representative of the larger driving forces of Neo-Darwinist natural selection and its correlate theory of motivated behavior.

For both Lenin and Stalin, propaganda was a high priority and a source of deep personal investment. The relative propaganda agendas embodied the ideologies with which each hoped to indoctrinate the citizens of the Soviet Union. Though many vehicles of propaganda were employed throughout the course of the post-Revolutionary propaganda campaigns, including posters, newspaper, rituals, theater, Agitational Trains, movies, radio, and volunteer organizations, the first two were the most prominent in the Soviet Union and were present throughout the regime, and will thus serve as the basis of the argument to follow.

While the latter listed forms of propaganda will not be subjected to the theory of motivated behavior, they were influential in the regime and deserve mention. Ritual, a term that embodies activities spanning from summer solstice celebrations to the placement of icons in the home, was a deeply embedded facet of culture throughout Russia's history. Following the Revolutions of 1917, ritual

was seen “primarily as a form of political socialization, as a way of inculcating the norms and values of the dominant ideology” – in other words, propaganda (Lane, 19). However, Soviet ritual was not unified in socialist ideological content until the 1960’s, well after other forms of propaganda had become totally transformed from their pre-Revolutionary states into a machine of purely Soviet socialist ideology. “Ritual relates the individual to the collective,” and as such aptly fits within the theory of motivation and advantageousness of non-kin groups (Lane, 61). However it did not experience great proliferation within Soviet society until the generation following the revolutionaries was coming of age. The original ‘children of the Revolutions’ acquired their political education and values through both ideological education as well as experience, but the youth in the latter half of the twentieth century received their political socialization through education alone, and ritual’s effectiveness as a “process of cultural management” more aptly fit the needs of the younger generation (Lane, 89).

Theater had been an integral part of Russian culture for many centuries, however due to the size of the territory and large percentage of the populous residing in small villages distributed over the enormous countryside, theater was not an effective method of propaganda on a large scale (Gregor, 59). Stalin utilized theater with increasing frequency in the larger cities throughout the duration of his reign, notoriously imposing complete censorship. In addition, he would only allow those works to be published that were written by his employed playwrights, who were paid to compose plays embodying Party ideals.

‘Agitprop’ Trains, whose namesake was derived from the combination of ‘agitation’ and propaganda,’ were first used in 1918 under Lenin to transport Party literature. They were decorated with Bolshevik posters and housed libraries, some even boasted of having cinematic services, on board. They were not used after the conclusion of the Civil War, however are said to have reached

all areas of the Soviet Union and received three million people during their utilization (White, 23). Movies did not become part of the propaganda arsenal until the late 1920's due to the expense and fickleness of early television technology (Halfin, 38). Similar to theater, movies were much more popular in cities than with the poorer, more diffuse peasant collectives and were created from formulated scripts solely intended to communicate Party ideology (Stites, 126). The utilization of radio for propaganda was also delayed until the latter half of the decade due to previously unattainable technology, but was more popular among the peasants than either theater or movies (Husband 2004, 103).

Volunteer organizations, for which the Komsomol, or 'Communist League of Youth' usually serves as the case in point, attracted members and then used them as human propaganda. Party-related organizations were common and influential, especially in cities where the members of such groups served as the foot soldiers necessary to impart ideology on the masses. However, it was virtually impossible to ensure that the various organizations were properly educated in the Party line. Much of the documented resistance to the Party, especially by the Orthodox Church, occurred due to incomplete or improper 'cadre' (low level Party member or Communist enthusiast) education (Husband 1998, 106). Also, as all efforts at outright resistance to the Party were forcefully eliminated, it became clear that claiming faith in the Party was a strategy of survival and it was thus impossible to determine if the purported faith of a cadre was genuine.

Upon Bolshevik seizure of power in late 1917, Lenin immediately instated a propaganda program intended to bring the "dark masses" to higher levels of 'consciousness' and behavior (Husband 1998, 74). Under Marxist prose, "culture had a purpose, a role in the world-historical universe, and a shape given to it by the classes who produced, controlled, and consumed it" (Stites, 39). Because the Bolsheviks already possessed "true knowledge" through their understanding of Marxism, "the task of the revolutionaries was not to search for knowledge, for

that was already achieved. Their duty was instead to bring the fruits of Marxist analysis to the proletariat" (Kenez, 5). Thus, the primary aim of Lenin's propaganda was "tutelage to and enlightenment of the masses" wherein education was the rudimentary goal (Lenoe, 79). However, the lexicon of party terms used to educate was largely misunderstood by the very people it was attempting to entice. A recognizable proportion of the proletariat class joined the Party as a result of Lenin's massive education campaign; however Party propaganda was largely beyond their understanding and ultimately only largely affected the *intelligentsia*, Russia's self proclaimed class of intellectual elite.

Lenin desired to bring about worldwide socialism, which denied the unifying sentiments of nationalism and implied that any cohesive in-group founded under Party pretense should include the entire world. Such a large in-group and no opposing out-group rendered the potential benefits of in-group altruism by group selection ineffectual. Under Stalin, propaganda evolved into a "shrill militant strike campaign" that curtly appealed to our innate motivation to behave in evolutionarily advantageous ways (Lenoe, 79). During Stalin's reign, propaganda was maximally censored to produce unified messages. The messages were simple directives, establishing a clear hierarchy that could be understood by everyone. The First Five Year Plan embodied goals that instigated solidarity within small groups, for instance among steel workers or the peasants of a specific collective, thereby promoting in-group cohesion and subsequent altruism. Stalin also defined a specific out-group, the kulaks, and proclaimed the desire for the achievement of socialism in one country, the Soviet Union, as opposed to Lenin's visions for worldwide socialism. Stalin's strategy thus inspired cultural in-groups and nationalistic sentiments. Hierarchy is tied to stability in primate cognition, and Stalin effectively utilized mechanisms of propaganda to promote hierarchy, thereby appealing to innate human desires for stable communities and the creation of cohesive groups that would benefit from group selection. His methods of indoctrination were farther-reaching and, as

such, inculcated more people. Since more people received, and could understand, his ideas, more people felt a heightened sense of importance. The neurologically stimulated elevated feeling of control granted by the reception of ideas combined with the uncertainty of the times encouraged citizens to embrace the Party ideology.

Posters have been a rooted aspect of Russian culture since the Empire's conception, and were popular Bolshevik propaganda machines. Among the influences on Soviet posters were the lubok, Orthodox iconography, and pre-Revolutionary art and advertisements. Lubok refers to peasant illustrated woodcuts or broadsides first seen in the early seventeenth century. They functioned as the primary form of pre-Revolutionary literature and included features now classified as the encyclopedia, newspaper, satire sheet, book, and entertainment. Luboks customarily depicted text and corresponding illustrations and were notably similar in format to early propaganda posters (White, 2). Even older an influence was the ancient tradition of icon painting. Icons act as worship aids as well as pictorial commentaries on theological doctrines. Stemming from Byzantine mosaics and frescos, icons are almost purely intended for religious purposes. The most obvious influence of ancient iconography on Soviet propaganda posters is the color red, the word for which means both 'red' and 'beautiful' in Russian. Simultaneously, the presence of red denotes the veneration of important secular figures by incorporation into religious scenarios. According to art historians, "Soviet poster art owed much to the iconographic tradition, perhaps most to all of its use of color, its simple but unified composition, and its direct appeal to the viewer" (White, 7). The claim that Soviet posters were an evolving continuation of pre-Revolutionary art and advertisements is evidenced by the continuities in design, theme, and subject.

Lenin's plan of "monumental enlightenment" was first discussed in April of 1918 in a conversation with the People's Commissar for Enlightenment. Its implementation began immediately thereafter, exemplified by the production of

over four thousand different posters by 1921 (White, 19)³. The poster was an integral part of the earliest propaganda campaigns following the Revolution, because the new regime realized that if it was to carry out the desired 'cultural revolution,' it needed to appeal to the largely uneducated masses⁴. Therefore, a form of propaganda that transcended the written word but could still indoctrinate and educate was of highest premium. However, though posters had supreme indoctrination potential, the complicated and coded tone of pre-Revolutionary posters remained in use under Lenin without adjustments to suit the proletariat.

Many of the posters produced directly following the Revolutions, and until Lenin's death in 1924, featured a large amount of text and showed a negative 'before' picture in contrast to a 'utopian' after picture, or consisted only of a slogan that was so symbolically loaded that it was effectively meaningless and impossible for the illiterate masses to decipher. The verbal descriptions of the symbols presented in the artwork of the poster were often detailed in a style reminiscent of the luboks. The non-educated citizens who could read had a hard time decoding the meaning of the political vernacular developed by the Party that was rife with symbolism and inferred meaning (White, 57). A telling example of this can be seen in a poster titled *Pro trudyashchegoyosa, popa I tuneyadtsa* (Concerning the Toiler, the Priest and the Parasite) in which there are ten frames, each with detailed, symbolically loaded pictures and several explanatory sentences. The masses could not interpret the intended ideology, and

³ The poster displayed as the cover illustration was published in 1920 and demonstrates the symbolism and slogan-ism prevalent under Lenin's propaganda campaign. The title of the poster and text within calls the revolutionaries to 'beat the Whites with the Red wedge.'

⁴ The first census in the Russian Empire was taken in 1897 and reported that less than thirty percent of the population ages nine to forty-nine was literate.



Pro trudyashchegoyosa, pora I tunevadtsa

by Mikhail Cheremnykh in 1921(White, 21).

therefore could not be indoctrinated. Due to the novelty and complexity of the Bolshevik ideology, the early posters could not impart the entire ideology, but could only represent small factions of the total program. There is evidence within the theory of motivated behavior that suggests people are more likely to accept ideas when they are presented as part of an overarching ideology. Accordingly, the intricacies of Marxist Bolshevism were less attractive when presented in individual pieces, as opposed to Stalinist doctrine that primarily focused on the overarching ideological goals of the First Five Year Plan until the mid-1930s. The complex levels of human sociality imply that people have been under the operation of group selection for some time, however selected-for non-kin groups require in-group altruism usually only achievable with indoctrination. Early Soviet posters were popular and a spectacle of interest to all, however the actual Party line message was often lost on the masses and did not create defined in-groups that were cohesive enough to benefit from group selection.⁵ While posters

⁵ Though lost on the masses, the early propaganda posters did serve to further excite educated revolutionaries, likely through a psychological phenomenon known as schema whereby prior knowledge of a subject creates a cognitive framework that allows for easier processing of new, related information. Schematics, those who have a developed schema on a subject, tend to accept messages in accordance with

did play a notable role in the defeat of the White Army in the Civil War, posters used to entice people to the side of the Red Army were usually militant in nature and appealed to people on the basis of defaming the bourgeois thereby creating an in-group by the establishment of an out-group.

According to the aesthetically oriented hypothesis described within the theory of motivated behavior, which says that propaganda can appeal to our built-in visual recognition system, the fact that many of the early Soviet posters displayed both a 'before' and 'after' illustration likely detracted from their potential attraction to human biological wiring. The aesthetic appeal of art that affects our neurology to produce positive or negative feelings is based on our 'innate knowledge' of the way things are supposed to be. The power of art lies in its ability to represent things in accordance with the way things should appear, for instance people are predisposed to favor pictures where the environment is lush and green rather than dead (Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Salter, 289). A derogatory image, even if contrasted with a pleasant one, does not serve to evoke the magnitude of positive feelings experienced by the sight of a singular positive image and therefore does not achieve the possible benefits to be derived from propaganda. Art that does speak to our 'innate knowledge' by portraying images as we inherently feel they ought to be can bring about affirmative feelings and create an association between the good feelings and the corresponding message. If and when this occurs, propaganda has achieved its goal.

After Lenin died and Stalin took over, the creative arts progressively experienced a "crowding down and suffocating, first by systematic ostracism, then by all the forms of boycott and direct economic strangulation in the hands of a state-controlled press and industry" (Eastman, 34). All posters were created with increasingly hegemonic intonation, with the purpose of advertising the goals of the First Five Year Plan: collectivization, industrialization, and dekulakization – all to mobilize the masses. The messages were simplified and less

their preconceived notions and reject those that cause dissonance, thereby ever-increasing their affinity for a notion that they have knowledge of and agree with (Garst and Nelson, 490).

symbolic, and therefore grasping multiple facets of the ideology became easier. In general, while the posters still boasted political slogans, they were more widely understood. The pictures were not as highly symbolic as the early posters had been, but were utopian representations of actual images.



Stalin's Smile Shines for the Future of our Children

by Anonymous in 1951 (Bonnell, 17).

This approach directly appealed to our 'innate knowledge' and created positive associations between the Party ideology and pleasant aesthetic imagery. The posters required no interpretation – they clearly demonstrated an ideological message in an aesthetically pleasing manner that created positive affiliations between visual stimuli and socialist doctrine. A profound association exists between the uncertainty of the times and people's increased propensity to accept an ideology, and though much of the strife during the Five Year Plan was due to the imposed ideology (particularly for the peasantry being collectivized), the societal instability likely heightened the people's propensity for indoctrination. The theoretical components of Stalin's ideology represented in poster

propaganda were clearer, more succinct, and more directed at a hierarchical society, all of which appealed directly to human behavior as motivated by the evolutionary goals of inclusive fitness.

An even more ubiquitous transformation of propaganda styles is evident within the realm of newspaper journalism. In *Agitation, Propaganda, and the 'Stalinization' of the Soviet Press, 1922-1930*, a study of the two newspapers in widest circulation upon the conception of the Soviet Union, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, notes a clear cut stylistic transformation between journalism under Lenin and as it later existed under Stalin, especially upon the implementation of the First Five Year Plan (Lenoe, 1). The printed word was not as prevalent immediately following the Bolshevik ascendance to power due to high rates of illiteracy and the destruction of printing machinery during the Revolutions (White, 43). However, the number of literate cadres exponentially increased following the Civil War, due in part to Lenin's education campaign and the appeal of his political focus on the liberation of the proletariat class as the leader of the Soviet Union, country, and history. Between 1921 and the forced adoption of the First Five Year Plan in 1928, the predominant journalistic genres were those "familiar to the American reader: the wire service report written in an 'objective' style, the editorial commentary, the economic analysis, the short satirical piece about everyday life...Between the middle years of the NEP and the 'high Stalinist' 1930s, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* shifted from relatively nuanced, complex coverage of news and Party policy to the presentation of Soviet society as an army at the command of the 'generals' in the Party" (Lenoe, 1). The shift was the result of Stalin's *udarnaia kampoaniia*, or "strike campaign," and was characterized by shrill, militant agitation. Lenin's theory of agitation and propaganda was fortified and condensed by the "nearly total ideological control under Stalin" (Lenoe, 13). While militant in intonation, the "strike campaign" effectively encouraged the making of a 'new Soviet man' in that it backed away from the harsh agitation of the Civil War period (1918-1921) that had attempted to

mobilize the population around a few cryptic slogans and illusive educational aspirations (Lenoe, 18). Stalin “contended that the paramount function of the press in Soviet society was mobilizing the masses around Party directives,” which required that the masses truly understand the directives. Stalin’s plan to educate consisted of building schools and promoting academic achievement, while Lenin’s had been more concerned with educating people within Marxist socialism. Education became a vital aspect of Stalin’s regime, wherein curriculums and textbooks were created to glorify the ‘motherland’ and reconstruct history in a beneficial way for the Party (Brandenburger, 98). The slogans employed by Stalin were embedded in the Soviet lexicon, but the simultaneous emphasis on education gave the more simplistic slogans of the First Five Year Plan actual meaning. With respect to journalism, Stalin utilized clear directives to mobilize the people, appealing to the masses with an emphasis on news from the ‘shop floors,’ as opposed to Lenin’s pedagogical analyses of Party doctrine and usage of cryptic slogans that proved meaningless to the masses. The situation is aptly depicted in *The Short Course to Modernity*: “What changed in Soviet journalism between NEP and the First Five Year Plan was not the Party’s theories about agitation, propaganda and the press, but Party leaders’ orientation within those theories” (Brandenburger, 79). Compared to the tactics used by Lenin, Stalin’s “strike campaign” was more appealing to the constructs of human evolution – the ideology was better understood and therefore better embodied, resulting in individuals feeling connected and important. In addition, cohesive in-groups were derived from the subsequent indoctrination, and a stabilizing hierarchy was more clearly presented through the streamlining of journalism due to enforced censorship.

CONCLUSION

In 1932 Stalin proclaimed that the goals of the First Five Year Plan were completed early, and two years later, that the Soviet Union had successfully laid the foundations of socialism. Though a bold exaggeration meant in part to deter from the horrendous famine that was a direct consequence of the Plan, tremendous mobilization and industrialization did occur in the Soviet Union at an unprecedented pace. It was not the Party line, nor its faith in propaganda as important tool of the regime, that changed, but the methods and styles with which the Party doctrine was presented to the people. While Stalin greatly benefited from being Lenin's successor, his deviations from Lenin's strategies were very effective; he employed mechanisms within the propaganda campaign that were more in tune with the way human cognition is wired as a result of the selection pressures of evolution. Though Stalin did not have an explicitly scientific or psychological background, the mechanisms by which he transformed propaganda more accurately appealed to the neurological foundations of human motivation than those employed by Lenin.

Propaganda is a dynamic medium that changes with the state, therefore some of the modifications instigated by Stalin were not likely intended to specifically transform propaganda, but transform the state as a whole. Though impossible to clearly delineate between propaganda's causes and effects, Stalin better facilitated propaganda that appealed to human nature. From the birth of the Soviet Union in 1917 to the height of the Great Terror purges, propaganda underwent continuous restructuring towards methods that more aptly appeal to the psyche of humanity as it has evolved through Darwinian natural selection. In the paradigm of the theory of human motivation, humans are motivated to behave in ways that increase the probability of an individual achieving 'inclusive fitness.' As such, the propensity to be indoctrinated has allowed humans to ascertain belief systems that appear to go against fundamental rules of natural selection – and these belief systems are due to the mechanistic group selection among humans. Therefore, indoctrination appears be advantageous in allowing

humans to create cohesive non-kin in-groups that are selected for as a mechanism by which individuals achieve genetic propagation, rather than solely by the typical conception of selection by kin. In addition, hierarchical societies are common across species, suggesting that hierarchy substantiates stability, and further, that stability leads to longevity. Pertaining to propaganda, art is capable of eliciting emotional responses that are effectively tied to the message associated with the visual stimuli. As Soviet propaganda evolved under Lenin and then Stalin, it capitalized on the human condition and our proclivity for indoctrination. Poster art was transformed over time to more effectively appeal to the aesthetic registry embedded in human cognition. Journalism evolved into a medium capable of promoting the formation of in-groups and consequent cohesion deemed advantageous by evolution through group selection. Soviet propaganda's increased appeal to the evolutionary sentiments of the masses over time endowed it with the ability to indoctrinate, present a coherent ideology, and establish a hegemonic hierarchy.

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