

The Political Warfare
Executive Syllabus
Volume II

The Political Warfare Executive Syllabus Volume II:

Words at War

By

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CHAPTER 1

THE PRACTICALITIES OF POLITICAL WARFARE

Introduction

Disinformation spread by Russia's "web brigades," "troll armies," "troll factories" and "troll farms" have wreaked havoc on the electoral processes of Western democracies. Through political blogs, international political forums, and YouTube videos, among numerous other media formats, "Kremlinbots," known in the jargon of the dark web as "sockpuppets,"¹ have orchestrated black and grey propaganda campaigns aimed at undermining the confidence that individual citizens have in their political apparatus. It is political warfare at its most effective and would most likely have been appreciated by the World War Two denizens of Woburn Abbey.

The warriors of Britain's Political Warfare Executive (PWE) would certainly have had a professional appreciation for the "trolls" who managed to disrupt the politics of so many powerful and technologically savvy nations. They would have felt quite at home in the practices the Russian trolls employ as they attack their enemies. Not only that, but the Russian "trolls" would have felt very comfortable living at Woburn Abbey, an early analogue version of the "troll farm." So much so, that it is likely that the Russians are operating a school for their propaganda careerists.

State-sponsored anonymous Internet political trolling may be new, but the concept of "trolling" a foreign power is not. It has existed in one form or another since humans organised themselves into the most rudimentary of communities. A nineteenth-century example of this is the Prussian Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, provoking France into declaring a war that provided the circumstances for Prussian leadership

¹ The term "sockpuppet" refers to the misleading use of identities in an online environment. It is more than simply assuming an alias while online. The "sockpuppet" will pose as a neutral third-party offering political analysis and commentary.

of a new German Empire. By exploiting the fear in the German-speaking world of the French invasion of the independent southern German states, Bismarck managed to make Prussia the dominant force in the new-born empire.

Not all trolling need end in war. In fact, the goal that the PWE aimed for was a form of peace that, through political warfare, resulted in the absence of a “hot war.”

To reach this goal, the PWE had to translate the theory dealt with in the previous volume into practice. This book will deal with the lectures delivered by PWE instructors focussed on realising propaganda concepts.

Central to this was the understanding that different practices were needed in the various situations, places and times as they presented themselves to the PWE operatives. The theoretical lectures of the previous volume tended to be general in topic and strategic in scope. They were not so much a “how-to” manual than an explanation as to why things might be done as they were. They also spent more time discussing hypothetical situations and involved possible outcomes.

The lectures in this volume will devote more time to the actual delivery of propaganda and how they might be used in conjunction with combat operations.

There was another important factor that determined the content of these lectures. As of February of 1944, the PWE was to train the liberation, reconstruction, and occupation officers for the planned invasion and conquest of Western Europe. This required a considerable need to rethink their approach to the lectures. First, and probably most significant, was the fact that the PWE was to train both British and American officers. In fact, in the last course they offered after D-Day, the majority of participants were American and not British or even Commonwealth personnel. This meant that the lectures would need to avoid issues that might have caused controversy. Furthermore, the officers would need to receive a basic grounding on the historical background of the country they were either to help rebuild or occupy. Finally, they would need to change their basis of operation from winning the war to securing the peace in Europe.

The problem was that no one was an expert or a professional political warrior. The PWE was really a collection of gifted amateurs. Additionally, there was no way of ensuring consistent results from the PWE's various working groups. It was soon decided that the PWE needed a means of ensuring a constant stream of individuals with

sufficient background knowledge to carry out the duties required of the Political Warfare Officer (PWO).

The Training School

Initially, the PWE thought that the training facility should be established at Woburn Abbey. This decision had not been taken lightly and had several good reasons for this being the correct course of action. Woburn Abbey, being the centre of operations for the PWE at that time, already had as part of its establishment many of the people required to deliver courses in political warfare methodology and who had actual experience in producing and delivering propaganda. It should be noted when this decision was taken the PWE did not yet fully appreciate what would be necessary for the reoccupation and liberation of Western Europe.

A further reason for choosing Woburn Abbey was its relative remoteness. One of the issues that the PWE always had to deal with was the high number of foreigners that it employed. These were mostly refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe and specialists in the various cultures that the PWE would encounter. The problem was that they might easily be spotted entering a building that housed top-secret activities. This would have caused considerable unrest, not necessarily amongst the ordinary people, but the journalists who might raise uncomfortable questions and thus steer the ire of the ordinary person in the street.

It was also possible for the trainees to gain a unique experience at Woburn Abbey, because of the ongoing production of leaflets and other oral propaganda and communications. It allowed them to experience contact with agents as they worked in the areas for which they were being trained. A team, led by Sefton Delmer, were preparing broadcasts for the clandestine radio broadcaster "Gustav Siegfried Eins" and were stationed in nearby Bedfordshire. They would have been an invaluable resource if not for the formal training then for the informal learning that went on because of everyday fraternising if experts in the practicalities of propaganda delivery. This gave the trainees the opportunity to learn about both frontline and backline wireless propaganda. Moreover, the PWE thought that it would have given the candidates an understanding of how a tool such as *Aspidistra* could be used and how the two types of propaganda, broadcast and leaflet, could be coordinated with one another.

It was also suggested that since the SOE already operated a propaganda training school at Woburn that certain economies and efficiencies might be gained in this way. It seems that the entire debate as to why the PWE and the SOE were split into two separate entities had been forgotten. Though the political in-fighting continued at the highest levels, on an operational level, there was a great deal of cooperation and assistance offered by professionals who realised that they were all on the same side. There was also the realisation that they had much to learn from one another.

Finally, Woburn Abbey already contained intelligence departments for the various countries with which they were concerned. This meant that individuals did not need to commute. Moreover, the Foreign Office had also located personnel at Woburn, and the PWE thought that they might be able to tap into these individuals as instructors as well.

To this point, the PWE training school had made do with whatever facilities it could finally procure. Usually, this meant that they delivered their programs at Woburn Abbey. They did indeed use it initially but had procured facilities at Brondesbury in the northwest of London. After some delays, the first classes were held there toward the end of December 1943. As a result of the PWE Training School finally having its own dedicated facility, the programme hereafter was often referred to as the Brondesbury Training School.

In terms of what the PWE had in mind for their candidates, this was rather straightforward. They needed to train their people in the following areas: intelligence, leaflet production, broadcasting, and oral propaganda. It should be noted that oral propaganda was different from broadcasting in that it involved what they called “whispering” campaigns or what later became known as “rumours.”

In looking at these four categories, it is interesting to note how they understood them fitting into the whole of the training necessary to produce a PWO. While they knew that they were to produce propaganda, they also understood that the building blocks of their propaganda had to come from somewhere. They needed information that could be turned into intelligence. That is, they needed to gain intelligence that might be “useful for influencing the population on the lines required by the propaganda plan for the country concerned.”² Pupils, as they were sometimes referred to, were to be trained to recognize the types of intelligence that would be helpful in the production of propaganda. That is, they were not to just inundate the

² “Training of Personnel for the Second Front,” TNA FO 898/98.

PWE with information that was not particularly salient to what they were trying to accomplish, but, act as an initial filter to ensure that only information with intelligence potential was passed on or given priority. This would have ensured that the conduits for the analysis of intelligence were not clogged with the unnecessary or unusable. Once the students had mastered the basics of intelligence gathering, they were instructed on how to determine which information would be useful for them in the field, which they should retain for their own use and that which was to be communicated to the PWE in London.

In terms of leaflet production, the operatives were to have a working knowledge of how leaflets were produced and the work that went into creating them. It should be noted that they were not expected to print the documents, but it was recommended that an understanding of how this took place would be of benefit in terms of making suggestions related to their own unique territories. It was also vital for them to understand this so that they could provide appropriate supervision in the dissemination of these leaflets. This meant that they functioned somewhat similarly to forward observers for the artillery. That is, they were responsible for the propaganda landing on target and making corrections as necessary.

Broadcasting was split into two subfields. First, they needed to understand *Aspidistra* and how it functioned as a propaganda tool. This required the agents to send suggestions back from the front line. In addition to this, PWOs also needed to understand broadcasting techniques. It was not necessarily the case that the PWE wanted to turn each one of their agents into a newsreader, but they did realize that on several occasions their agents would need to step in and take over a local station that had been occupied by the BEF. For this advanced training, they suggested that the BBC unit located at Bedford College could take responsibility for this.³

A final area of concentration was oral propaganda. This, like broadcasting, consisted of two subunits. Foremost, the agents were to learn how to spread “whispers.”⁴ These targeted the enemy and were thought necessary to mislead or depress them. On the other hand, it was also important to be able to communicate with the local population. This, of course, went beyond just being able to speak the language and involved the cultural nuances important in

³ Bedford College was officially known as “Bedford College for Women” and was associated with the University of London in 1900.

⁴ The term “sibs” is often used in PWE documents rather than “whispers.”

communication. Perhaps most importantly, it was necessary to encourage their “friends.” It was also noted that both methods had already been practised by Woburn Abbey and were part of everyday operations there.

The next issue that the PWE addressed was that of who was to teach these courses. Clearly, subject area experts were necessary for knowledgeable instruction, but they also thought it necessary to suggest that the instructors have experience in teaching. They knew that they could supply the first, it was really in the second area that they were lacking. Here they made rather bold choices. They were very clear about not wanting instructors from the universities, though this was often openly ignored.⁵ What they were looking for initially were instructors from the fighting services. That is, people who would focus on teaching the PWOs what they needed to know rather than the theory that might lie behind what they were being taught. It was also suggested that the Director of Military Intelligence supply an officer who would analyse the situation at the PWE and make suggestions as to additions and emendations that might be made to the curriculum of the PWE Training School. It was even thought that this individual, if suitable, could be appointed as Head of Training and be seconded to the PWE. However, there is no evidence that this study was carried out.

It seems that women were excluded from the Training School, though exceptions were made. Garnett reports that the PWE mission to West Africa was to include four women. It would not have been unusual for women to be involved in this type of work. Many women were employed at Bletchley Park for example. Moreover, the SOE had no inhibitions in using women as agents. But, with the PWE it was somewhat unusual. Garnett says that these women went through the program in early 1943.⁶ However, later that same year, in August, one reads in the surviving files that the issue of training women was very much up in the air and that they were not actively being sought as PWOs. This is not to say that they, that is the PWE, did not welcome women in their ranks. Eventually, for reasons that are not entirely clear, women were excluded merely because the PWE had not received

⁵ This is attested by the template letter the PWE prepared in mid-1943 asking the universities for help in recruiting men, though they left the door open for the recruitment of women in the future, TNA FO 898/98.

⁶ Garnett indicates that, in November 1942, Sedgwick reported that for women and nine men had been trained for the west African mission. Garnett page 397.

the explicit permission, despite having asked during committee meetings on several occasions, whether they could be included.

It is notable that in terms of the candidates, the PWE did not necessarily recommend that their existing staff undergo this training. Perhaps, it was because they were already employed in specific tasks and that they did not necessarily see an advantage to reassigning them to duties outside of the country. The same argument seems to have been made by various other directors in the British military establishment, and thus the PWE was not allowed to recruit from within the active services. It seems that the PWE had made initial contact with Brigadier Neville since he indicated that he would be of assistance in finding suitable pupils. But even here, there was some hesitancy in that they include the statement "at the appropriate moment."

There was, however, one problem. The War Cabinet still had personnel located in Woburn Abbey. This being the case, they just did not have the room to accommodate the additional personnel. There were also other tensions regarding the space allocated to the PWE at Woburn. Apparently, there had been some rumours that the code-breakers at Bletchley, due to its proximity to Woburn Abbey, would commandeer it if they were ever bombed. They also suggested that new huts might be built on the park if necessary. In their mind, it seems that there were no other choices open to them. They saw the location of the school at Woburn as something that had to be done so that they could maintain continuous contact between the students and the actual work being carried out by the PWE. One might even consider this a type of internship or apprenticeship for the students. Classroom instruction that was supported and augmented by targeted, practical experience.

Next, the existence of the PWE Training School was formalised. As of January 1, 1943, R.L. Sedgwick was to be the commandant of the training school. With this came an expansion of the material covered in the approximately three-week course. Garnett reports that the entire curriculum consisted of 61 lectures with more than half of those being delivered by Sedgwick himself. This is consistent with the ratio of lectures that have survived in the archival holdings, though evidence suggests the number of different lectures is more than 80. This meant that those attending lectures had very little time to do anything but try to absorb the information that came streaming in their direction. They attended 20 lectures a week, meaning that they had approximately 4 hours of lectures every day. According to subsequent schedules, they

did receive two days off every week, though those days most likely were taken up with a great deal of reading, practical demonstrations, and practice doing actual broadcasts.

In all of this, the administrators of the training school had to obtain the facilities to deliver their courses. This became especially important later in 1943 when it became quite clear that they would need many trained officers to support the invasion of France and the liberation of German-occupied Western Europe. It was, at this point, that the PWE switched from the training of “propaganda warriors” to the preparation of individuals for the work of reoccupation and liberation. They were destined to become part of what was known by its acronym, AMGOT (Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories). Thus, from the 1st of September 1943 onward the PWE Training School began to seriously deal with issues of running continuous courses of some 20 to 25 candidates and ensuring that they have approximately 400 trained individuals ready by April of 1944.⁷

Redefining War

When one considers the meaning of the word “war” it conjures specific images in one’s mind established by one’s cultural milieu. The average person has not been programmed to think of war as the absence of battles in which soldiers confront and try to kill one another. Though terms such as “Cold War” were developed after the Second World War, it was considered a prelude to a “Shooting War.” The reason for this is that this conceptualisation has been reinforced by popular culture over the millennia. From D.W. Griffith’s *The Fugitive* and Homer’s *Iliad* to Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* and Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, the popular image of war is that of armed soldiers carrying, or having under their control, deadly weapons designed to make the enemy bend to one’s will.

War, in the minds of most people, is rarely about how one might attack another nation without the use of physical force. Even when, on rare occasion, the theme of war by other means is taken up in film, television, or printed literature, it serves as an ancillary to the actual physical battles undertaken by “real” soldiers. It is thus little wonder

⁷ They must have received some indication from SHAEF in 1943 that the liberation of the continent would begin in spring of the following year, because they note on a few occasions that April 1944 was a target date for them to be ready.

that the image of war does not allow an easy association with the activities of the PWE other than in a quaint supporting role undertaken by pipe-smoking gentlemen in tweed jackets.

Organisations such as the PWE by the very nature of their work must lead a dual existence. The PWE, of necessity, leaves the limelight and glory to the traditional three fighting arms: the army, navy, and air force. However, this “fourth fighting arm,” which, ironically, thrives on capturing the imaginations of the media’s audiences, must remain in the shadows and call no attention to itself.⁸ If the PWE had been less than absolutely secretive about their activities they would have lost their effectiveness as a weapon that is meant to undermine the ideological underpinnings of the enemy.

Resorting to playing on the thoughts and emotions of one’s enemy, and anyone else whose mental state of mind might have an impact on the outcome of a given conflict, is simply not how war is pictured. However, the world has changed and with it the way in which we conduct war. This had already been imagined by JFC Fuller's *Tanks in the Great War*:

To-day we stand upon the threshold of a new epoch in the history of the world—war based on petrol, the natural sequent of an industry based on steam. That we have attained the final step on the evolutionary ladder of war is most unlikely, for mechanical and chemical weapons may disappear and be replaced by others still more terrible. Electricity has scarcely yet been touched upon and it is not impossible that mechanical warfare will be replaced by one of a wireless nature, and that not only the elements, but man's flesh and bones, will be controlled by the "fluid" which to-day we do not even understand. This method of imposing the will of one man on another may in its turn be replaced by a purely psychological warfare, wherein weapons are not even used or battlefields sought or loss of life or limb aimed at; but, in place, the corruption of the human reason, the dimming of the human intellect, and the disintegration of the moral and spiritual life of one nation by the influence of the will of another is accomplished.⁹

The PWE endeavoured to systematise this mode of operating on the battlefield of the mind and thought. Not only that, but, the PWE was committed to fully developing its potential and then passing it on to

⁸ Lieutenant Colonel R.L. Sedgwick, Director of Studies of the PWE Training School, repeatedly referred to political warfare as “the Fourth Fighting Arm” and argued strenuously that it should be seen as an equal to the three traditional fighting arms of the military.

⁹ JFC Fuller, *Tanks in the Great War*, 1920, p. 320.

future generations. The curriculum they developed in the darkest days of World War Two is still the fundament by which today's political/psychological warriors operate. In fact, warfare is now closer than ever before to Fuller's "wireless" battlefield. The PWE saw beyond the fossilised notion that war is conducted on a battlefield as defined by Napoleon, Wellington, and Blücher at Waterloo, by brave young men whose two concerns might be not dying and being seen the coward in the face of the enemy.

Since the First World War, the battlefield was permanently changed. War, since then, has required sustained industrial effort which has made every citizen a combatant and thus a fair target in military operations. The PWE admitted to this in their manual entitled *Political Warfare Executive. The Meaning, Techniques and Methods of Political Warfare*:

With the progressive development of Total War – with civilians in uniform replacing the professional armies, with the gradual and now final involvement of the entire economy and therefore the entire population in the prosecution of war – the emphasis of political action has now changed. The winning of Allies, or the disrupting of the enemy, is no longer confined principally to the reaction of the hierarchies of nations.¹⁰

This meant that the state of mind of the ordinary citizenry became of concern in the overall war effort. While battlefield dynamics and the speed at which wars are fought have changed once again due to advancements in weapons and networked communications technology, a further result of Fuller's "electric warfare," it has created an environment in which the former disinterested citizen has become even more interwoven with the conduct of war than in World War Two.

By equating war with the physical mechanics of battle, one loses sight of the purpose and goals that lead to war. The aim of war is not usually the simple killing and maiming of the enemy. If this were the case, there would never be a ceasefire, armistice, or peace treaty. There must be a set of parameters that, when satisfied, would cause the winning side to stop fighting. In the case of World War Two in Europe, at least for the PWE reflecting the wishes of Great Britain's leadership, it was the destruction of the National Socialists as the government of

¹⁰ Page 1, TNA FO 898/101. The PWE produced two manuals under this title. One was designated as "Confidential" while the other was considered "Secret." The Secret version used as a reference here is longer and addresses the particulars of POW re-education, Black Propaganda.

Germany and establishing conditions that would prevent any future armed conflicts in Europe.¹¹ The way that the PWE thought this second objective could be achieved was primarily through the psychological and spiritual disarming of Germany.

However, disarming Germany was not the only war aim. A further concern that appears in the lectures, particularly in those dealing with the Low Countries and Norway in the post-war period, is Britain establishing itself as their primary trading partner. In the case of France, the British were very concerned about creating political and cultural influence there. The PWE trainees were sensitised to these issues. The subtexts of the lectures reveal that the war was not fought for nebulous notions of democracy and freedom alone.

There was also the recognition that what the PWE was trying to do was not new. However, one might correctly conclude that certain aspects of the PWE's work were novel, especially those involving the preparation of occupation officers. The PWE manual recognises that the British are using a definition of political warfare that is not necessarily compatible with how its allies viewed what they are doing. Moreover, in the relatively new concept of what the PWE termed Ideological Warfare, they engaged in something that had never been attempted, in particular on this grand a scale. The PWE had to set aside the notions of "psychological warfare" (which their American ally embraced), "morale warfare" (a term that the PWE used on occasion) and focus on the ideological re-education of an entire nation. It is the concept of "ideological warfare" that is the most intriguing and pertinent to what they were trying to accomplish during the period immediately after Germany's surrender. Up until 1949, all of the Allies, except perhaps the French, were fighting for ideological supremacy in the souls of the Germans.

Tactical and Strategic Propaganda

As trainees were taught the "do's and don'ts" of propaganda, they were also introduced to the differences between strategic and tactical propaganda. In the lectures, they are sometimes alternately referred to as long- and short-term propaganda. According to the instructors at Brondesbury, the purpose of strategic propaganda was to:

¹¹ The emphasis on building for a post-war peace is found in numerous lectures such as those given by Sutton, Giffard-Martel, Sedgwick, Bodington, Alexander, and Bicknell. It is also echoed on pages 3 to 5 of the above noted PWE manual.

1. Make the audience believe what you are saying.
2. Cause the audience to draw from those truths the conclusions you wish them to come to.

On the tactical side, the implementation of propaganda according to the PWE consisted of:

1. Indicating that a particular action is a logical consequence of their opinion.¹²
2. This type of propaganda plants the seed that supports strategic propaganda but is of short-term scope.
3. Tactical propaganda causes the target to consider what is offered as a viable option if nothing else.
4. Like strategic propaganda, the target should act on those thoughts.

In discussions on the nature of strategic propaganda, the PWE instructors once again took the opportunity to thrust home the point of propaganda needing to focus on a single point, with one or two additional points being the maximum. Moreover, no words or images should be wasted in chasing that which was not germane to the crux of the argument being made.

It is notable in the lecture notes prepared by the PWE instructors that frequent references are made to commentary on propaganda made by Hitler and Goebbels. In addition, other National Socialist authors on the topic of the use of propaganda in the political life of nations such as Ewald Banse and Albrecht Blau are also mentioned.¹³ If nothing else, it demonstrates the meticulous study the PWE instructors made of propaganda theory and its application. In fact, there are numerous works in which the German approach to propaganda is very carefully studied.

While the ideas conveyed by the instructors may represent the enemy's point of view, it shows that within the confines of the training school the PWE was open to learning from their enemy and the

¹² Note, the PWE instructors did not say that one needed to present the propaganda in a logical manner, but only that the decision made by the target appear to be a logical conclusion based on the information provided.

¹³ Ewald Banse was famous at the time as a military and political theorist and his writings were carefully studied by both the American and the British even before the war. Albrecht Blau published the basic textbook on German psychological warfare in 1938 and devoted his research to the study of comparative national psychology. His approach to political/psychological warfare is sometimes labelled "Intellectual Warfare" by the Allies.

methods they employed. They learned lessons on both that which worked and that which did not work in German propaganda and gave credit where it was due. In other words, the PWE was far from the environment created by the BBC and the MOI in which all things associated with Hitler, Goebbels and the National Socialists were mocked and ridiculed and considered tainted.

Strategic propaganda's purpose was to prepare the population to act on tactical propaganda when called upon. It was not so much the purpose of tactical propaganda to enhance strategic goals. Instead, PWE trainees were taught that strategic propaganda held the target population in a state of readiness waiting for tactical propaganda to trigger actions of benefit to the Allied cause, sometimes in very localised situations. It was not the only reason, but perhaps the most important one. Therefore, trainees were advised to coordinate the two carefully.

The success of the overall propaganda campaign was dependent on strategic and tactical propaganda not asking its audience to do something for which it was not prepared. Instructors underlined that should the tactical propagandist hurry the story beyond the target population's ability to understand why an action was required they would react with confusion. This would lead to a form of mental paralysis that would immediately negate any momentum they might have had and would then lead to inaction or even backlash. It could also put the army in the field in danger as it tried to manoeuvre through the country in an effort to maintain pressure on what they presumed would be a retreating German army.

The heart of what the trainees were being taught was selling the possibility of things being otherwise. As the PWE instructors emphasized, by having a German soldier tuck a "safe conduct" leaflet in his boot, he was already admitting that there was a possibility of his desertion, which, even though it might be slight, was the first evidence of the inertia required for the soldier to surrender to the enemy.¹⁴ Furthermore, they taught that even inaction could be seen as a form of action. If it was not possible to receive prisoners in an advantageous manner, it might be that one's forces were unusually thin on the ground at a given time. This could lead to enemy soldiers changing their minds and returning to their own lines. It could be that an enemy soldier might be prepared to surrender because he thought his forces

¹⁴ "Reference Note for Lecture 4: Long- and Short-Term Propaganda" TNA FO 898-101.

were severely outnumbered and they wanted to mitigate the possibility of being killed in a futile battle. They might then turn around and provide this intelligence to their own side with the excuse for their absence being reconnaissance of the enemy's positions. This might then result in a defeat at the hands of the enemy. In this case, it would be better to suggest to the enemy that he should remain where he is and not surrender at that time. In other words, the appropriate action would be for those wanting to surrender to wait and take no action.

The same was true most often for the civilian population. If one's Army is planning to move up a road, the least desirable thing would be for that road to be filled with civilian traffic hoping to avoid the coming battle. The propagandist in the field would need to try to keep civilians off the roads for both the good of the advancing army, so that it would not become bogged down in civilian traffic and thus becoming easy targets, and the safety of the civilians who would become collateral targets. It would be far better for all concerned that the civilians take no action and remain where they were.

In reference to the above situation, it was also recommended that if one had nothing for the target audience to do, it would be better to say just that rather than manufacture something that would amount to busy work. They suggested that having them do nothing is still evidence of them having confidence in the propagandist's message. In that way, this pseudo-action could still be a demonstration of their support for the Allied cause.

The PWE instructors also addressed some of the practicalities of working in a strategic or tactical propaganda unit. "Reference Notes for Lecture Five: The Short-range Leaflet" outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of working in either of these areas.¹⁵ The advantages of long-range strategic propaganda were:

1. The propagandist can work in safety.
2. The propagandist has a comfortable environment.
3. They tend to have all the best and most up-to-date equipment available to do their work.
4. They have access to the best technicians should something break down or go wrong.
5. They have as much intelligence as possible available to them from all their allies.

¹⁵ The following paraphrases suggestions made in the notes for lecture five, February 1944, TNA FO 898-101.

6. They have the most up-to-date reports on what the enemy's long-range propaganda is doing.
7. Usually, the propagandist can do good work under such conditions.
8. They also have time on their side, which means that they can take their time to make certain that they get what they are doing right, and they are able to reinforce their message. In other words, they have more than one opportunity to plant the idea in the target's mind.
9. Above all, they can create a grander narrative or image of what they are trying to say.

There are, however, certain disadvantages that come with strategic propaganda:

1. There is the uncertainty about who is being reached.
2. They do not know how many are being reached.
3. They are never entirely sure that the message they intend for their target actually arrives intact.
4. It is possible that their broadcast can be intercepted or jammed.
5. Aircraft carrying leaflets could be shot down before they have an opportunity to drop their payload.
6. There may be gaps in local intelligence that may cause significant shifts in opinion and outlook of which they may not be aware.
7. News may not always reach London for days or weeks, and they may be including material in their propaganda that is no longer pertinent to those on the ground.
8. They may not be aware of all of the unexpressed fears and complaints that the target audience might have. This could lead to them overlooking issues in the lives of people in occupied areas with them then wondering how cross the British must be not to address a particular issue of import.

In terms of tactical propaganda, there were some definite advantages. Most of the disadvantages of strategic propaganda could be turned to the advantage of the tactical propagandist. The same can be said of the advantages of the strategic propagandist.

1. The most significant disadvantage was the complete disconnect that the tactical propagandist sometimes experienced from intelligence that was gathered by the strategic propagandists.

2. They used local sources or whatever they could pick up on the radio, with this often being incomplete.
3. The news received on the radio was not specific to their area, so they would repeat information that was of little benefit in their assigned area or may actually be detrimental to their work.
4. Finally, they also found themselves reacting far more to the enemy press than would be the case for the strategic propagandist. In some ways, this allowed the enemy to dictate the direction once propaganda is going to take.

Nevertheless, there are some advantages.

1. The tactical propagandist was on the spot and did not have to rely on intelligence that may have gone through a number of different hands before he received it. At the most, his intelligence was second-hand.
2. He knew precisely what was going on in his district. This was in opposition to what the situation for the strategic propagandist was.
3. He knew the minds of the local population, which was something that the strategic propagandist could often only guess at. Thus, the long-range propagandist needed to write in generalities in order to not localize his message too much.
4. The tactical propagandist could see what did and did not work almost immediately and could also institute changes just as quickly.
5. He could also target very precisely where his propaganda was going and thus avoid some of the pitfalls of strategic propaganda; that is, having to cover so much ground that it runs the risk of becoming bland and ineffectual.

The PWE instructors structured their lectures to address issues from a very practical point of view. That is, what they did was hands-on. This meant that the trainees were often presented with various scenarios and then asked to produce an appropriate propaganda piece to deal with the situation as outlined by the instructor. One such example ran as follows:

1. The propaganda trainee was given two choices for a topic.
2. The context was that there was nothing specific that the propagandist could address at that particular time and that what they were doing was merely ensuring that there was a steady stream of propaganda targeting the enemy.

The choices of action that they had were:

1. Create propaganda dealing with the Allied landings in North Africa.
2. Create propaganda dealing with a high rate of sinkings of cargo ships in the North Atlantic by the U-boats.

PWE recruits were taught that in tactical situations they were to avoid topics that required technical data to prove their point. This was why they would have advised against creating material in a short-range situation dealing with the Battle of the North Atlantic. It was simply fraught with too many difficulties that they might not be able to overcome in the short time they had to prepare and deliver their message. In the case of the North African landings, there was no disputing that it had taken place and that the Germans had been defeated there, or, at the very least, they had made a strategic retreat. There was no need to get into numbers and statistics because the facts were agreed on by both sides.¹⁶ They would not have to argue on what basis these claims are being made.

The North Atlantic was another story. The battle was not yet over, and the propagandist could not avoid debating the parameters of what would constitute defeat. The Germans might even argue that the numbers were irrelevant because the battle was ongoing. Moreover, the battle's success might not be measured by the numbers of ships and tonnage, but what was happening in Britain as a result of the ships being sunk. For example, they might suggest that even if they were sinking fewer ships, that the ships they were sinking were high-value targets such as tankers. Moreover, it might also just be the case that the people living in the region that the PWO was operating simply did not care about the Battle of the North Atlantic. On the other hand, an invasion on land is something that might cause them to think of the possibility of the same happening where they were.

¹⁶ There is a brief discussion of this in a "Most Secret Memo" from T.A. Rose to Air Commodore Groves 13.9.1943 in which Rose notes that the strategic propaganda unit does argue the tonnage of bombs dropped on Germany in a series of leaflets that were dropped on Kreefeld (in June 1943) after a raid there. They also note the satisfactory dispersion of the leaflets. TNA FO 898-451.

Learning About Propaganda and Messaging¹⁷

Once a decision had been made regarding the propaganda target and how the political weapon was to be constructed and applied, it was necessary to write the copy. To do this, the propagandist was taught that he needed to balance two crucial elements: 1) it had to be pleasing to the eye and to the mind, and 2) the message needed to be simple and easy to understand.

In order to more easily achieve this, the PWE taught their trainees to follow a straightforward system. First and foremost, the budding propagandist was taught to catch the attention of the target. Second, and very quickly, he needed to present his motivation for the action the target was to take. In doing so, the propagandist was to apply the following rules to his message. In the case of a leaflet;

- 1) The words employed were not to be complex. The simpler the vocabulary the better. Extended adjectives were to be avoided because the image created in the target's mind's eye would have been too intricate to be quickly understood. It invites thought and not reaction.
- 2) It is to be delivered in the same language of a good news story. The focus is not on your ability to write entertaining or artistic prose. The words are not to call attention to their elegance nor sentences to their clever construction.
- 3) It is about the target and not the writer.
- 4) The propagandist was not to try and convince or persuade the target of anything. Rather, they were to "lead" the target to the conclusion that coincided with the "why" of the propaganda item or goals they had established at the beginning of the exercise.

The trainees were also taught by their instructors that only about 20% of the population had "any marked degree of intellectual ability." In this, they echoed the opinions of Goebbels and Hitler. For the PWE instructors, his was not in specific reference to the Germans, Italians, or French, but applied to any population. This meant that in whatever language they were writing, the trainees would do well to adhere to something similar to *Ogden's Basic English* which consisted of 850 English words with which one could, in proper combination, communicate any thought.

¹⁷ Based on the third set of "Lecture Reference Notes," TNA FO 898/101.

While keeping the vocabulary easy to understand by the "man in the street," the concept was also to be kept simple. The PWE did not insinuate that the "man in the street" was stupid, just that he was not much interested in long-winded intellectual arguments that presupposed a considerable background in, and understanding of, political theory. Moreover, the position being stated should move forward to its climax in a straightforward manner with a constant eye to the conclusion and how what was being said contributed to leading the target to reach the desired conclusion. This meant that each sentence and paragraph must logically and naturally transition into one another without the reader having to think about how these two ideas related to one another. The writing style was to be concrete with a prudent choice of vocabulary.

According to the PWE training school guidelines, humour was to be avoided. This was not so much a matter of getting the joke wrong or the joke not entirely translating well. While it may not always be the case, there was the danger that the propaganda leaflet's intended readership may not think that the author is treating the topic seriously enough. So, if the writer did not consider this to be a serious topic, why should the audience consider it to be significant? The pragmatic approach to humour in propaganda suggested that a propagandist would rarely be accused of not telling a joke when they should have. The converse was far more likely to be the case.

Another of the critical aspects of writing good propaganda in the view of the PWE was to know what the other side was saying about your target. As important as knowing in general what the opposition media was talking about in their coverage. Thus, one could avoid contradictions in one's own propaganda, while at the same time identifying contradictions in the other side's approach. It is in the probing for these weaknesses that they collected intelligence for their arguments. This allowed the PWE propagandist to take advantage of weaknesses in the opposition's message.

To be effective, a propagandist had to know the audience being targeted. They could not write propaganda with their own national or cultural sensibilities in mind. The propagandists had to extend themselves beyond just using the appropriate colloquialisms in their creations and had to command an extensive understanding of their target's cultural milieu. What mattered was what the target audience was interested in. What the propagandist understood or enjoyed was of no consequence or interest in this type of writing.

An example of how this was put into play was the editing process that went into the creation of the "Nach Hitlers Sturz" leaflet. The leaflet

was created in June of 1942 with at least three different iterations being dropped on Germany between June 3 and August 12, 1942. The leaflet was set up like a present-day FAQ. Norman Cameron,¹⁸ writing to Duncan Wilson,¹⁹ noted that there would most likely be some confusion on the part of the Germans targeted by the leaflet. He points out that Question IV, “Will the United Nations hold the entire German nation responsible or only call the guilty to account?”²⁰ would most likely be confusing to the German. The response given in the leaflet’s draft read in part “...everyone who has committed a crime will be punished, like the destruction of towns and villages in the name of retribution...”²¹ Cameron noted that most German would not know about Lidice, which had been destroyed in reprisal from June 9 to 10, 1943 for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. He suggested that they might think the leaflet was referring to the destruction of British cities by German bomber crews.

The prose of the propagandist was expected to deal in the concrete and specifics. Abstract writing, in their view, could address only generalities. The PWE held that when one remained with specific examples, the reader was not required to overthink how the situation being described might apply to their own world. This was because concrete terminology was directly accessible and understood by the reader through their senses. These would be words like spoon, cable, or soup. Even a word such as “ogre,” which had become concrete through its iconic place within Western storytelling traditions, could be considered tangible.

The “ogre” had a general agreement as to meaning. However, it should only be used in propaganda targeting a friendly audience. This is important to remember because it is in the use of a negative term that one would not lead an enemy audience to the conclusion that you would want them to reach. It just would not work to insult the audience

¹⁸ Cameron was a British poet and worked with the PWE and associated organizations dealing with Germany and Austria until 1947.

¹⁹ Wilson worked with the PWE producing leaflets targeting Germany. He was also a regular Training School lecturer according to David Garnett (354) and was tasked on occasion with delivering lectures at the Civil Affairs training facility at Shrivenham. None of his lecture notes have as yet been found in archival holdings.

²⁰ Author’s Translation from draft of “Nach Hitlers Sturz” (TNA FO 898-451).

²¹ Author’s Translation from memo from Norman Cameron to Duncan Wilson. 18.6.1942 (TNA FO 898-451).

and then expect them to agree with you. In the case of the term "ogre", the British had already cultivated that image of the German since before the First World War. So, their home audiences would understand the reference to the point of it being concrete for the home audience. On the other hand, the Germans would only reject the notion outright as being nonsensical. The propaganda thus would have absolutely no chance of landing even a glancing blow. If anything, it would have precisely the opposite effect of that being sought after, unless your goal is to have the enemy shut your message out.

Other words that were to be avoided were: love, hate, democracy, freedom, and any of the "-isms" that one might encounter. Love and hate are emotions that can mean different things to different people. The word "love" can be understood to mean: the feelings between a mother and a child, making love to a prostitute, or how one might feel about one's favourite food. The same may be said of a word like "hate." There are no single definitions of these words for them to be reliably used in propaganda to enemy audiences. This, however, does not mean you cannot use the emotions or stir those emotions. One just cannot use the words. Terminology such as democracy and freedom is even more problematic in that the concepts can mean very different things and practice while conceptually the definitions might appear similar.

The Use of Emotions²²

The emotional engagement of the propaganda target was an essential principle of the SO1/PWE's mode of operating from the very beginning. When the British propaganda effort represented by the BBC's "German Talks" series was criticised for "not maintaining its standard of dignity" by *The Manchester Guardian*, SO1 sought to justify its approach to delivering propaganda to Germany. T.G. Barnam, in a report dated October 29, 1939, dismissed the criticism by noting that the propaganda was not created for the British public's approval.²³ Its intention was to attack German social cohesion in this very early stage of the war and thus the only thing that mattered was whether it worked in Germany.

The German criticism against the "German Talks" - made by trusted Germans living in Britain - was, however, taken seriously. SO1/PWE

²² Based on "BBC German Talks," as report by T.G.B. [T.G. Barman] 29.10.1939, TNA FO 898-178.

²³ Ibid.

believed that the German propaganda machine had succeeded in so altering the German mentality that “quiet appeals to reason [were] hardly likely to be successful, at least in the first stage.”²⁴ It was only through the application of a powerful antidote that they thought they would have any chance of changing the minds of the Germans who had been exposed to Goebbels’ relentless message.

Barnam noted that Military Intelligence in Holland reported that “during the crisis in September 1938, Germans living in Holland had reacted to it in exactly the same way as the masses living in Germany.”²⁵ This was in spite of the fact that these Germans had lived in Holland for years, they all seemed to believe what the Germans within Germany believed. He concluded that “No appeal to reason could alter this conviction.”²⁶ The second example dealt with non-German women who had settled in Germany and had married Germans. Though these women started out as critical of the Nazi regime, it only took a few months in Germany to make them bitterly hostile towards the world outside. They were, in his estimation as hostile as “any full-blooded Nazi, in spite of the fact that they go on reading newspapers sent from home and letters from relatives abroad.”²⁷

For this reason, Barnam was convinced, as indeed were most others involved in the SO1/PWE, that British propaganda broadcasts had to primarily appeal to German emotions and not to the German intellect. He had concluded that to all intents and purposes the German intellect had ceased to function.

For this reason, he recommended that, while the news had to be reported in as straight a manner as possible, talks or opinion pieces should be as packed with much emotion and many emotional appeals as possible. To this end, he even recommended that quotations from German poets be employed to strike home the message, though he does indicate that this might not be effective with those under 40-years of age.²⁸ He also believed that they could take a softer approach “by

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The crisis referred to had as its fulcrum the German accusation that Czechoslovakia, France and England were preparing to attack.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. It ought to be noted that Barnam was a little out of touch with the realities of the Germany of 1939. He recommends the use of the poetry of Heine and suggests that it would be extremely effective. By this time Heine’s books