

# Questions Our Propaganda Must Ask

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**I**N THE propaganda war against the Soviet empire, our international broadcasting has done more than establish itself in business. It is heard behind the Iron Curtain; it has kept many of those who hear it from despairing. Yet Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America are still on the defensive. There is a war to be won, and we have not moved to attack.

Our logical aim in the cold war is to bring about the collapse of Soviet tyranny from within, thus avoiding the necessity of having perhaps to break it one day by force of arms. If the Soviet empire were the monolith it pretends to be, this would be an idle dream. Soviet rule is firmly entrenched, but only those blinded by admiration or by fear can ignore the growing tensions within the structure. But the Soviet empire is not yet crumbling, as some people would have us believe, and there is much for us to do.

A look at the discrepancy between Communist theory and Communist practice should give us our best clues for action. Communist theory emancipates; Communist reality oppresses and terrifies. Terror marks every man within the Soviet orbit. This terror is imposed by the few but threatens all. Any distinction between Communists and non-Communists ceases to apply. Executioner and victim alike are afraid—for the Soviet executioner himself is a potential, even probable, victim.

Syllogism: Every Soviet subject is afraid: no human being enjoys permanent fear; all subjects of the Kremlin would welcome any change that freed them from fear. If this is true, our propaganda need not blueprint the precise means of a change to democracy.

We have been seeking unattainable

goals and unnecessary precision. This has been a cause of weakness. We have felt that we must make promises or threats. This has made us appear as though we were talking to children, and no people like to be cajoled and threatened as if they were children.

## No Threats, No Promises

Moreover, what are we to offer to whom, and under what conditions?



Whom are we to threaten, and with what, and for what crimes? It is not surprising that no democratic, satisfactory answers have been found to the questions, because they spring from a paternalistic, undemocratic attitude.

“Those people” are more numerous than we are, and are endowed with the same basic qualities, rights, and common sense. At present, in the throes of the totalitarian affliction, they may behave like morons or monsters, but they are neither. Nor are they children, no matter how childish—on the emotional plane—their society may appear (with its corporal punishment, lying, stealing, bullying, bragging, etc.). To resort to

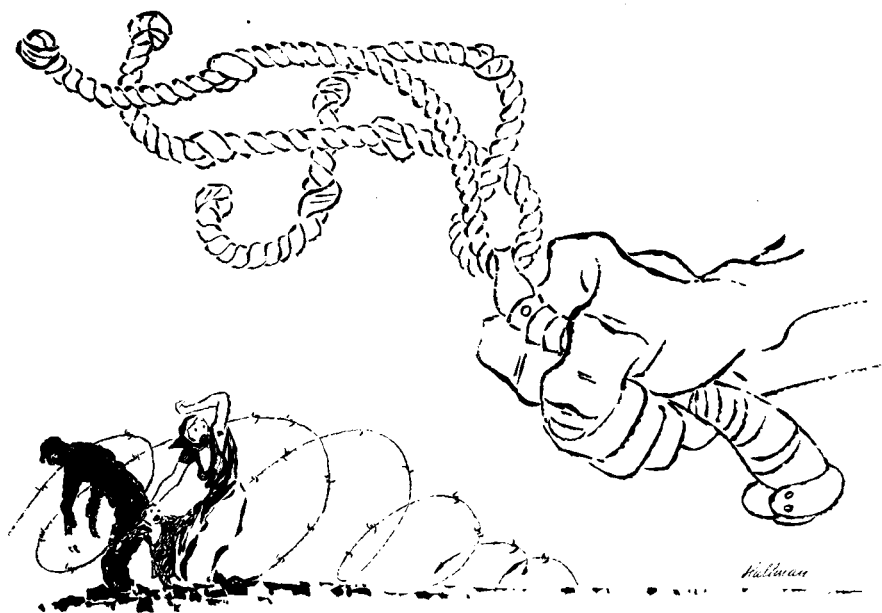
promises and threats is to convey to our listeners that we have no confidence in them.

We do not have to offer the Russian or the satellite peoples anything *instead* of the system which is for all of them, in one way or another, the most frightful, destructive, and frustrating way of life yet attained. We must simply try to make them realize that the system is doomed as a political, economic, and social experiment; that the terror that holds it together is not invincible or permanent; and that we in the West can be lived with and will lend a helping hand if such a hand is wanted after the Stalinist Tower of Babel has been made to disintegrate. We should make them realize that the most pernicious of all Soviet propaganda tenets—that Red totalitarianism cannot be brought to an end except by military force applied from without—is pure fantasy.

## Thought and Conscience

That is why, instead of telling our listeners with deadly monotony about the evils of Communism, we must ask them to think for themselves. This cannot be accomplished by opposing counterclaim to claim. What the Soviet leaders fear most of all is that their subjects should think for themselves. The totalitarian machine does not simply substitute misinformation for truth. That is only its first line of defense. Nor is it content to suppress the expression of free thought. It aims at *the suppression of thought itself*, at the deactivation of the mind, because it knows that thoughts, whether expressed or not, can be “dangerous” (as the Japanese chose to phrase it).

Such attempts at demobilizing the mind are well illustrated by the German example. When the Information



Control Division of the U.S. Army reached Germany, it expected to find manuscripts in every desk and drawer, produced and hidden by fearless and thinking men during the long night of tyranny. Nothing whatever was found. No one had written anything. The Hitler machine had actually succeeded in suppressing thought. For the Big Lie, German or Russian, is not simply a device to make people believe something that is untrue. It does not necessarily aim at being believed. (We often say, quite correctly, "Not even a Nazi or Communist can believe *that* . . .") The ultimate function of the Big Lie is to make people impervious to the truth by discrediting the spoken and written word as a vehicle of thought communication. Its aim is to incite, like an archaic battle cry; to conjure up alluring or frightful fantasies; to hypnotize the listener into oblivion of reality.

### Consciences in the Deep Freeze

But the authoritarian machine cannot content itself with immobilizing its collective mind; it must also deactivate its collective conscience. In the destructive, anti-human society of totalitarianism, everyone to a greater or lesser extent has a bad conscience. Bad consciences, as we all know, are appeased with rationalizations, and one of the basic functions of totalitarian propaganda is to provide them.

"But we *had* to believe Hitler," Nazis cried after the collapse of the Third Reich. "Otherwise our whole world would have crumbled!" The greater

the transgression, the greater must be the flight into unreality. When it becomes total, as in the murderous and suicidal totalitarian society, the rationalization, the excuse, must also become total. Since there is no total excuse except God, the system becomes a religion and the leader a god.

Thus, trans-Curtain propaganda must plow the ground in order to give the seedling of truth a chance to take hold and grow and bear fruit. It must reactivate and mobilize minds in the face of cunning and energetic opposition; it must mobilize consciences by dissolving the rationalizations employed to appease them; it must alleviate the fears of an unknown future.

And it cannot do so by saying: "We are democratic and you are imperialist; we are peaceful and you seek war; we are innocent and you are guilty." Counterclaims are defensive, and, what is worse, a bore to everybody; the more ingenious, righteous, and cleverly documented they are, the more boring.

If we want our message to have the opposite ring and effect from theirs, we should be humble where they are haughty, tolerant where they are vengeful, doubtful where they are certain, mature where they are childish; we should treat men as individuals where they treat them as cogs, speak to men as adults where they speak to them as children, treat people with respect where they treat them with contempt. We can do all this without going one iota beyond official U.S. or U.N. policy.

The Soviets always deal with catego-

ries—Communists, Fascists, imperialists, kulaks, enemies of the people, toilers—and we follow close on their heels in this respect. In view of the fact, however, that there is hardly a human being who fits completely into any of these categories or completely identifies himself with it, nobody ever feels directly addressed when categories are either praised or condemned.

The efforts to categorize people and mount an offensive on this treacherous ground becomes particularly apparent when the attempt is made to "drive a wedge between Communists and anti-Communists." In a country where Communism is in the opposition, it is not always easy to make a clear distinction between Communists and anti-Communists (look at European neutralism). In a country where Communism rules, such a distinction is impossible and meaningless.

Propaganda must speak to individuals, Communist or not, and never to categories, no matter how subtly established. The essential difference between categories and individuals is that the latter are capable of change, the former are not. To treat living and changing people as symbols of certain categories is one of the basic disorders of our time, and the essence of the totalitarian system. For our present propaganda activities, it is the fastest and surest road to self-defeat.

### The Ineffective Threat

The Soviet machine terrifies everyone into conforming, regardless of how inclined or opposed an individual may be to the official line of action. At present, we can think of nothing better than attempts to terrify leading Communists into opposition to the régime. This may appear logical and "hardheaded" at first glance, but an elementary psychological consideration must raise doubts. It is unlikely that men already terrified will be affected by the possibility of distant, uncertain retribution.

Once again, Germany may serve as a warning. It was when the totalitarian cause was already hopeless that the gas chambers were instituted; it was only when the Nazis had become terrified to the point of panic that they used the gas chambers day and night.

Stalin and his enslaved slave drivers try to implant the idea that for all individuals their downfall would have consequences too frightful even to con-

template. It is our business to suggest to those involved that their fear of the results of Soviet collapse is not in proportion to reality. While the Soviet machine tries to prevent its servants from even contemplating what the end would be like, we should persuade them to do just that.

In this connection a little cynicism is not entirely impermissible; it might be suggested that they look at what happened after defeat in West Germany. It is a shortcoming of our present propaganda effort, especially of the programs beamed to the satellites, that the principal emphasis is placed on Soviet exploitation, miserable economic conditions, etc. "The Russian people," exclaimed an exasperated Russian refugee, "are not interested in iceboxes; they are interested in freedom!" Perhaps that sounds a little too encouraging; yet is it not rhetoric but fact that, under certain political conditions, physical and material considerations become of secondary importance.

A human being deprived both of material goods and of freedom will feel the loss of freedom more than hunger, more than poverty. This is not because man is incurably idealistic but because he cannot endure the total loss of individual rights.

### A Man Is Not Alone

Like all totalitarians, the Soviets try to divide in order to rule. The machine not only attempts to divide nation and nation, group and group; it attempts to divide children and parents, brother and sister, individual from individual. Around every person there is a wall of fear that prevents complete cooperation or communication with his neighbor.

This is of vital importance to the machine, because it knows that the sum total of hostility and antagonism against it is always greater than that of the support it enjoys. Thus, while it utilizes the support by permitting it to amalgamate and come out in the open, it keeps "subversive" energy from coalescing by imprisoning and compartmentalizing it behind walls of fear and distrust. In order to work for a growing unity of anti-Communist forces we should have frequent broadcasts telling our listeners that people may turn out not to be what they appear to be. Just as the clandestine critic of the régime may be an *agent provo-*

*cateur*, the zealous Communist may be at the point of defection.

This is the result of a dictatorship that makes frank relations between human beings impossible as long as it lasts. The system bases its strength on the fact, among other things, that under it everybody distrusts, fears—and therefore dislikes—everybody else. We can tell our listener not to do the system this favor. Naturally, he must be careful and cannot express himself freely. But when he meets other people, he might do well to give them the benefit of the doubt, to keep his final judgment in abeyance. We should remind our listeners constantly that the proportion of genuine pro-Communist and anti-Communist forces in his shop, dwelling, city, and country is quite different from what it appears to be. Contrary to all appearances, he is far from alone; in fact, nobody is alone except those who have committed themselves to Communism.

### Questions and Missiles

The Soviet and U.S. propaganda machines *tell* the individual something—they do it all day long—but neither Russians nor Americans *ask* the individual for his opinions. It is made dreadfully and doubly plain to him that



his opinions are of no interest; all that the warring factions want from him is his allegiance and consent. As a result, he does not need a mind and forgets how to use it. This is exactly what the

strategists of totalitarian thought want. Why must we do what they want?

Cold warfare would be well advised to ask questions—and then ask more questions. Not the rhetorical ones, of course, which are used *ad nauseam* by propagandists, and cannot fail to irritate the listener even more than any amount of exhortation or preaching; but genuine questions, questions to which we do not know the answers. Naturally the listener is in no position to give us answers. But, more than anything else, the mature, sincere, and unemotional discussion of baffling problems can stimulate his imagination, his conscience, his mind.

The presentation of an airtight plan, the expression of unshakable convictions, self-righteous pontification on the obvious, the compulsion to fit everything into a "line," the haughty or pseudo-humble account of one's own accomplishments plainly told for an ulterior purpose—all these are devices from the totalitarian propaganda arsenal. They are useful devices; they are the very instruments with which the dictatorships have brought the imaginative, constructive, human side of their subjects' brains to a standstill. They are tools suited to totalitarian objectives. It follows that the same tools, employed for the purpose of spreading democracy, are suicidal. Soviet radio broadcasts are so devised that the listener *stops* thinking at the end of the transmission. Ours should be such that he *begins* to think when he shuts off his receiver. Thought is followed by action, and this indirect way of influencing action by inducing thought is propaganda's only—but great—opportunity.

If we are to revive independent thought behind the Iron Curtain, we must deal even with controversial matters, and the questions we ask must be intelligent, worthwhile, and insistent. They must produce new vistas, hopes, attitudes. Emphasis on the question can free our propaganda from the stale, static, defensive, boring formulas that govern it now.

Dictators hate questions. Unlike the statement, the question does not require the *confidence* of those to whom it is put in order to be effective. It is the symbol of intelligence, tolerance, and concern for other people. It is a sign of self-confidence, a proof of honesty, a sign of strength.

# Four Politicians in Two Acts

*Two dialogues concerning the availability of Adlai Stevenson*

WILLIAM H. HESSLER

(What follows is fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is probably deliberate, but in no case malicious in intent.)

## ACT I

The scene is a comfortable room in the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C. Two Democratic National Committeemen, John and George, are sprawled in easy chairs in their shirt-sleeves, sipping highballs. The room is, of course, appropriately smoke-filled. The time, mid-June, 1952.

JOHN: Sure, wait and see! Wait and see! I tell you, we *can't* wait and see! All right, so the Ike boom misses, and they nominate Taft after all. And we're sitting on our hands watching this Kefauver get the freest free ride that our screwy primary system ever gave anybody.

GEORGE: I know, I know. You want to smoke out Adlai Stevenson before the G.O.P. show. You want to warm him up in the bull pen. I tell you I don't like it. The man's got Illinois in the palm of his hand. He's Governor for four more years. He's where he ought to be, building up for 1956. Springfield's the best farm for new players in this league. I say leave him alone. All you'll do is hurt him in Illinois and stir up a fight at Chicago. Besides, he's said no . . . No! . . . NO! Everybody heard him.

JOHN: Now look. He *has* said No, but he's dodged when they asked him about a genuine draft. Says it's hypothetical. George, when a man says a question is hypothetical, it means either

modesty or discretion forbids him to answer.

GEORGE: I don't say you're wrong about that. I've never met the man who'd refuse the Presidency—unless he's already had it seven years. But it hurts a man to be looked over and voted on and then sidetracked or defeated. I say leave him clean, riding high in Illinois. Four more years at Springfield and he'll look as big as Roosevelt did in 1932. He'll look like Lincoln—I mean a Democratic Lincoln.

JOHN: It's a slovenly comparison, my boy. Ad Stevenson went to Princeton. He's an experienced diplomat. He comes from a family that's been in public service for generations. But let's not argue. Let's look at facts. And pass me that bottle. This stuff makes for calmer consideration of basic problems.

Now, Truman's left us on the defensive on Communism in government, honesty in government, Federal extravagance, inflation, socialist reforms, labor domination—on every issue but one

—foreign policy. Even if Acheson is a liability—and I'm not saying he is—the one thing Truman's got on the credit side is a damn good foreign policy. It works. George, that's all we've got to make hay out of. We need somebody that can make hay with it. And that's not Estes!

GEORGE: That's for sure. But remember, Adlai testified for Alger Hiss, and you know—

JOHN: Hold on, George. Adlai refused to go East to testify. He gave a deposition. He wasn't asked what *he* thought of Hiss, but what *other people* thought of him when he was a little big shot in the State Department. They've got nothing on Adlai in the Hiss business.

GEORGE: All right. Then what about the divorce?

JOHN: That's been cleared with the right clerics. He got a clean bill. The divorce thing is just a gimmick the McCarthy wing of the electorate has picked up. They talk about the divorce because they haven't got the courage to come out and say they're against Stevenson because he's an intellectual. If they didn't have the divorce, they'd cook up something else.

GEORGE: You're eloquent today, Johnny. But I guess you're right.

Anyway, I see more trouble with this brainy boy of ours out in Springfield. We want to pull this split-up party of ours together. We didn't have a chance till H.S.T. eased himself out. Now we've got a chance. But we have to find a fellow that will suit Dick Russell and those boys down South.

JOHN: Where a Democrat is an

