

THE RISE OF TOTALITARIANISM

Viewpoints

A powerful propaganda machine helped Adolf Hitler take over Germany. In the first excerpt, Joseph Goebbels, director of the Nazi propaganda machine, keeps track of the election campaign. In the second, American news correspondent William Shirer reacts to what he has seen in Germany ♦ *As you read, think about the use of propaganda in modern politics. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Hitler's Propaganda Machine

From *My Part in Germany's Fight* by Joseph Goebbels

[Feb. 29] Our propaganda is working at high pressure. The clerical work is finished. Now the technical side of the fight begins. What enormous preparations are necessary to organize such a vast distribution!

Reported to the Leader [Hitler] at noon. I gave him details as to the measures we are taking. The election campaign is chiefly to be fought by means of placards and addresses [speeches]. . . . Fifty thousand gramophone records have been made, which are so small they can be slipped into an ordinary envelope. The supporters of the Government will be astonished when they place these miniature records on the gramophone!

In Berlin everything is going well. A film [of me] is being made. . . . It is to be shown in all public gardens and squares in the larger cities. . . .

[March 18] A critical innovation: the Leader will conduct this next campaign by plane. By this means he will be able to speak three or four times a day at various places . . . and address about one and a half millions of people in spite of the time being so short.



1930s Nazi poster

From *Berlin Diary* by William L. Shirer

I'm beginning to comprehend, I think, some of the reasons for Hitler's astounding success. . . . he is restoring pageantry and color and mysticism to the drab lives of twentieth-century Germans. This morning's opening meeting . . . was more than a gorgeous show. . . . The hall was a sea of brightly colored flags. Even Hitler's arrival was made dramatic. The band stopped playing. . . . Hitler appeared in the back of the auditorium, and followed by his aides, . . . he strode slowly down the long center aisle while 30,000 hands were raised in salute.

It is a ritual, the old-timers say, which is always followed. Then an immense symphony orchestra played Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*. Great klieg lights played on the stage. . . .

In such an atmosphere no wonder, then, that every word dropped by Hitler seemed like an inspired Word from on high. Man's—or at least the German's—critical faculty is swept away at such moments, and every lie pronounced is accepted as high truth itself.

Sources: (1) *My Part in Germany's Fight*, by Joseph Goebbels, trans. Kurt Fielder (Howard Fertig, 1979); (2) *Berlin Diary*, by William L. Shirer. Copyright the William L. Shirer Literary Trust.

Questions to Think About

- How did the Nazis use what was then new technology?
- What is Shirer's explanation for the effectiveness of Hitler's giant rallies?
- Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** Why do you think Nazi propaganda techniques worked so well?