



Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic (Rhetoric & Public Affairs)

Randall L. Bytwerk

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Why do totalitarian propaganda such as those created in Nazi Germany and the former German Democratic Republic initially succeed, and why do they ultimately fail? Outside observers often make two serious mistakes when they interpret the propaganda of this time. First, they assume the propaganda worked largely because they were supported by a police state, that people cheered Hitler and Honecker because they feared the consequences of not doing so. Second, they assume that propaganda really succeeded in persuading most of the citizenry that the Nuremberg rallies were a reflection of how most Germans thought, or that most East Germans were convinced Marxist-Leninists. Subsequently, World War II Allies feared that rooting out Nazism would be a very difficult task. No leading scholar or politician in the West expected East Germany to collapse nearly as rapidly as it did. Effective propaganda depends on a full range of persuasive methods, from the gentlest suggestion to overt violence, which the dictatorships of the twentieth century understood well.

In many ways, modern totalitarian movements present worldviews that are religious in nature. Nazism and Marxism-Leninism presented themselves as explanations for all of life—culture, morality, science, history, and recreation. They provided people with reasons for accepting the status quo. *Bending Spines* examines the full range of persuasive techniques used by Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic, and concludes that both systems failed in part because they expected more of their propaganda than it was able to deliver.

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