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Art and Revolution

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German vs. Soviet Union Poster Propaganda

During the world wars, the fascists and communists went head-to-head on the battlefield and the printing presses. For the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the easiest way to spread the word of the government was through posters and flyers. They were the mold for these nations' morals and emotions during a time of revolution, while also encouraging citizens to consider the global impact of their actions. These mass-produced products set the pace for the nation's drive for capitalism and developed an addiction to the cause. They created a supportive relationship between what was in other media, like theater and radio, therefore maintaining a constant flow of information to the people. Nazi Propaganda targeted “patriotic groups, anti-communists, disenchanted liberals, defeated veterans of the Great War, and the socially, economically vulnerable, all of whom responded to the narrative of national humiliation and betrayal (Deligiannis 1).” The Soviet Union used its posters to legitimize its power as its leadership shifted from Lenin to Stalin, and the nation was on its way to a revolution. Through repetition and saturation in public spaces, these images became deeply ingrained in people’s minds. The aim was not only to spread the word but also to craft an ideology that became an integral part of citizens' daily thoughts. While the Great Wars were at a head, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany shared revolutionary aesthetics but different ideologies to spread the fundamental

ideals of the government to their nations through poster propaganda based on subject matter, form, and politics.

A shared belief in propaganda the Germans and Soviets agreed on was that the fate of their nations would be in the hands of future generations. Both of these countries depicted large families: women performed motherly duties, men were in uniform, and children completed good deeds, as seen in Figures 1 (NSDAP poster) and 2 *"In favor of a joyful, flourishing childhood! In favor of a happy, close-knit family!"*. Figure 1, the German poster, illustrates a large, idealized family in the arms of an eagle, symbolizing the security brought by the country. A prime example of women in the country being placed at the epicenter of bearing the totalitarian regime for generations to come—often presenting a selective version of reality—is constructed to seem authentic or truthful. These images reinforce right and wrong behavior while correcting those who don't follow accordingly. In Figure 1, Germany illustrates the "correct" way to raise a child at the time by producing more children to follow in the footsteps of the regime. Figure 2 tells a similar narrative, but in this one, it is conveyed directly through imagery, suggesting that raising children in the Soviet Union is a proper way of life. The Soviet poster, Figure 2, like the German poster, glorifies the communist experience by emphasizing a healthy way of life to set a positive example for the nation. The women of both countries were placed at the forefront of building an image of longevity within the beliefs of Nazism and communist Russia. Figure 3, Felix Albrecht's "Mothers, Working Women – We Vote for National Socialists" (List 8, 1932), is also a prime example of women being seen only as mothers and wives in Nazism. This use of women as a sense of comfort shaped their depiction, making them only worth what they were in a relationship with the man who characterized them and gave them value. The implementation of

families was crucial in developing unification within the nations. For Germany, the goal was to construct the pureblood and an outlier within Nazism; for the Soviet Union the goal was to generated the utopian narrative of communism.

"A poster, either political or not, consists of three basic elements: simplicity in design, a fascinating image and a direct message (Rowe 1927: 179)" (Karatzas 79). Both the Soviet Union and Germany used similar forms in typography, color, idealized figures, and symbols. Figures 3 and 4 (Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Books, 1924)* both use bold text that is easy to read from a distance. For propaganda, the image needs to be immediately legible and easy to grasp. Many German and Soviet flyers use a lot of text to fill the page, simply stating the message represented in the imagery. This can be seen in Figure 5, "To have more, one should produce more. To produce more, one should know more." This Soviet flyer utilized words to convey what they expected from their nation rather than direct imagery. Like in previous flyers, the artist incorporates persuasive language around the main image in the center. All posters, excluding Figure 1, use the color red in either the text or the image itself. Red was used to incite xenophobia and anti-semitism in German propaganda. The color was seen as connected to the Red Army or a symbol of blood; it is a dominant color that leads the nation to side with victory in their beliefs. Nazi art was based in classical style; utilizing modern art to depict the nation within poster propaganda was controversial. Soviet poster art was based on social realism, while German art followed the Aryan model and was anti-modernist. Many flyers—like Figure 6, "*Support the assistance program for mothers and children,"* which supports the NSV—used similar subject matter to the Renaissance period. The woman is framed like a holy figure, nursing a baby like the *Madonna and Child*. By mimicking this classical scene to depict the

women and children of Germany, the Nazis are implying that women in that generation are giving birth to the messiah. Like during the Roman Republic, the ideal German society was based on old values, so their artists trained in classical style, making the poster propaganda reflect that. There are symbols of each nation included in their posters, as depicted in Figures 2 and 6. Figure 2, labeling their posters for global communication, features a baby holding the Soviet flag, and Figure 6 includes the National Socialist People's Welfare Organisation (NSV) symbol in Germany at the time. If we connect these uses of semiotics with actual graphic symbols to the model mother mentioned earlier, it takes the form of an ideal symbol of German women, such as a flag or an emblem.

During the Soviet era, the three key means by which the political system was built were production, distribution, and exchange, especially during the emergence of Stalin's Five-Year Plan. The socialist ideals were spread mainly through print materials, as shown in Figures 4 and 5. Aleksandr Rodchenko's, *Books,* promotes literacy and thinking while uplifting those at a disadvantage within the nation. Stalin wanted to create a community that better served one another and a more educated society. Figure 5 states, *"To have more, one should produce more. To produce more, one should know more,"* therefore promoting similar ideals in a broader sense. It alludes to the idea that a more educated person has more value in a socialist society because they can contribute more to an economy based on production. While the Soviets leaned on idealism and expectations, Germany used tactics of fear and created the "other" in its campaigns, also incorporating religion. German media illustrated Jewish people, depicting them as spies against the country; by doing so, Germany conjured an enemy for their followers to combat and allowed for Hitler to gain the popular vote. For some subject matters, the destruction of churches

from bombings was illustrated to conjure anger and fear against the opposing forces. With religion spanning large groups, it creates a sense of security in like-mindedness; there is no room to think differently than the media that is being supplied. Like the Germans, the Soviets still depicted an outlier in their media; it was not based on religion but on capitalism. The bourgeoisie was the class enemy of the communists; this can be seen in posters like Figure 2, depicting a humble family with just each other. For both totalitarian regimes, the goal was to create a utopian society, one based on communist ideals in one case and fascist ones in the other.

Whether on the frontlines of the battlefield or in the art studio, conjuring the next poster art, the Soviets and Germans were in a constant fight for the last word. During the two Great Wars, the governments of the two nations had ideals that needed to be instilled, and the most optimal way was through propaganda on paper. In times of revolution, posters affect the ethics and emotions of nations, instilling right and wrong or correcting old ways. The drive for capitalism was at a high, and an addiction to the cause was pivotal in keeping a constant need for media. The posters reiterated what was seen in other medias, therefore keeping audiences emotionally and politically engaged. Posters legitimized power during a time of shifting leaders and nation-building during the Russian Revolution. A subject matter that was repeated and oversaturated in both nations' propaganda was the heavy reliance on women and large families, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. Women were seen only as wives and mothers, bearing the next generation that would further the communist and fascist causes, at times visually being compared to Madonna or icons for their importance. Visually, these posters shared similar design choices, such as typography, color, Aryan figures, focal points, and symbols. In the large text, the constant use of the color red and the integration of symbols create a similarity in form between

the two. Within the forms, the religious undertones to convey politics are strong; Germany relied on religion to push their agenda. The Soviet Union strictly used politics and capitalism to construct the bourgeoisie as the enemy. All these tactics were utilized in the propaganda of these countries during the World Wars. The Soviet Union and Germany shared revolutionary aesthetics but different ideologies in their poster propaganda, which established their nations' ethics and emotions during a time of revolution.

Fig. 1 *"Support the assistance program for mothers and children."* NSDAP poster.

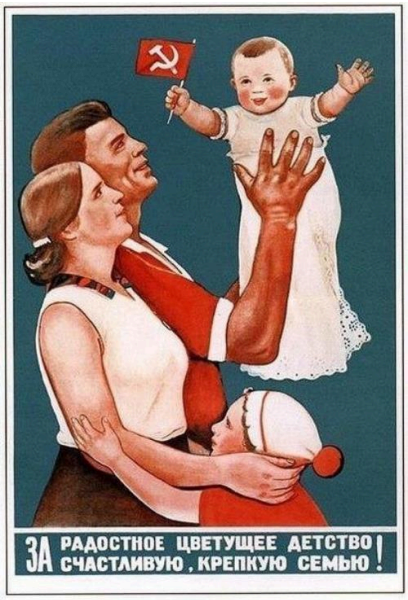

Fig. 2 "*In favor of a joyful, flourishing childhood! In favor of a happy, close-knit family!"*

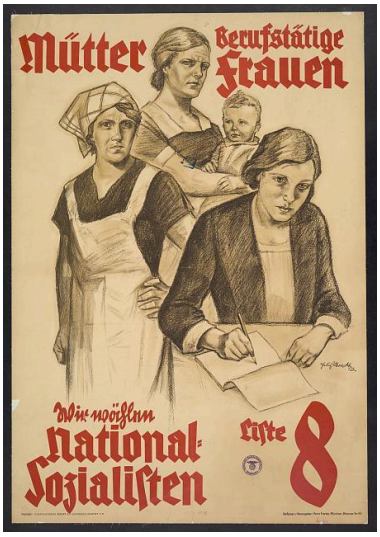

Fig. 3 Felix Albrecht, "Mothers, Working Women – We Vote for National Socialists" (List 8, 1932)

Fig. 4 Aleksandr Rodchenko, *"Books", 1924*

Fig. 5 "To have more, one should produce more. To produce more, one should know more."

Fig. 6 "*Support the assistance program for mothers and children"* supporting the NSV

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