

Extracts from a government report on bombing and propaganda, July 1941

Catalogue ref: INF 1/894

Extract a

B. THE EFFECT OF BOMBING ON CIVILIAN MORALE.

5. The R.A.F. offensive - our chief offensive weapon.

It is assumed that our only (or our chief) offensive weapon during the next months will be the R.A.F. The effect of the R.A.F. offensive against Germany can be considerably enhanced if a) it is planned not only with a view to military and industrial damage, but also to achieving the maximum demoralisation both of the civilians in Germany and of their relatives in the armies abroad, and (b) if it is accompanied by propaganda designed to increase its effect.

Extract b

D. THE NECESSITY OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL ESCAPE FOR THE GERMAN PEOPLE.

11. The limitations of "fear propaganda".

If the above plan were accepted, it should not be put into operation without a propaganda campaign carefully designed to offer the German people some escape from its doom. "Fear propaganda" such as that advocated in the plan is only effective ^{ive} if :

- a) It canalises the German hatred away from the British to their own central and local Government.
- b) It offers the German people some way of escape from destruction.

If we employ "fear" propaganda by itself we shall be in danger of positively strengthening German morale by giving the German people the impression that there is nothing for it but to stand together and fight to the last man.

What is this source?

This is a secret government report produced by the Ministry of Information. This department was in charge of all aspects of information, including government propaganda.

In the early stages of the war the RAF dropped leaflets as well as bombs, trying to turn the German people against the Nazis.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. During the Blitz, German bombers attacked British cities, killing thousands of civilians. By the summer of 1941 Hitler had attacked the USSR. Britain could do little to help the Soviets, but one option they considered was a bombing offensive.

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

Propaganda was a key factor in the Second World War. The British were aware that many Germans were not enthusiastic about the war and resented the Nazis. Clearly the Ministry of Information had thought carefully about this issue and hoped that bombing would lead to more resentment of the Nazis.

One of the controversies about bombing is whether it increased discontent with the Nazis or whether it actually made Germans pull together and support the war effort even more. This is certainly what happened when British cities were bombed.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. What does the document reveal about how effectively Britain can attack Germany in 1941?
2. What does this document suggest should be done as well as dropping bombs?
3. Does this seem like a sensible strategy?
4. Why does "fear propaganda" have its limitations?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

Letter from Churchill on area bombing, 1st April 1945

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