

KS3 History

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4 lessons.

# **Propaganda and Cults of Personality**

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# Propaganda and Cults of Personality

In order to make it easier for governments to control people in totalitarian states, the leaders were often presented to people as heroic or god-like. Trying to create this impression is known as a **cult of personality**. This is done by the government only presenting information to the people which supports a certain view of the leader. This government control of information is known as **propaganda**.

Creating a cult of personality had two main aims. Firstly, it encouraged the population to publicly admire and support their leader and secondly, it gave people confidence in their leader so that they supported government actions. Totalitarian states often presented the leader as a strong and all-powerful individual.



# Hitler's cult of personality

Hitler gained greater control in Germany by developing a cult of personality. During the 1930s, the Nazi Party generated an image of Hitler as a strong and powerful leader to contrast with the economic troubles the country faced. This allowed Hitler and the Nazi Party to rise to power, as he promised to strengthen Germany. The Nazi Party used a series of methods to create Hitler's cult of personality. These included campaign posters and carefully organised public appearances. This increased Hitler's fame in Germany and encouraged public admiration for him. Hitler was often presented as a god-like figure who was capable of restoring Germany to greatness. This was important as many Germans felt humiliated by the defeat the German people had suffered during the First World War.



# Hitler's cult of personality

However, Hitler was also presented as a caring, father-figure to the nation, often pictured with members of the **Hitler Youth**. Additionally, during the Second World War, Hitler was presented as a soldier and military leader, capable of defeating the country's enemies. These images of Hitler were created using simple and understandable posters to ensure they reached the largest audience.

Another method utilised by the Nazis to create Hitler's cult of personality were mass **rallies** and parades. A mass rally was held each year at Nuremberg to advertise the strength of Hitler and the Nazi Party. These events linked Hitler's cult of personality with national unity and helped build support for the Nazi government.



# Stalin's cult of personality

The propaganda which presented Stalin positively was released gradually at first. In the 1920s Stalin struggled with other members of the Communist Party to become the leader of the Soviet Union so propaganda presented Stalin as loyal and hard-working. Propaganda also presented Stalin as the rightful successor to Lenin, the previous leader of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Stalin was often portrayed in posters and paintings with Lenin to suggest he was a close friend and adviser of the first Soviet leader. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, this idea was spread through the re-writing of the country's history. The *Short Course* was a history book published in the Soviet Union which described a close relationship between Lenin and Stalin. It was unlikely Lenin and Stalin did have a close relationship, nevertheless, by 1948 the book had sold 34 million copies.



# Stalin's cult of personality

Stalin's cult of personality was also used to gain control of the population in the 1930s. Stalin's economic policies had caused disruption to the countryside and his use of **terror** had led to the deaths of millions. To maintain his control, Stalin was presented as a strong leader to reassure the people that he could lead them through these difficult times. Moreover, like Hitler, he was portrayed as a father-figure in paintings and posters which emphasised Stalin's relationship with the people of the Soviet Union. Several posters were created including children thanking Stalin for their happy childhood. These posters were created despite the fact Stalin's policies caused disruption and chaos for many people. Stalin's cult of personality reached its height in the 1940s, following the Soviet victory in the Second World War. Increasingly, pictures showed him as God-like.



# Glossary

**Cult of personality:** when a state uses propaganda to deliberately present an heroic and glorified image of a political leader.

**Hitler Youth:** a Nazi youth group for boys aged between 14 and 18.

**Obligatory:** something you must do because it is a law or a rule.

**Propaganda:** information or ideas, which are often false, that are used to make people agree with something.

**Rallies:** public meetings of large groups of people.

**Terror:** violent action or threats designed to cause fear among ordinary people.



# Comprehension questions

1. What were the aims of creating a cult of personality?
2. What methods were used to create Hitler's and Stalin's cults of personality?
3. How was Hitler presented in propaganda in the 1930s?
4. Why was Stalin often presented with Lenin in propaganda during the 1920s?
5. **Challenge question** - What impact did the Second World War have on Stalin's cult of personality?



# How similar were Hitler's and Stalin's cults of personality?

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<i>Hitler and Stalin were portrayed as father-like figures</i>	<i>Propaganda presenting Stalin positively was introduced gradually</i>

*One similarity between Hitler's and Stalin's cults of personality was...*

*For example, ...*

