

Developing courage for peace

Impact of propagandistic narratives of good and evil and how we can counter them

by Marita Brune-Koch

The destruction of the economic basis of our society, the restriction of our fundamental rights and freedoms, and even the instigation and support of wars that could affect and destroy us all – why do people go along with so much of this almost without contradiction? Much has already been said about this, and analyses of propaganda and its effects are available. But what about the individual? Why do people not object, but submit – obediently or enthusiastically – to the looming destruction of their economic and even physical existence and that of their loved ones? Why do many demonstrate against the far right – as is the case in Germany – rather than for peace?

At the latest since Corona, our society has been divided. Opinions are categorised as right or wrong, information is allowed or appropriate, and “disinformation” is ostracised, even banned and deleted. All of this culminates in dividing people into good and evil.

Right and wrong, good and evil

There should be no open discourse, many facts must not be included. It is clear to everyone what the right, the good side is and what the wrong and evil. Some examples:

- **Right:** against Russians – **wrong:** in favour of international understanding.
- **Right:** for total war, “whatever it takes” – **wrong:** for peace, for diplomacy.
- **Right:** for fact-checkers, denunciation, and the prosecution of unpopular opinions even below the criminal threshold – **wrong:** for freedom of expression and open discourse.
- **Right:** criticism of politicians and their actions is prosecuted as “deligitimisation of the state” – **wrong:** the state should serve the people; citizens and the media should critically observe state action and object to violations of civil rights and interests.
- **Right:** suspension of civil rights in the name of fighting a supposed pandemic – **wrong:** health issues, including global ones, must be openly discussed in the scientific community. Civil



"Peace can only be won with all those who are committed to peace." (Symbolic illustration ma)

rights may only be restricted in the event of an extreme emergency and for a very limited period of time.

- **Right:** scientifically untenable claims such as “there are more than two sexes” dictate the course of state action, criticism of which is punished and penalised – **wrong:** state action must be based on scientifically proven principles (there are only two sexes).

The sulphurous smell of evil

Every citizen, without exception, knows which narratives are to be classified as right and which as wrong. Propaganda has done a good job. As a result, anyone who expresses an opinion, a suspicion or even just a question at any point in public or professional life whose answer is contrary to one of the narratives to be enforced risks at least social ostracism, exclusion from communities, from family, friends or colleagues. The “sulphurous smell of evil” precedes the dissenter.

Overcoming the divide

Few people can stand this, can bear it. Most feel dependent on the affirmation of their fellow human beings, want to belong to the good, to those who think correctly, want to be respected, perhaps admired, but at least to be a part of the communities in which they live.

Very few can stand being excluded from the community, being seen as “supporters of evil” (e.g. the Russians) or as “a danger to the community” (e.g. as unvaccinated) and thus being ostracised. For most people, exclusion from the community is almost unbearable. This is an anthropological fact that has made sense in the history of human development. Without cohesion, humanity would not have survived.

So here too, it is not a matter of criticising the fear of losing a community, nor of “shaking up” and agitating. Even stirring up fear of impending apocalypses, e.g. nuclear war, proves to be less effective than the urgent desire “not to fall out of line”. So, what can we do? The keyword is encouragement. We must relearn how to talk to everyone. We also must – and this is often very difficult – listen to those who have very different opinions from our own. We must not give in to the reflex to exclude people with whom we disagree. We must learn to treat those who think differently with interest and kindness.

We are one human family

Labelling each other contemptuously (“corona denier” versus “crazy mask wearer”) only deepens the divide. Nothing is gained by this. Peace researcher *Daniele Ganser* coined the term “we are one human family”. This could be a good guiding principle.

It is so important to find our way back to an open dialogue with each other because these psychological factors, the fear of exclusion, often have a more direct and stronger effect than the threat of punishment, such as fines or imprisonment.

Prerequisites for a peace movement: friendly openness, tolerance, unity in the pursuit of peace

If we want an effective peace movement, we must take these circumstances into account. We must break the prohibitions of contact and thought.

Parts of the peace movement, for example, exclude a large proportion of people who stand up for peace. A common reason for this is: We do not talk to right-wingers.

Such bans on contact make it easy for warmongers and supporters of comprehensive and total state power. We function as their propaganda, their “strategic communication”, demands of us. The “peace movement” thus places itself, intentionally or unintentionally, in the service of the warmongers. We allow ourselves to be divided, we insult each other, we exclude each other, we refuse to talk to each other. In this way, we can boast of belonging to the good guys, but in reality, we are abetting war and the totalitarian development of our society.

A topsy-turvy world: right is left, left is right

Because it is so powerful, a word about the defamation of a part of the population as “right-wingers”. Traditionally, leftists, liberals and democrats were against war, for social justice, for freedom of expression, for an open discourse, for freedom and participation of citizens. The right was more likely to stand for war, power ambitions, more restrictive laws, limited freedom of expression and state power. Propaganda has succeeded in reversing the meanings of these historically grown terms, turning them into their opposites. A peace movement that participates in this is doing the work of warmongers.

“Whether we wear red, yellow collars, helmets or hats ...”¹

Let us not be divided any further. Let’s ignore contact bans. Let us support each other in the most important endeavour that humanity can have: The creation and preservation of peace, freedom and justice. In some parts of the, how should one put it, *alternative movements? oppositional civil communities? groups of people thinking out of the box?* These principles are already being lived: no contact bans, cooperation with all those of good will who also stand up for peace and freedom. Unity in common goals, tolerance and a “live and let live” attitude in differences.

These are encouraging developments.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

¹ <https://deutschelieder.wordpress.com/2019/01/15/ob-wir-rote-gelbe-kragen/>
«Ob wir rote, gelbe Kragen» (Song for the people)