

PROPAGANDA

By the 20th century, the propaganda technic has been a widespread means to control the information. With the soaring up of the medias such as the radio and the television, the propaganda has found its place as an instrument of counter-power.

Propaganda during WW1 is singular. It strives to condition and influence the behaviour of the people to force them to get fully involved into the conflict. The watchword is "Patriotism".

However in Reunion Island, where we find an important illiteracy rate, this propaganda does not have the same impact as in the territory of France. Despite that, the number of recruits is very high. Indeed, about 14 600 Reunionese soldiers have been involved into the war.

What was the real impact of propaganda in that old French colony ?

Roughly 2 months after the war declaration/ the onset of the war, the French newspapers urged a maximum of people to get involved into the war. The patriotic fervour is highly emphasized. Then, the day after the declaration of war, the media started to relay the information to the French colonies / despite a flaw, basic and slow communication system.

On October 5-6th, 1914, Le Progrès newspaper, with some others, are given the responsibility to recruit people.

Albert de Mun who was a former soldier, wrote an article in which he pays a tribute to the French nation and to the Allies in order to muster the natives' / the islanders' admiration.

Propaganda in the Reunionese medias

A propaganda effort to praise the Reunionese spirit has been intensively displayed.

Some Reunionese soldiers were set as examples: One could read in the newspapers for example the case of a volunteer who had been denied the right to go to war because he weighed only 31 kilograms and who had protested because it was unfair. Other WWI French soldiers we called « Poilus » were also mentioned to show that everybody could volunteer for the army without regard for their age (the younger one was 18 and the older was 72 years old !).

Indeed, one could read an article in Le Peuple newspaper published on April 23th, 1916 entitled : « **a 72-year-old soldier is fighting in the trenches** ».

It gives an account of these man's feats who had previously fought in 1870. In this article, the author pays a tribute to this soldier but also to other Poilus. He praised their courage, their duty, their involvement, their spirit in using overpraising terms.

At least 2 Reunionese-French WW1 soliers died quite old during or just after the war (source : Cercle Généalogique de Bourbon) :

- IMHAUS Théodore Nicolas Emile (Commandant au 163e R.I.) N: 14.12.1854 à Saint-André (La Réunion). DCD: 30.3.1916 à 62 ans

- ADAM DE VILLIERS Luc Jacques Marie Léon Martin (Lieutenant-colonel) N:11.7.1856 Saint-Denis (La Réunion) DCD: 17.3.1919 à Paris à 63 ans

To put it in a nutshell, the role of the media when it comes to the real impact on the Reunionese people's motivation to join the French army should be nuanced. Indeed, the majority of the Reunionese population is illiterate and in 1915, only one third of the young boys and girls old enough to attend school were denied this opportunity while the first junior school for girls only opened in 1913. As a consequence, people at that time were not very educated. Thus, the information was mainly displayed by word of mouth in bars, at the market place or more officially during sermons given by authoritative and guiding priests.