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Secrecy

THREE important pronouncements have recently been made on the question of the responsibility of the government to keep the people informed as to its broad policies. At a meeting of the Foreign Policy Association in New York, David Lawrence, discussing the need for an intelligent interpretive bureau for the government, said that there is a Division of Current Information in the Department of State. At first the chief of this division was a trained newspaper man, but later this position began to be filled by men from the diplomatic service—men who had very little knowledge of the demands of the press. While some of these diplomats have done very well, Mr. Lawrence feels that in the long run the country would be benefited if the office of chief of this division were filled by a different type of person. Mr. Lawrence thinks that if the Division of Current Information is to be merely an administrative agency, there should be an Assistant Secretary of State who is thoroughly familiar with the problem of dispensing information to the press—someone upon whom the Secretary of State can call for consultation and someone who is big enough to persuade the Secretary of State to make public that which, for insufficient reason, is suppressed.

Mr. Lawrence went on to say that this same problem has been solved by big corporations outside of the Government, not by employing press agents or publicity men but by having vice-presidents in charge of public relations who are sufficiently broad gauged to sit in the highest councils of the corporation.

In a vivid speech, Walter Lippmann, at the same function, strongly urged the need for the State Department to be candid, to clearly state its policy, to refrain from attempting to mislead the public, to demonstrate that it possesses the will to maintain peace, to show that it is inspired by that tradition of peaceable and candid dealing which this nation has always professed and in which, he feels, the majority of American people believe.

The need for "Open covenants openly arrived at" is forcibly demonstrated in the subject matter of an editorial in the *New York Evening World*. The value of the application of the same principle and the danger of its non-application in any broad field of human endeavor are self evident.

A new mysterious note, described as serious, has been delivered to the Mexican Government by the United States. It is said to not be an ultimatum, but we are given to understand that it was exceptionally sharp and demanded an immediate reply. It apparently deals with something of which the American people know nothing, and we are told that the result may be to break off relations with Mexico.

This is secret diplomacy of the sort that is thickly coated with the dried blood of men.

Coming at this juncture it is especially dangerous, since Congress adjourns today and for nine months Secretary Kellogg and the Administration will have a free hand. In view of the general impression that the Administration seeks an excuse to break off relations, if not for war, it is unfortunate that Congress is to be out of the way.

With Congress in session and with Senator Borah demanding information, and calling attention to the strange proceedings of the State Department, the public is more or less on guard. With Congress out of the way we may be involved in a war by the President before the public has the most remote idea of what it is all about.

This is the weak point in our system. Quite properly the power to declare war is lodged with the immediate representatives of the people who fight wars, and pay, and pay, and pay. But the President can involve us in war before there is a formal declaration.

Before we learn the nature of the new note Congress will be adjourned, and we shall see what we shall see.

Was Killed Cock Robin?

AN illuminating editorial from the *New York World* explains why public opinion is a changeable factor. When observation is uncertain, judgment must be insecure:

All of the newspapers agreed yesterday that Alexander Katenisky had been slapped in the face by a young woman on the stage of the Century Theatre. As a matter of news-reporting, illustrative of the difficulty of obtaining agreement even in an eyewitness account of the same incident taking place publicly, it is interesting to note some variance as to details.

These are descriptions of the manner in which the young woman struck her blow:

World: Slashed him viciously across the cheek with her gloves.

News: Struck him on the left cheek with the bouquet.

American: Dropped her flowers and slapped him in the face with her gloves.

Times: Slapped his face vigorously with her gloves three times.

Herald-Tribune: Beat him on the face and head . . . a half-dozen blows.

Evening World: Struck him across the face several times.

Mirror: Struck him a single time.

Post: Vigorously and accurately slapped him.

And this is what happened next:

American: Kerensky reeled back.

Evening World: He stood unmoved.

News: He stepped back, maintaining a calm pose.

World: He stood still, but used his arms to wave back his friends.

Herald-Tribune: He stood still, with his arms thrown back.

Journal: He reeled.

Post: He remained unmoved.

Mirror: He reeled from the blow. His supporters were stemmed by a handful of royalists. Fists flew; noses ran red; shirts and collars were torn.

These reports come from trained reporters, and no doubt they vary less than the reports which a vast majority of the 5,000 spectators of this event brought away with them. All psychologists are aware of the fact that different people report the same event differently when they undertake to describe it in detail. The reporting of news is necessarily affected by such human considerations. Now and then an incident like the Kerensky incident serves to remind us of the fact.

If a physical act taking place publicly before an audience in a New York theatre watching the single entrance onto the stage of a famous man cannot be reported without varying versions of the same simple set of facts, what happens when a reporter in Shanghai sits down to cable his newspaper word as to what 300,000,000 Chinese people are thinking about Bolshevism and Buddhism and Christianity this morning?

Dog Bites

EVENTS have a relative importance and not an absolute importance. Our judgment of this importance, of necessity therefore depends upon the standards of the era in which the events occur.

Edward McKernon, eastern division superintendent of the *Associated Press*, said tonight in an address before the promotion representatives of communions associated in the Federal Council of Churches, that there had been a radical change in standards of news values since Amos Cummings was managing editor of *The Sun* at 170 Nassau Street, New York.

"I take pleasure," said Mr. McKernon, "in hitting on the head a sacred cow that too long has grazed in newspaper offices. It is the tradition that the definition for news is the exceptional or freakish. Every newspaper man is familiar with the witty illustration of this theory: if a dog bites a man, that is not news; but if a man were to bite a dog, that would be news.

"Daily," said Mr. McKernon, "the *Associated Press* surveys the universe and deliberately selects from its manifold happenings such events as are significant of the society of today. Then it groups these events with a proper sense of proportion in order that the newspaper reader may have a correct picture of things as they are—the one sure foundation for straight thinking. And in straight thinking will be found the hope of free government.

"Today if a man bit a dog, he would be thrown into an ambulance and taken to the psychopathic ward of some hospital for observation. The affair would be of much concern to him and his family, if he had one, but its news value would be small. On the other hand, when a dog bites a man or another dog, it is news of importance to every person, particularly every dog owner within a hundred miles."

From the *New York Herald-Tribune*.

Modest Medicine

IT may be sound social policy for a group to create ethical standards for its profession, but that profession must be careful not to let its ethical standards override the social considerations of its work. Dr. Bloodgood courageously faces an important issue, according to *Editor and Publisher*:

Dr. Joseph Colt Bloodgood of Johns Hopkins University, cancer specialist, has discarded the time honored prejudice of physicians against having their opinions quoted in newspapers.

In the opinion of the famous scientist professional ethics against publicity should be placed on the shelf for all time, and the public should be told all that the medical profession can tell them.

"I turn to the press in this fight against cancer, and against all other disease," said Dr. Bloodgood on his arrival in Chicago this week where he is taking part in a state-wide anti-cancer campaign.

"As a medical man I am not afraid of the press. I am perfectly willing to compete with the quack for front page space any day.

"The trouble is, too often, that honest medicine can't get on the front page.

"In my work at Johns Hopkins I am in a position to see what the education of the public is doing. Due to the spreading of sound advice concerning the teeth, excessive use of tobacco and stimulants, 70 per cent of the possible cancer patients who come to us arrive in time to save themselves from the actual infection.

"In the days before the newspapers were spreading health education less than 3 per cent came in time.

"Let the press continue its work. Let it advise every man and woman over 40 to have their teeth X-rayed twice a year. Bad teeth are the most common cause of breakdown.

"The press has in its own hands the medium to give the public information that will cut deeply into the nation's death rate.

"Understand, I am not encouraging the charlatan and the seeker after free publicity. The health information should come from the entire medical profession, not alone from the individual practitioner."

Soft

INDUSTRY, in the constant change of public opinion and habits, is continually confronted with two alternatives in its efforts to keep abreast of the tides: either to mould public opinion to its own ends, or to alter its own policies of production or distribution to conform to the public's dictates.

Economic considerations caused the resignations today of Albert E. and E. Harold Cluett, vice-presidents and directors, and George I. Miller, director, of Cluett, Peabody & Co., Inc., shirt and collar manufacturers.

Resignations of the Cluetts, however, does not mean a retirement of the family from the business. George A. Cluett will remain as president and active head of the business, while E. H. Cluett will still continue to serve as a director.

Depression in the industry, Mr. Cluett laid to competition . . . and displacement of stiff collars by soft ones.

The popularity of the soft shirt and collar attached has turned the tide of industry and naturally there has been a decrease in business.

From the *New York Herald-Tribune*.

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Broadcast

MARSHALL D. Beuick in *The American Journal of Sociology* tells of the numerical growth of the radio in America:

Estimates show that one out of every three families in New York City has a radio set, and in the whole United States one out of every five families has a set. In further proof of the widespread effect of radio broadcasting, the New York Edison Company published a survey which reports that the sales of radio receiving sets increased from \$7,000,000 to \$500,000,000 in five years up to January, 1926; and that \$15,000,000 was spent during 1925 by broadcasting stations for programs.

But he tries to break down the belief that it is an enormous power for regimenting public opinion. He has made out an interesting case—but unconvincing. Here is the abstract printed at the head of his article:

The public has been led to believe that radio broadcasting is creating a social revolution. One-fifth of the population are "listeners".—There are about 20,000,000 potential broadcast listeners and about 600 broadcasting stations, but they are only affecting markedly a limited group such as isolated dwellers. There are fundamental things in human nature that will prevent broadcasting from wielding any greater influence on us than the phonograph has. Radio does not make us congregate.—Radio does not satisfy man's desire to congregate with other persons in the mutual enjoyment of music, games, etc. Broadcasting cannot compete with other amusements.—Broadcasting does not encourage association or herding, and can, therefore, never compete injuriously with the theater, the concert, the church, or the motion picture. Radio's greatest benefit is to isolated persons.—It will, however, serve most effectively the sightless, the bed-ridden, the farmer, and the deaf.

On the other hand, Gilbert Seldes in *The New Republic* accords to the radio a broad and pervasive influence. Extracts from an excellent article are quoted here:

... The new form of communication was instantly recognized as a universal one and the right name was found for it in broadcasting.

... Within the space of one generation, the air has been made the medium of two "modern" activities: getting people more rapidly from place to place, and spreading information. Convinced that movement is not the essence of civilization, the anti-modernist despises the aeroplane; in a hundred years he may write of it as Waido Frank writes of the motor car, as a threat to that serene continuity of existence from which spiritual life may come into being, as a form of escape by flight. The menace of the radio is a thousand times greater. It turns to propaganda as easily as the aeroplane turns to bombing; it sows its seeds with a wider throw. If you are afraid of it, it is deadly.

... The persuasiveness of doctrine as it comes from the loud speaker is even greater than in a face to face conversation.

I have tried again and again to make myself a picture of the air at one of those moments when every tiny turn of the dial brings something new to the loud-speaker. It hardly seems possible that so many things could be of interest, that so many people would be trying to sell or persuade or exploit. Maxwell House Coffee presents old Southern melodies; Mrs. Augusta Stetson talks about God; *Collier's Weekly* transposes its forthcoming issue into music and drama; the political situation is summarized by Frederick William Wie; dinner music is broadcast direct from Janssen's Midtown Hof-

brau House; Aimee MacPherson wishes that she could tell you how lovely Jesus has been to her; specialists speak on recondite subjects which suggest that they have collaborated with Robert Benchley; a lesson in Spanish from the municipality's own station; a plea for Jews to speak Hebrew; how to take care of an Airedale; Al Smith addresses newsboys and can't remember what year this is—waves, voices, personalities crowd each other, interfere with each other; a faint hum of jazz accompanies a Catholic priest; a prize-fight cuts into Bach; as you rapidly turn the dial from one end of the gauge to the other, you hear grunts and shrieks and the wild whistle of static. It is everything that America is interested in; it is America.

Public Relations

THE three forces, then, which are injecting into the conduct of business a new hazard are fashion, new ideas, and changing habits; but what makes them formidable is the speed with which they spread and the unanimity with which they are adopted. Advertising is responsible for both the speed and the unanimity. The continuing body of advertising has produced a receptive state of mind. Advertising is accessory before the fact as well as after. It has created a public, almost coextensive with the population of the country, that reveals an amazing willingness to adopt anything, or, to put it more emphatically, a determination not to be left behind—a sort of mad scramble to have, do, and be whatever is popular at the moment. The individualist is apt to be lonely.

—EARNEST ELMO CALKINS in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

"The Minority Rules"

THOMAS Jefferson said that the world was made, not for Caesar, but for the common man. The contemporary common man, however, shows no sign of giving three who rule East New York whether it was made for him or not. The majority leads him along by the nose.

Universal literacy was supposed to educate the common mortal into control of his environment. Once he could read and write he would have a mind fit to rule. So ran the democratic doctrine. But instead of a mind, universal literacy has given him a rubber stamp, a rubber stamp inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with published scientific data, with the trivialities of the tabloids and the profundities of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man's rubber stamp is the twin of millions of others, so that when these millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all receive identical imprints. . . .

"So vast are the numbers of minds which can be regimented, and so tenacious are they when regimented, that a group at times offers an irresistible pressure before which legislators, editors, and teachers are helpless. . . .

"There is good and bad propaganda, just as there are good and bad politicians, or books, or peanuts. It must be remembered that the word "propaganda" had its origin in an endeavor to spread nothing more reprehensible than Christianity. It came into general use long after it was first applied

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to the commission of cardinals charged with management of Roman Catholic foreign missions.

"While some of the descendants of these original propagandists may have sold themselves to the devil, many have remained righteous. Given our present social organization, approval of the public is essential to any large undertaking. Hence any laudable movement is lost unless it impresses itself on the public mind. Charity, as well as business and politics and literature, for that matter, has had to adopt propaganda, for the public must be regimented into giving money just as it must be regimented into fighting a war. The Near East Relief, the United Jewish Charities, the Federation of Charities in New York, and all the rest have to work on public opinion just as though they had pieces of Ivory Soap to sell. We are proud of our decreasing tuberculosis rate—but that too is the work of propaganda.

"The fact remains that, good or evil, propaganda is always with us. In fact, its use is growing as more and more its efficiency in gaining public support is recognized. . . .

"The success of the various books loosely classed in the Outline category, offers a case, showing how the minority point of view is more broadly appealing than it hoped to be. H. G. Wells's "Outline of History" created such a storm of interest because of its new and controversial treatment of history that it reached a far wider public than a history ordinarily would have. Other sagacious publishers and authors realized that they could capitalize on the stereotype of an Outline book created by the first one. The public was ready to accept histories, biographies, scientific works, written with the human interpretation Wells had made acceptable. And we find today that serious works in these fields have encroached on the territory of fiction's best sellers—an "Outline of Literature," an "Outline of Science," "The Story of Mankind," "The Story of Philosophy," the "Microbe Hunters."

"In biography, the recent enormous popularity has been due to the propagandizing effect of Lytton Strachey's "Queen Victoria." Another interesting literary example is the minority movement of psychoanalysis, which, starting with a small group of half a dozen scientists in Vienna, widened its influence in larger and ever larger circles until today the psychological novel, biography, and history all have responded to its impulse.

"The cross word puzzle books are an example of a minority idea capturing the public mind. While the social and educational implications may not be so far reaching as in the case of the Outline, who can gainsay the advantages of adding "ibex" and "emu" to the vocabulary? . . .

"In the good old days when kings were kings, Louis XIV made his modest remark, "L'état, c'est moi." He was about right. Within certain limits, whatever the State of France

did was what Louis XIV wanted to do, for the State of France and Louis XIV were pretty much one and the same. So much so, indeed, that the nearest approach to state buildings were the royal châteaux.

"But times have changed. The steam engine, the multiple press, and the public school, that trio of the industrial revolution, have taken the power away from kings and given it to the people. The doctrine that the king, the state, and the earthly voice of God were identical gave way to the doctrine that the voice of the people was the voice of God. Whatever the truth of this belief—which becomes increasingly unpopular with the doctors of political philosophy—the people actually gained power which the king lost. For economic power tends to draw after it political power; and the history of the industrial revolution shows how that power passed from the king to the bourgeoisie, and in smaller measure to the proletariat. Universal suffrage and universal schooling reenforced this tendency, and at last even the bourgeois stood in fear of the mob. For it promised to become king.

"In this century, however, a reaction has set in. The minority has discovered a powerful help in retaining control of the mob—the mob, that is, not so much in the economic as in the mental sense, though the two often overlap. It has been found possible so to color the mind of the mob that it will throw its newly gained strength in the desired direction. Given the present structure of society, this practice is inevitable. Whatever of social importance is done today, whether in politics, finance, manufacture, agriculture, charity, education, or anything else, must be done with the help of propaganda.

"But if it is really so easy to stain the public mind to a desired tint, is the prospect cheerless? We do not believe it is. Small groups of persons can, and do, make the rest of us think what they please about a given subject. But there are always opponents and proponents of every propaganda, both of whom are equally eager to convince the majority. So that the majority in reality has its choice of action for every subject. Propaganda is not always so correct as it is effective. But the minority which uses this power is increasingly intelligent, and works more and more on behalf of ideas that are socially constructive. Intelligent people are recognizing the difficulty of convincing the public of facts that are against its own interests.

"In the active proselytizing minorities in whom personal and public interests necessarily coincide lie the progress and development of America. Only through the active energy of the intelligent few can the public at large become aware of and act upon new ideas, usually good, occasionally bad."

By EDWARD L. BERNAYS

From the April Bookman.