

# CONTACT

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Edward L. Bernays, Counsel on Public Relations

## How Realities Make Myths

THE public is so fond of fiction that it makes imaginary characters out of real people. Nobody takes the President, the Vice-President, the Mayor of his town, the champion prizefighter, or the leading movie queen or "leader of society" as he or she really is. We must each of us make of each of them an imaginary hero or heroine, villain or adventuress.

"While we go on making real people imaginary, the storyteller satisfies this human instinct by making imaginary people real. And so we pay less attention to eminent persons in the arena than to fictional creations.

"Every business man is either a Babbitt or not a Babbitt. Every crime requires a Sherlock Holmes or a Craig Kennedy. Every problem must be disposed of by Mr. Dooley or the man that Al knows so well."—Advertisement of the *Red Book Magazine* in *New York Herald-Tribune*.

There you are! Myth-making is as old as the race, and without a symbol the energies of man could not be stirred. The counsel on public relations realized both the need in the individual and group mind for such a symbol and its value as an ideal and incentive. The exaggeration which he sometimes employs is no different than the application of a magnifying glass to an object, or the use of a spotlight. Art is often idealization, which is essentially a constructive exaggeration of a basic reality. In like manner the counsel on public relations must transfigure the realities that are often ignored, because they seem so commonplace, by bringing out the colors or ideas that his study and imagination actually discern in them.

## Dictionary History

MARK Sullivan in his book on the near past, *Our Times*, lists words which are part of our linguistic currency to-day, but which were mentioned not at all, or in a few cases, rarely, in 1900. Of course, these are not merely words that are listed so casually; they are ideas and symbols and represent new trends of thoughts and action. The student of public relations must watch changing ideas, whether they are evidenced by laws or by dictionaries. We quote here from an editorial by Glenn Frank in the *New York Evening World*, in which he comments on the book, and extracts the following:

"In these word-packed pages Mr. Sullivan paints a panoramic picture of the development of American life without doing more than piling one word upon another in utterly disconnected fashion. Here are some of the words the American of 1900 did not find in his morning paper:

"He read nothing about the radio.  
He saw nothing about the movie as an institution.  
He did not find mention of a chauffeur.  
He read no high adventures of the aviator.  
He saw no mention of income tax or surtax.  
He could find nothing about insulin.  
He failed to unearth anything about relativity.  
He saw nothing of the quantum theory.  
He read nothing about tractors.  
He saw no reference to a Federal Reserve System.  
He found nothing about chain stores.  
He read no advertisement of an automat.  
He saw nothing of ships driven by oil burning engines.  
He found nothing about women smoking.  
He saw no barber's advertisement of boyish bobs.  
He read no lurid stories of rum runners.  
He was not disturbed by any reports of bolshevism.  
He read nothing of fights between fundamentalists and modernists.  
He was not challenged by the high claims of a Nordic.  
He saw nothing of Freud or his complexes.  
He was not lured from work by any cross word puzzle.  
He saw no rotogravure section.  
He read no stories of a Ku Klux Klan.  
He found no mention of camouflage.  
He saw no soda fountain advertising sundaes.  
He saw no pictures of one-piece bathing suits.  
He found no advertisements of lipsticks.  
He read nothing of a parcel post.  
He saw many advertisements of hairpins and horseshoes.  
He read reports of croquet matches more than of golf.  
He saw little about vamps or flappers or feminists.  
He rarely saw the word propaganda.  
He read of an accident to the horse that was drawing a street car.  
He found no mention of a jazz orchestra.  
He saw nothing of a League of Nations or an Agricultural Bloc.  
"This casual grouping of the important and the trivial gives



us a better sense of the march of things than many pages of ponderous history might do.

"If we could keep before us the detailed mass of changes, large and little, that have come about in American life during even the last twenty-five years, we might be saved from the sin of oversimplifying the problems that vex us.

"We are children of a changing time."

### Inquiry

**A**N important survey has been made by The Universal Trade Press Syndicate to determine what is the place of propaganda in social and economic life today. To this end, Mr. Myron Blumenthal, the editor of that syndicate, questioned leading editors, publishers and business men. The result of this survey was published by them in a brochure, "The Verdict of Public Opinion on Propaganda," based on an article, "A Public Relations Counsel States His Views," by Edward L. Bernays, which latter article appeared in *Advertising and Selling*.

We are printing, with permission of the Syndicate, a few excerpts from this brochure (others were printed in a previous issue), which we believe will be especially interesting to the readers of *Contact*.

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**H**ERE is the contribution of H. V. Kaltenborn, Associate Editor of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*:

"Everything is news or propaganda or advertising or all three, according to the personal view of those whom it affects. The distinction is subjective and not objective. The newspaper gets paid for printing advertising and it does not get paid for printing news. But this does not alter the fact that much advertising has news value and that most news has some kind of advertising value.

"The reason why newspapers are suspicious of the press agent or the public relations counsel is because they feel that he is collecting money for services for which they would like to collect money themselves. He shares the advertising appropriation. Thanks to his skill advertising becomes news and news is made into advertising, with the result that while news columns may be advantaged, the advertising income sometimes suffers.

"Newspapers have themselves to blame for the glorification of the press agent into the public relations counsel. They pay most of their reporters such poor salaries that any reasonably intelligent newspaper man can earn twice as much when he sells his talents to a business undertaking. So many newspapers are run on the cheap that they are delighted to get press agent stuff which does not cost them anything. It is far less expensive for an advertiser to hire a press agent than to hire advertising space, and the press agent gets 'preferred position.'

"Newspaper publishers are beginning to wake up to the fact that they have been giving away something for which they might get paid. New York publishers gave away free advertising in their Radio programs for three years before they realized what they were doing.

"I am inclined to think newspapers are going to be more strict about publishing news that is also advertising, and they are going to be somewhat more discriminating in what they accept from the press agent, or the public relations counsel.

"At the same time, I, as a newspaper man, have absolutely no quarrel with the press agent or public relations counsel. He has lightened my labors as reporter and editor. For all I know he may have helped to raise my salary because he has increased the competition for the services of trained newspaper men. What he 'gets away with' he 'gets away with' flagrantly, openly and honestly. More power to him! and more intelligence to us in order that we may discriminate between the good stuff and the bad stuff which he presents for our consideration.

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**T**HESE paragraphs are taken from the letter of J. J. Pelley, president of the Central of Georgia Railway:

"The Central of Georgia Railway believes that the public is fair-minded when correctly informed, and that, as a public service corporation, the obligation rests upon us to supply accurate information as a basis for right thinking.

"This railway does not maintain a separate public relations department nor employ a public relations counsel, publicity agent or propagandist. The president of the railway is the public relations officer, and since public relations touch every department of the railway, he expects and receives the cooperation of every other officer of the company in this work. This program contemplates that officers shall not only interpret the management's views to the public, but shall interpret the public's views to the management."

"The sudden political revolutions which strike the historian most forcibly are often the least important. The great revolutions are those of manners and thought. The true revolutions, those which transform the destinies of people, are most frequently accomplished so slowly that the historians can hardly point to their beginnings. Scientific revolutions are by far the most important."

LE BON in *The Psychology of Revolutions*.

"There are many people who feel that the daily sound of a human voice proclaiming a fixed set of views is far more effective in forming public opinion than all the newspaper editorials in the world."

*The Living Age*.

### "Edward L. Bernays Is Back

**E**DWARD L. Bernays, public relations counsel of New York, has returned on the Leviathan from a short trip to London and Paris in the interests of clients. While in Europe Mr. Bernays attempted to standardize the handling of the baggage of American tourists for the Luggage Manufacturers of America."

*New York Evening Post*.

### "Pitiless Publicity, Indeed

**B**ECAUSE the President of the United States elected to employ worms instead of flies as lures for the lusty trout which populate the streams of the Black Hills, the city of Glen Cove, L. I., is face to face with a worm famine. Immediately upon the publication of Mr. Coolidge's choice of bait there was such a raid on the creatures which Mr. Darwin found to be necessary manufacturers of fertile soil that that city, in order to conserve the local supply, has forbidden all outsiders to dig for them. Even with this prohibition in effect the creatures are threatened with extinction.

"If the Presidentially conferred popularity of the angle worm continues to expand the husbandman may soon be facing a serious problem. Without the action of worms there can be no productivity of the soil, and without productive soil the food supply will soon be threatened. It is unfortunate that the army worm, the tent caterpillar and other destructive members of the worm family are distasteful to the denizens of the lakes and streams. Were such not the case the present demand for bait would soon drive them from the face of the earth. But only the harmless, necessary angle worm finds favor with trout and bass. And now the rush to follow a distinguished precedent is rapidly decimating their numbers."

*New York Herald-Tribune*.

### Pitiless Publicity, Also

**P**UBLICITY has a sinister effect in this practical world. It is not only eagerly sought after by those with some idea or some product to sell but it impels those upon whom it gratuitously descends to seek out some material use to which it may be put. At least this seems to be its effect upon the case in point, which is that of Ver-sur-Mer, now entertaining the high ambition of entering into the brisk competition for the title of Queen of French Watering Places. Before the momentous descent upon its quiet beaches of Commander Byrd and the crew of the America, Ver-sur-Mer pursued its untroubled existence with the world well lost. A few French families made it into an inconspicuous resort during the summer months, but it harbored no ambition to rival Deauville or Le Touquet. Now publicity demands its price, and the villagers of Ver-sur-Mer are apparently convinced that destiny has decreed for their town a glorious future, in which international vacationists will tread the paths of the American flyers and pay well for the privilege."

*New York Evening Post*.

### "First American Art Show Held in Paris Draws 170 Canvases and Wins Much Praise

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Special Cable to The New York Times

**P**ARIS, July 2.—More than 1,500 people attended the opening this afternoon of the first exhibition of American artists in France, held in the galleries of the Jacques Seligmann Company in the ancient palace of Sagan. The showing was organized by Edward L. Bernays, who came here two weeks ago from New York for the purpose.

"One hundred and seventy American artists are represented, each with a single canvas. Among them are such well-known artists as Frederick E. Frieseke, Paul Burlin, Waldo Pierce, Norman Jacobsen, Howard Leigh and Martha Walter, as well as many of the younger group.

"At the vernissage and reception at the opening were many distinguished visitors from diplomatic, artistic and social circles. Among them were Edouard Herriot, Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts; Mme. Berthelot, wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs; Colonel Bentley Mott, Military Attaché of the American Embassy; Alphonse Gaulin, the American Consul General; George Blumenthal, the Marquise de Polignac, the former Miss Grossby and Colonel and Mrs. Francis E. Drake.

"Paul Leon, director of the French Academy of Beaux Arts, opened the show.

"This is seeing France through American eyes," he said.

"The paintings show a marked French influence on the American artists. So much interest was indicated by the large attendance of both French and Americans and the large number of contributors that Germain Seligmann offered the galleries for a similar show next year. The show is good and the artists are being highly praised."

### Someone Ought to Do Something

**W**HEN do the desires of the public become translated into actions or customs? It is one of the anomalies of civilization that masses of people may have latent or expressed needs, which evince themselves in wishes, or in conversations of dissatisfaction, but which rarely get beyond that stage without the intervention of active leadership. "Letters to the editor" often betray the helplessness of individuals to change customs, unless they understand the mechanism of changing public opinion. Excerpts from one of these letters, printed recently, illustrate admirably the fact that without leadership even a habit that concerns the personal comfort of millions of people does not change:

"To the *New York Herald-Tribune*:

... "A good deal of the present discomfort suffered by men might be saved if we would dress more as they do in



the South and West during the summer months—that is, wear seersucker suits.” . . .

“It probably needs the world’s most popular bachelor to wear one of these suits just once on Fifth Avenue, and after that we would probably not be able to obtain enough of them. We are all slaves of habit and custom, and have not sufficient nerve to be the first to start a sensible fashion.” . . .

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## The Right of Criticism

CENTURIES of struggle have only recently brought governments and industry to a realization of the value of salutary and veracious information to the public. Lord Mansfield, in the 18th Century stated that “the greater the truth the greater the libel.” But, as Samuel A. Dawson says in his illuminating book, *Freedom of the Press*:

“Modern democracy could not exist under the old rule—the greater the truth the greater the libel.” It would cease to function were the proceedings of the legislatures and the courts guarded from public knowledge. It would be a farce were the people denied the right of criticism and fair comment on the acts of their officials.”

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## Assets

IF Bernays can succeed in turning these newspaper pests (press agents) into newspaper assets, all the editors of America will kiss him on both cheeks” said the *Boise, Idaho Statesman* in an editorial. “He believes there is such a thing as legitimate publicity. He wants publicity distinguished from advertising. It may be he is on the track of something worth while,” says the editorial, and adds that “it is very certain that there is news breaking day after day in the industries of America, news of new inventions, of consolidations, of radical departures in service, of heroism displayed, of disasters averted and of many things that cannot be guessed at and classified in advance. But the newspapers cannot dig them out in every case. When they come to the ears of newspapermen they are seized quickly and broadcast through the press services. Getting them all would mean having reporters everywhere, many of these reporters skilled technicians at that.

“If the publicity workers for the industries of America would get this news to the editors, they and their employers would be repaid by the benefits that come from an aroused public interest and educated consumers. But it would take work, hard work, and only legitimate news would get by.

. . . “The skillful public relations men . . . see that the newspaper offices have on file, for use when occasion demands, all the facts and figures pertaining to their industries. They are quick to co-operate by furnishing pictures of men, machines and buildings to be kept in ‘morgues’ and

used to illustrate news when it develops. They see that speeches made at notable gatherings by notable men are brought promptly to the newspaper offices. They do not try to coerce, to threaten, to influence; they try to be helpful.”

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## Mystery Breeds Suspicion

ESTIMATING the public relations aspect of casualty insurance in an address to the Insurance Advertising Conference at Hartford, Henry Swift Ives, Vice-President of the Casualty Information Clearing House of Chicago, talks of the necessity for business enterprises to keep the public informed of their affairs. Reticence and mystery breed suspicion and prejudice, he said.

The *Journal of Commerce* comments on his speech, and we reprint passages from its columns:

“The best way for a business to promote good public relations,” he said, “is for it to so live and act that it deserves public good will. The results of such conduct are almost automatic. Favorable public opinion can be developed and good public relations maintained only by institutions which are honestly conducted, which sell their products at a fair price, which frankly and truthfully set forth their processes and their problems, which live up to the highest ideals of service, and which at all times and all places deal with their patrons with absolute equity, with unflinching courtesy and with perfect fairness.

“No amount of oratory, no amount of special pleading, no expensive propaganda can avail much in obtaining the good will of the people unless the institution seeking favor can meet these primary qualifications.” . . . “The complexities of modern life are such that it is growing more and more necessary for business enterprises which seek public good will to tell the public something of their affairs. Reticence and mystery about such matters always breed suspicion and prejudices.” . . .

“There are many obstacles which must be overcome in such a campaign. The public relations problems of casualty insurance to some extent are peculiar to it and arise out of the very nature of the business itself.” . . .

“I would like to see built up within the casualty insurance business a science of public relations, recognized and supported because it is as essential to our progress as are underwriting and finance. I would like to see every company have a department in charge of a major officer engaged in this branch of work exclusively—studying, experimenting and perfecting methods and their applications. Such company departments, of course, should be tied up with a central bureau representing the business as a whole, and this bureau could determine the major policies of the institution of casualty insurance.”