

# CONTACT

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## Activity

THE public is a well, a mine, a dynamo; tap it and you strike oil, dig and you find gold, move it and you get action. Even academic halls now realize that the theories of the universities and their professors can quicken the vital forces of public opinion to life.

Forming into a group, certain professors have issued a statement sufficiently powerful to influence a vast public that accepts the authority of this important group. What they have done is an excellent example of the manner in which public thought is consciously directed by its leaders. The *New York Herald-Tribune* comments editorially on their action:

"For the second time in a relatively short period a group of educators has come out in support of a general policy. A short while ago a group of Columbia University professors issued a statement recommending a change in our policy regarding the settlement of international debts. We now have a group of educators, representing a number of colleges and universities, suggesting a certain policy in the handling of our relations with Mexico.

"Disregarding the merits of the suggestions in question there is the fact that an important group in the affairs of the nation shows an inclination to organize with the definite object of influencing public opinion. It is not necessary to accept the views of this group to welcome its action. Public opinion is formed by a large number of instruments, including the press, the politicians, the church, the schools and colleges, the wireless and the motion picture. As public opinion is difficult to define or to gauge, so it is not easy to estimate the relative amount of influence of these various agencies. We doubt whether either of these college groups is representative of the whole body of opinion among the country's educators. The important point is that a certain important group has attempted to voice its views; that it has succeeded in finding a common basis of agreement."

## "Standardization"

BUILDING materials, articles of apparel, political sentiment, as well as æsthetics are susceptible to the same sort of standardization as that described in an interesting article in the *Saturday Review of Literature*:

"... great is the possibility of developing standards of worth. What an opportunity for the movie, for the radio, for literature! What of value may they not standardize! . . . Standardization may be good as well as bad. Not similarity of taste and desire is the enemy but similarity of bad taste and bad desire.

"Good taste, however, can never be developed without something to feed on. A sense of the artistic and the fine does not spring un nourished in the human breast. The love of the dramatic, of the spectacular, of the passionate is there; these are qualities which it needs no guidance to develop. . . . But the ability to discriminate between the dramatic and the melodramatic, between the striking and the showy, between emotion and emotionalism, this is an ability—a taste, if you will—born of acquaintance with both. Standardize reading of the better sort, thinking of the better sort, and automatically you will destandardize lack of judgment and cheapness of taste."

## Three Points

THE *Fourth Estate* prints an important address by Royal J. Davis, of which we quote a cogent paragraph. The italics are ours:

"... What influence the newspaper has upon its readers to-day, Mr. Davis pointed out, can be put under three heads: The news columns, from which we get our knowledge of most matters of public interest and form our opinions accordingly; *the printed opinions of others, published as having come from a definite person or organization*, and the editorial page, in which a newspaper definitely and deliberately does what it can to affect our thinking, our action or both."

## Defoe Too

**A**N *A.P.* dispatch from London points to a propagandist source of literary inspiration that may surprise many who forget that troubadours of the middle ages often sang to increase the fame of mightily admired patrons. This story was printed in *The Philadelphia Public Ledger*.

"Robinson Crusoe was conceived as a press agent stunt, says W. A. Wetherell, who has returned to London from Tobago, where he has been appearing in the title role of Defoe's famous work. Mr. Wetherell looked up historic data in studying the character of Robinson Crusoe, and believes that Defoe created the famous character as a means of calling attention to the West Indian enterprises existing at that time.

"Defoe was most certainly employed by a London financial district company to write prospectuses of West Indian flotations of the 'South Sea bubble' type', declared Mr. Wetherell, 'and I certainly am convinced Crusoe was written as a piece of propaganda.'"

## Publicity an Asset

**T**HE *New York Evening World* comments on the commercial value of publicity, and prints a dispatch from Washington:

"Family jokes and stage puns about Ford's 'flivver' were reckoned among the intangible assets of the Ford Motor Company by George Lindsay, New York banker, who testified at to-day's hearing in the Government's suit for additional taxes on Ford stock transferred by James Couzens, Dodge Brothers and other minority holders to Henry Ford in 1919.

"The amount of free advertising given the Ford car was a big help in popularizing it,' said Lindsay.

"In view of the steady progression in earnings and the company's outlook for rapid increase in sales, backed by skilled management and sound financial policy, he believed the stock on March 1, 1913, was worth from \$10,000 to \$12,000 a share.

"Ford was decidedly in a class by himself, and there was a tendency to put Ford on one side and automobiles on the other,' said Lindsay."

## Inquiry

**P**SYCHOLOGY has not yet determined the relation of knowledge or information to attitudes; that is, a man may be fully cognizant of the facts concerning an idea, a race or a product and yet have a bias for or against, independent of and contrary to that knowledge.

Goodwin B. Watson, Instructor in Teachers College, Columbia University, says, in a pamphlet issued by *The Inquiry*, an organization seeking to analyse the relations of the individual to society:

"Under laboratory circumstances, the presentation of facts seems to affect attitudes. Yet taken by and large, there is no guarantee that people who have acquired the most information are likely to hold any given point of view on controversial questions. The question of the kind of information has been insufficiently studied. It is leaping a little, but perhaps not too far, in advance of the evidence, to suggest that probably the quantity of information is far less significant than would be the proportionate emphasis within that information and the circumstances under which it was given."

The counsel on public relations realizes this. Facts alone do not necessarily change an attitude towards an idea or the product of industry. For that reason, as has been often stated in these pages, he studies the "circumstances" under which information may be given and creates those circumstances. That circumstance is the dramatic movement that carries over, propels the static facts.

In this connection, *The Inquiry*, in one of its questionnaires, remarks:

"In many a discussion on war, labor unions, races, politics, etc., when some one says: 'Well, that's how I feel about it,' the others hardly know what to say. He seems to have said the last word. And yet feelings do change toward these matters. If chance developments sometimes change attitudes, can we not also intentionally modify them by bringing about purposely the kind of experience that has been known to occasion a change?"

This is exactly what the counsel on public relations seeks to do.

### Thought Power

MODERN means of communication are the leverage power of thoughts. They convert ideas into public opinion and actions. H. G. Wells writes of this in the *New York Times*. We quote one passage:

" . . . If the 'Modern Utopia' were published now, everybody would say I had taken a leaf from the book of the Communist Party or the Kuomintang or even (though this is rather a different animal) the Facisti. But, indeed, this anticipation sprang only from an early recognition that modern means of communication—the power afforded by print, telephone, wireless and so forth, of rapidly putting through directive strategic or technical conceptions to a great number of cooperating centers, of getting quick replies and effective discussion—has opened up a new world of political processes. Ideas and phrases can now be given an effectiveness greater than the effectiveness of any personality and stronger than any sectional interest. The common design can be documented and sustained against perversion and betrayal. It can be elaborated and developed steadily and widely without personal, local and sectional misunderstandings."

### More, Not Less

OFFHAND, we should say that knowledge is the only antidote for misinformation, the only safeguard against ignorance. American citizens can never learn the truth about themselves in their foreign relationships as long as they refuse to listen to the full expressions of opinion of foreign countries. To listen only to the opinions of our own legislators would make for dangerous misunderstandings. The *Springfield (Mass.) Republican* quotes a Washington dispatch that indicates that there is more fear than wisdom at the basis of certain legislative programs:

"An effort will be made before this session of Congress ends to enact legislation to stop activities of agents, many of them Americans, who hire themselves out to foreign factions to influence public policy of this country. . . ."

"The presence of the agents in the Capital was noted by Senator Borah, Republican, of Idaho, in connection with the Mexican-Nicaraguan controversies. Borah charged they were going so far as to write editorials for newspapers in propagandizing for their factions."

### Corporation Publicity

CRITICIZING the management of corporations as at present administered, William Z. Ripley, Ph.D., professor of political economy at Harvard University, in an address at the annual meeting of the State Bar Association at Hotel Astor, advocated as a necessary remedy for present-day conditions "the publicity of accounting and the use of the largest amount of publicity with regard to the conduct of the business of corporations."

"There may be disagreement as to the means by which such adequate publicity of corporate accounts may be brought to pass, but there is no dissent from the view that it is an imperative need at this juncture. And the principal advantage attendant upon it is that it will contribute to the creation of a true open market for securities publicly owned. To the degree that the accounts of corporations do not faithfully disclose their actual conditions, there may be an open door on the exchange for buying and selling, but there can be no true registration of values. And it is such which is an essential of untrammelled trading.

" . . . Corporate publicity, then, is essential to an open market. It irons out the disability of the outsider as against the inner circles. And unquestionably more than ever before, with the growth in size and intricacy of industrial and financial corporations the need of equalizing the status of those within and of those without is rendered more imperative. The preservation of the voting rights of shareholders I have held to be a basic safeguard for the interest of the investing public. But as an immediate means to the protection of those interested corporate publicity is of even greater importance."

## Averting Calamity

ON a winter day early in the year 1925 a gentleman dealing in millinery was found hanging with a rope about his neck in his show-rooms. He was quite dead. Style had killed him.

"Nineteen twenty-five was a bad winter and spring for milliners. Women had gone on the loose in an unaccountable fashion. Instead of wearing the hats they had been instructed to wear by the normal channels of trade pressure, they had taken style into their own hands and were buying felt hats simply trimmed; or, what was worse, not trimmed at all. And this unprecedented independence threatened to annihilate the bulk of the millinery business. 'The makers of ribbons, flowers, braids, and straws,' said *Editor and Publisher*, 'are compelled to gaze upon the whole feminine world wearing something on their bobbed heads that wasn't made by millinery manufacturers at all! For the first time in anybody's remembrance a whole industry has been deserted almost without warning.'

"The milliners stood trembling on the brink of the abyss, but they did not take the plunge. The highest kind of the higher salesmanship saved them in the nick of time. The machinery which accomplished this miracle is worthy of attention. It shows what can be done nowadays to a buying public that exhibits symptoms of a wrong-headed and unprofitable independence. Mr. Edward L. Bernays, Counsel on Public Relations, tells the story, and well may he be proud of it, for it reflects great honor upon his profession. . . .

"There was . . . one emergency tool which could do the job—the indirect tool of publicity, validly based on news-creation. If society women and artists could initiate a counter-current of style, then all might not be lost. . . . East-bound gravitation started with the semi-annual style show in New York in February, 1925. 'The basic idea applied as a remedy was to interest key leaders of art and society and trade in higher millinery standards of beauty.' Two groups were created: the first composed of artists 'who definitely gave the millinery displayed artistic standing'; the second made up of society women, 'who sponsored the artistic movement back toward standard millinery materials.'

"Heyworth Campbell, art director of the Condé Nast publications, headed the committee of ar-

tists which had to select the beautiful live models who wore the hats (adequately trimmed hats) on the basis of carriage, pose, grace, and entire form as well as facial beauty. The artists had also to judge one of each class of hat represented, in respect to the beauty of the model, her hat, and her entire ensemble costume. Thus the hat was happily linked, in news value, to the charms of the manikin as well as to her frock and the rest of her costume, if any.

"After the winning model in each class was selected by the assembled artists her photograph was taken by a leading New York photographer. Hundreds of them appeared in the rotogravure sections of the Sunday newspapers throughout the country. The pictures were also used in traveling exhibits to retail establishments. Gravitation began to pull. The authority of its sponsors could not be ignored by retailers. 'They began to shape their millinery purchases, window displays, and publicity along the new lines.' Meanwhile publicity experts were at work upon news reports of the style show. Articles, interviews, special illustrated stories began to pour in upon editors, in a volume sufficient to create authentic news value. Carefully instructed salesmen of millinery houses descended upon merchandise managers and millinery stores armed with 'authentic news' and with the glad tidings that the new styles were ready to be shipped in quantity lots.

"'In thirty days' time the millinery trades were humming again with activity. A casualty had been averted by the skilful use of sound public relations. . . . It was a subtly built plan, and it worked.'

"It was and did. Not only God but Counsels on Public Relations are masters of the mystic pulls of gravitation. Mr. Bernays holds, furthermore—and we cannot but agree with him—that the principle is applicable to all types of merchandise. 'Ideas that desire to get public attention must avail themselves of this kind of mechanics.' And so, happily, the consumer may forever cease from buying what he freely wants; and the Kingdom of Heaven of the Salesman will come upon earth.

"High on the awful steps, above the Angel Gabriel himself, in morning dress, their honest faces transfigured with pleasure in a work well done, will sit Mr. Bruce Barton and Mr. Ivy Lee."

By Stuart Chase, In *The Nation*.