

CONTACT

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People Act on Fact

THE great power of newspapers is described by Norman J. Radder in his book *Newspapers in Community Service*, and it is in the recognition and utilization of this power that the counsel on public relations and the newspaper editor so often work hand-in-hand. It is frequently in the survey of public opinion made by the counsel on public relations and presented in the newspapers, that beneficial results are obtained, either in industrial or civic fields.

Speaking of the survey Mr. Radder says: "A survey is a good thing for a community because it will substitute tested information for mere conjecture and belief. . .

"The first step is the gathering of facts. The second step is analysis and interpretation of facts. Once the data are in hand, what do they mean? . . .

"After conclusions as to what the facts mean are reached, the third step is the working out of the recommendations for improvement. Results often follow the mere turning of the light upon unwholesome conditions. . . . At any rate, the survey should contain the definite and specific recommendations of the man or group of men who have gone deeply into the problems of the community. . . .

"Finally, the public must be convinced that the recommendations should be adopted. This may take time, and considerable follow-up work may be necessary. Not the newspaper alone, but other public agencies, the graphic exhibit, the motion picture, the printed pamphlet, the public address and the radio will have to be used. Usually a wide dissemination of the facts and recommendations will be sufficient. The best minds in the community usually agree if they have the same facts. Furthermore, it is believed to be American experience that communities will act upon facts when they have them."

Peace Through Public Relations

THE necessity of establishing open relations and frank contact between public utilities and the public is emphasized by Owen D. Young in a speech before the National Electric Light Association in Atlantic City. The counsel on public relations, knowing that the public is gladly receptive of all the facts, strives to show the public what is inherent in an idea, an industry, a product; he realizes that where the public knows too little it is suspicious and antagonistic. So, says Mr. Young:

"In my view, the difficulties between the public utilities and the public arise from the fact that the

public managers know too much about their business and the public knows too little about it. When the clash comes, there is no single impartial tribunal skilled in the art which is able to deal comprehensively with the issue no matter how vital they may be. Our nearest approach to it are the public service commissions, which, in spite of the large number of able and impartial men who have sat on them, are still handicapped by political interference. The result is that in one form or another the contest still goes on, not to be sure in such a brutal way as it did a quarter of a century ago, but it goes on.

"The widespread distribution of public utility securities, and especially the securities of a public service company among its own customers, is a way by which such customers may be induced to study the utility problem impartially and open-mindedly.

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."

Herd Thinking—49%

THE National Association of Credit Men made public the results of an interesting survey of its membership of 30,000. "About 49 per cent stated that they are influenced to a considerable extent in their business dealings by published opinions of business conditions. The remainder, while they were influenced in this manner to some extent, found fact or data news more valuable in their operations," says the report.

In commenting on this, J. H. Tregoe, executive manager of the association, says that this indicates that there is less "herd thinking" than many of us believed.