

Father of PR still at work on offspring's image

By David Elsner

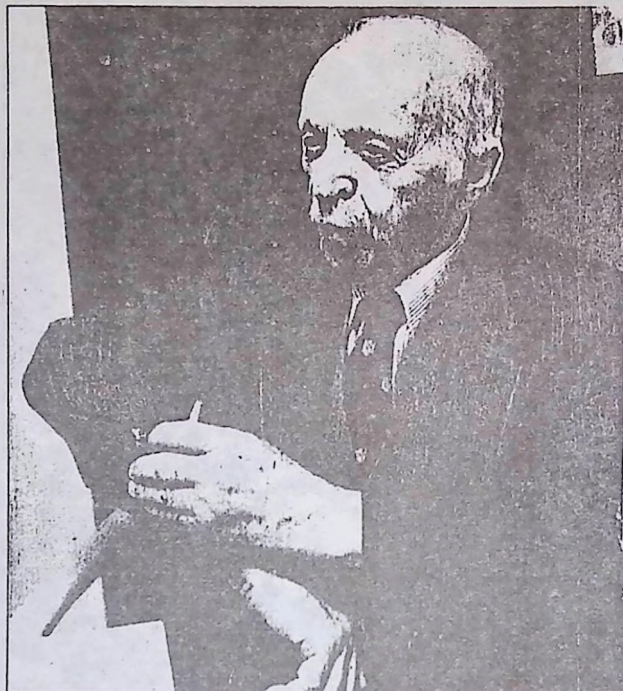
When meatpackers wanted to increase bacon consumption, Edward L. Bernays found doctors willing to recommend to the American public the health benefits of eating larger breakfasts.

When false rumors that the Waldorf Astoria was being sold resulted in a flood of reservation cancellations, Bernays had the hotel sign the maitre d' to a well-publicized long-term contract. The cancellations stopped.

And when a wristwatch manufacturer found it couldn't overcome the then-prevailing image that the only men who would wear one were homosexual, Bernays persuaded the U.S. Army that the watch's radium dials could save the lives of World War I doughboys. Until then, in order to tell time after dark, the soldiers in the trenches had to light matches, which often brought on sniper fire. The resulting publicity sent wristwatch sales skyrocketing.

Similarly, Bernays, a legend in public relations circles, helped Procter & Gamble sell more Ivory soap by creating extremely popular soap-sculpting contests for schoolchildren, and influenced Thomas Masaryk to declare the founding of the Czechoslovak republic on a Sunday rather than on a Friday in order to get better news coverage.

These are only a small sampling of the public relations coups of Bernays, who began his career as a press agent for Enrico Caruso and other theatrical personages and over the next four decades became widely acknowledged—with no little help from himself—as the nation's foremost practitioner of public relations.



Tribune photo by Carl Wagner

Edward L. Bernays, age 94 and publicist par excellence, expounds on his latest campaign: Cleaning up his own profession.

It was Bernays who originally coined the term "public relations counsel," in an effort to elevate the profession beyond mere press agency and flakdom. His book, "Crystallizing Public Opinion," written in 1923, still is used in journalism and public relations courses, and the

Encyclopaedia Britannica hired him to write its article on the subject. Last week, Bernays visited Chicago and demonstrated that, even at age 94, although his voice is a bit frail and his physical stature somewhat diminished, his mind is still sharp.

And he showed he still knows how to manipulate the media. In one day he taped a television program, held a radio interview and granted two sessions to print reporters.

The cause that most concerns Bernays these days is his own profession. He is engaged in an active—and so far, unsuccessful—campaign to persuade the public relations industry to adopt a strict course of academic training, licensing and registration.

Legal sanctions should exist, he believes, to bar dishonorable practitioners. Instances he cites include Anthony Franco, a Detroit publicist who stepped down as president of the Public Relations Society of America after being charged last month by the Securities and Exchange Commission with trading on inside information of a proposed merger of a department store chain; Michael Deaver, who has been ac-

cused of using his position while still in the White House to build his current client list; and the public relations men who came into positions of power in the Nixon administration and tried to cover up Watergate.

"Any nitwit who pays his dues can join the Public Relations Society of America," Bernays fumes, "and any naked woman in Playboy can call herself a consultant in public relations."

"Now, I'm not against press agents, and I'm certainly not against getting space in the media because I've done it often enough myself.