



EDWARD L. BERNAYS

The Science of Ballyhoo

BY JOHN T. FLYNN

I

WHEN that famous psychologist, Mr. Phineas T. Barnum, arrived in London accompanied by General Thomas Thumb, he was there for the purpose of welcoming the curious to his box office. A less astute manager would have taken a theatre, opened his ticket stall, and plastered the walls and the newspapers with advertisements. That would have been publicity. 'Professor' Maelzel, who managed the automaton chess player at Concert Hall, had observed of Mr. Barnum that 'he understood the value of the press, and that there is nothing helps the showman like the types and the ink.' All this was quite elementary to Mr. Barnum. But he understood something deeper than that. He understood that mysterious, whimsical Monster — the Mass Mind; therefore, before he resorted to the types and the ink, he went to work shrewdly upon the Monster.

He began by taking a mansion in Grafton Street, which had been occupied by Lord Brougham. He filled it with liveried servants and set up as the guardian of his famous midget. Then he issued beautifully engraved invitations to various noble persons and some of the more important editors to call and meet General Thumb. They called. Their magnificent equipages stood before Mr. Barnum's mansion for several days. The American Min-

ister, Mr. Edward Everett, also paid his respects. He was very gracious, invited General Thomas Thumb and his guardian to dine, and arranged to have the pair summoned to St. James's Palace to meet Her Majesty.

All this time Mr. Barnum did not once address himself directly to the Mass Mind. He merely 'created events and circumstances,' as Mr. Edward L. Bernays would say, and 'the types and the ink' did the rest when they faithfully chronicled everything that went on. The result was that the Monster was coming to be all eyes and ears: everybody from Shoreditch to Mayfair was dying to see and hear the amazing little creature who had excited the curiosity of so many noble persons — 'group leaders,' Mr. Bernays calls them — and had even won the attention of the greatest group leader of all, the Queen herself. Hence, when Barnum put General Tom Thumb on the stage of the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, the populace came thronging and tumbling past his box office.

Many years later another disciple of Thespis was in dire need of dealing with the Mass Mind. Mr. Richard Bennett, the actor, wanted to produce Brioux's play, *Damaged Goods*. But the play had within it certain immoral elements which rendered it an exceedingly risky business venture in chaste,

of his profession. As a Public Relations Counsel he is a liaison officer between Big Business and the Monster. In odd moments he has been a professor in very truth, for until recently he lectured on his system in New York University.

The reader is perhaps aware of the difference between the public relations counsel and the publicity man. The publicity man merely makes a noise in the neighborhood of his client or product to attract attention to it. He beats the drum outside his show. He angles for space in the newspapers. He seldom rises to a higher level of performance than that which Bernays calls 'continuous interpretation' or 'dramatic high-spotting.' If he has bacon to sell, he just keeps repeating, 'Eat more bacon; eat *our* bacon.'

The public relations counsel manages it differently. He makes use of what the psychologist calls the conditioned reflex. He does not mention bacon at all. He does not mention anything, because he knows no one is interested in what he mentions. He gets a number of physicians to say that people should eat heartier breakfasts. He manages a kind of vogue for heartier breakfasts on grounds of dietetic necessity. That is all. He knows that if people will eat heartier breakfasts they will think of bacon. As for 'dramatic high-spotting' — well, when the President of the United States telephones to the President of Peru, and all the newspapers report the event and the conversation, you may be sure that the new long-distance service between New York and Lima has been opened, and that the publicity man of the telephone company has been doing the job he is paid for.

Even a public relations counsel may do a lot of this sort of thing. Oddly enough, Bernays himself is perhaps best known for two examples of dramatic high-spotting which were really

no more than grandiose, glorified publicity stunts. One of these was Light's Golden Jubilee. Surely you will not have to be reminded of that amazing jamboree which took place when the story of Edison's invention of the incandescent lamp was reenacted in Dearborn, with Edison himself, Henry Ford, and the President of the United States playing the leading rôles, while droves of great industrialists and financiers played the parts of villagers and supers in the cast, and radios and newspapers fought for the privilege of broadcasting it. Henry Ford was supposed to be the manager of the show, but the man who set the stage and pulled the strings attached to all the dignified marionettes was Edward L. Bernays. He worked, not for Edison or for Henry Ford, but for very important organized commercial interests which saw in this historic anniversary an opportunity to exploit and publicize the use of electric light. His other outstanding performance was when he spent nearly \$70,000 for a single hour's show on the radio to introduce a new Dodge car to the market.

All this was publicity. The Standard Oil Company, which is supposed to have been introduced to the subject by Ivy Lee, was in reality making use of publicity away back in 1888; long before that Jay Cooke manipulated it to sell lots in the West, and earlier still the United States Bank employed it to render the public mind benevolent to its schemes. This sort of thing is probably as old as the human race, but public relations work is new — at least it is new as a conscious and understood science.

And Bernays himself is quite the newest type of public relations specialist, so intelligent and so free from the conventional inhibitions that he assumes almost the character of a phre-

omenon. He does not ask newspapers to print things. He has not been in a newspaper office in ten years. He creates 'events and circumstances' which newspapers are compelled to notice as news. But, more important than this, his chief rôle is the examination of the relations between his clients and the public.

An orphan asylum was having a difficult time getting subscriptions. Its managers decided that they needed some publicity. They went to Bernays. Bernays looked them over and concluded that they needed something altogether different — some changes in their own character and structure. It was an old-fashioned, institutionalized orphan asylum, for which the public had lost its taste. He advised the managers to reorganize their institution completely upon a new and better plan, making it into one of those modern, homelike asylums where the inmates are housed in family groups in separate cottages. This was done and the subscriptions began to flow merrily in.

At another time one finds him persuading railroads to facilitate and simplify the methods of handling trunks. He induces our own and foreign governments to lighten the regulations affecting the examination of baggage. Then he gets prominent society women to reveal publicly many kinds of clothes which, they consider proper for traveling; the kinds of suits to be worn on trains or at dinner in hotels; the sort of hats and shoes appropriate for different occasions on a voyage; the implements of the toilet essential to the lady *en tour*. What is he doing but creating a condition which will require the traveler to carry more luggage? The modern 'scanties' of the bobbed-haired and short-skirted twenties had made luggage almost unnecessary in travel. Bernays has

helped to change this by dealing with the conditions which produced it. Publicity was merely a subsidiary implement called into use only after the trouble had been diagnosed and the remedy prescribed.

III

Bernays's field, it will be seen, is the psychology of the crowd. He is fond of quoting Le Bon. The French writer popularized the theory that the crowd mind is less intelligent than the minds of the individuals who compose it, and that emotional states are contagious. He was criticized for explaining instances of individual action on the ground of crowd psychosis when there was really no crowd present. This criticism is hardly valid to-day. In modern America, alive not merely with the actual teeming multitudes, but with newspaper, motor car, movie, magazine, and radio, it is almost impossible to escape from the crowd. Even one's quiet room in the country may be filled with other personalities, its air charged with countless impressions shot at one from the air, the printed page, the phonograph, and the contacts of the day — crowd impressions continually pouring in on us.

'A man sitting in his study,' observed Bernays, 'choosing a railroad stock which he will buy, may think he is choosing freely. In fact, his judgment is a mélange of countless impressions. In the back of his skull is the labor policy of the railroad, the patronage of J. P. Morgan, the pleasant air of the diner he last ate in, the good sleep he had in the Pullman, the headline he saw in last evening's paper.' To understand, to originate, to motivate and direct these controlling impressions — this is the function of the public relations counsel.

Bernays did not leap from his per-

formance for Bennett and the Sociological Fund directly to his new profession. He got a job as press agent, and soon the twenty-five-dollar-a-week editor of the *Dietetic and Hygienic Gazette* was drawing two hundred dollars a week 'grabbing space' for Klaw and Erlanger and others. When the war came, he enlisted in that mighty legion under the command of General George Creel which shot patriotic propaganda into the American people to keep them at the white heat that was necessary for hating and fighting. Thus he had an excellent opportunity to practise on the Monster, the Mass Mind, at the moment when it was most appallingly massive and most shockingly monstrous.

But Bernays fell to analyzing philosophically what he was doing, and when the war ended he felt himself to be in possession of a powerful instrument which could be used with rich results for business. His success has been extraordinary. At work, his spacious offices look out from one of the great Wall Street towers upon the magnificent panorama of the Hudson. At home, he lives in one of those dignified Washington Square mansions once occupied by the gentry of old New York. It is obvious that the monetary rewards for the kind of work he does are very large. Ivy Lee is well known to have become a millionaire through his services as public relations counsel for the Rockefellers, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and many other rich clients. If Bernays is not a millionaire, it is simply because he needs a little more time.

He has represented various governments — Lithuania, Rumania, and on several occasions the Government of the United States. The French Government has decorated him. He has advised several royal persons, and looked after the public relations of some great

American corporations beside which royal persons are but poor and shabby patrons — the American Tobacco Company, the Vacuum Oil Company, Procter and Gamble (for whom he inaugurated their famous soap sculpture contests and exhibits), the Beech-nut Packing Company, and many others. Retainers for his firm will not suffer by comparison with the retainers paid to the greatest lawyers. A yearly fee of twenty-five thousand dollars from a single client would not, I am told, be considered a large one.

In spite of all this, it must be said that Bernays remains singularly free from swank and make-up. Small of stature, careless in his dress, not always even newly shaved, he resembles rather a diminutive, absent-minded professor than the alert business man. What is more, he is utterly without posture when he talks about his profession. He offers no hypocritical explanations about the purposes behind his campaigns; he considers them quite proper and important to business, and defends them on purely pragmatic grounds. He discusses his art, his business, his methods, and himself with complete objectiveness and with a frankness which is engaging in one who, accustomed to talking with important business men about their affairs, might be expected to take refuge behind a screen of reserve and pretense.

IV

One cannot talk long to Bernays without learning that the most direct way to reach the mind of the herd is through its leaders — its group leaders. Bernays, of course, deals with mental groups — groups arranged according to intelligence, tastes, prejudices, ambitions, emotions. There are groups of women, millions of them, interested in fashions. There are groups of electric-

light-bill worriers. There are groups of men interested in health or diet. There are groups interested in stocks. You cannot reach these people by mail; still how can you get them into a hall to organize. They can be influenced only through their leaders. They have leaders in all these matters, though they may not know it, and often the leaders themselves do not realize their position.

Take red neckties, for instance. Let us say that manufacturers would like to have men throw away their striped green neckties and wear red ones. Now who are the group leaders of the necktie wearers? Well, they are in London — the Prince of Wales, obviously; perhaps half a dozen other dignified gentlemen who are the glass of fashion and the mould of form. Get red ties around the aristocratic necks of these leaders, and their unconscious imitators from Birmingham, England, to Birmingham, Alabama, will follow like sheep.

But how accomplish this? Go to His Royal Highness and ask him to wear a red necktie to help the necktie makers of Seventh Avenue, and he will laugh at you. So you get somebody to explain to him that English trade is involved, that the dye makers of Merry England will flourish and prosper if red neckties become the vogue. In a few days the Prince will emerge with a necktie of the new shade. Reporters for the fashion papers will be there to catch a glimpse of the new tie. The news will be flashed around the world. The necktie makers of Seventh Avenue will be ready and waiting with the necessary materials. Red neckties will begin to roll from their machines. Red neckties will break out in the windows of Fifth Avenue, and a little later Sixth Avenue, then finally Third Avenue. Shirt fronts will blaze with the new ties, and all because some manipulator of the Mass Mind decreed it and got the right group leader

of the great, disorganized, helpless, and hence easily led, necktie group to dictate it unconsciously when he wore one of them himself.

The milliners wanted women to wear large hats. Bernays moved noiselessly to the attack. The group leaders were quite handy. A society woman, a famous artist, a famous style expert, a fashion writer, a fashion editor, are brought together at a fashion fête where these leaders collaborate in exhibiting the new hat. Next comes a tableau of beautiful girls. A distinguished committee is on hand to choose the most stylish one. Not a word about hats. When the beauties appear, 'by a singular coincidence' they all wear large hats.

'Merciful heavens!' cries the young lady in Dubuque, seeing the pictures of the 'contest' in the Sunday rotogravure section and looking with an executioner's eye at the little tight-rimmed bonnet she has been wearing. 'I must get one of those large hats.'

And the thing is done.

V

I expressed some apprehension about all this propaganda to Mr. Bernays. The producing and selling groups in society are all highly organized and effectively implemented to operate against the consumer. The consumer, on his side, is utterly disorganized and helpless. He must depend solely upon his reason, weak and fallible as it is. Now comes Propaganda pouring down upon him noiselessly and subtly its countless powerful impressions to rob him even of his reason.

'You are full of terrors,' replied Mr. Bernays, 'about the multitude of influences which propagandists shoot at the Mass Mind. I think you overlook the fact that if there were no such manipulators of public opinion the Mass

Mind would still be at the mercy of quite as many influences; would be pulled about by quite as many forces — the fortuitous and whimsical forces of life and chance. An old play is revived in Paris. Costumes of the Second Empire are worn. Ladies in the audience adore the quaint little Eugénie hat. They ask for them at the shops. The shops have n't got them, but soon order them. Women in Paris have them on in a jiffy, and in a few more jiffies they sweep over the heads of the women of the world like a plague. Here the unpremeditated result is the same as if it had been achieved by a propagandist.

'Some years ago Mrs. Irene Castle, the dancer, then very much the reigning darling, took a fancy to cut her hair short. She looked very lovely. No propagandist persuaded her to do this, yet see what happened. Women stormed the barber shops. The makers of hair nets were reduced to panic. Hairpin manufacturers laid off their workers. Hats had to be remodeled. The hair-comb industry was in confusion. Barbers, almost exterminated by Gillette, were suddenly resuscitated by Mrs. Castle. Beauty parlors sprang up everywhere. The thing affected the very conduct of women. A kind of emancipation agitated them and they began slicing great gobs off their skirts. The cloth makers joined the panic. Hundreds of thousands were thrown out of work. Other thousands got new jobs. Would this have been better or worse if a propagandist had induced Mrs. Castle to cut her hair?

'There is something appalling to the ordinary business man in the fact that his business lies at the mercy of uncontrollable forces of whim and chance. Every year innumerable clothing manufacturers are wiped out by the sudden changes in fashion which sweep over the country. Sun parlors get to be the

fashion in houses, and hundreds of millions of dollars in value are cut from the houses built without them. Women are forever putting on furs and taking them off, shifting from fur collars to fur neckpieces, suddenly adopting neckerchiefs or sweaters or ribbed stockings or black undies — without notice or direction from anyone. How can you blame the intelligent business man who has millions invested in his industry, and thousands dependent on it for jobs, if he attempts by intelligent propaganda to give these shifting tides of taste a direction which he can follow without loss; to control by means of propaganda what otherwise would be controlled disastrously by chance?

The invention, however, is like dynamite. It can be used to excavate a subway or to destroy a town. There is a grave social danger lurking in the discovery which Mr. Bernays has made, that the Mass Mind is to be controlled through its group leaders.

'In this country,' said a learned divine who now acts as public relations counsel to a large corporation, 'we live by thinking. The three institutions that deal in ideas are the school, the church, and the press. And those are the three institutions that we persist in starving to death.' The good, pragmatical parson aptly dubbed them 'the starveling professions.' And then he proceeded to lecture the public relations counsels of the public utility companies, telling them that they ought to take advantage of this fact — the poverty of the teacher, the preacher, the journalist — and buy them to distribute ideas for the utility business.

This advice was followed to the letter, and in the last dozen years there has been a wholesale debauchery of otherwise honest men: professors hired to make 'surveys,' doctors employed to make 'experiments,' teachers paid to utter 'warnings,' newspaper men com-

missioned to make 'reports.' For those who have not the time to wade through the endless mass of testimony which has been laid before the Federal Trade Commission on the publicity performances of the utility companies, Mr. Ernest Gruening has made a sprightly and interesting summary in his book, *The Public Pays*. Here is revealed in startling yet simple colors this amazing chapter in buying 'group leaders' which has been going on for some years.

I hasten to add that Mr. Bernays had nothing to do with this. I point to it merely as the logical consequence of the system of propaganda through group leaders which occupies such a central position in Mr. Bernays's philosophy.

VI

Another device which the modern public relations counsel uses is well worth examination. Among the heretics and unregenerate it is known as 'shirt-stuffing.' Mr. Bernays insists that a business has a right to establish confidence in itself by revealing to the public the high character and intelligence of its leader. He adds that the honest propagandist must have as raw material for such an operation an honest man and an able executive. In other words, he must do no more than make known the actually existing and verifiable qualities of his client. Unfortunately the practice is not held very scrupulously within these ethical limits.

Modern business is based on a very old principle in economics, as old as the Pharaohs and well understood before economists gave it a name — the principle of the division of labor. In the modern corporation this principle is carried to its highest perfection. The corporation brain is a brain of many cells. The cells are occupied and managed by numerous brigadiers who think, plan, remember, speak, execute, pro-

duce, sell, and perform all the countless functions essential to the life of the corporation. But in a good many of our great American corporations it has seemed desirable to dramatize all these multitudinous mental operations as taking place inside the skull of the Founder or the Chairman of the Board or the President. He is represented as a Master Mind, ruling over all the vast activities of his corporation, instigating new measures, uttering profound opinions on matters of domestic and international politics, carrying forward great schemes of social reform.

These gentlemen are built up precisely in the way Italy has built up its kings. One may see all over Italy majestic and heroic monuments of those two diminutive little chaps, Vittorio Emanuele and Umberto, the first two kings of modern Italy, mounted in bronze upon immense horses, with swords uplifted in attitudes of defiance and victory, moulding the Italian Mass Mind into supposing that its royal rulers are really men of extraordinary clay. It is an old trick. Carlyle sneered at the accounts of Louis XV described as leading his armies into Flanders, when, as a matter of fact, the doddering old monarch, rotten with disease and flattened in futility, was being carted around with the army like so much baggage.

The phenomenon of shirt-stuffing is now almost a force in our national life independent of any individual designs. Our agencies of communication are all geared as parts of a vast selling instrument. We have endowed them with so much energy that we have but to feed a name or a thing into them properly to have it taken up and pushed with furious and ceaseless vigor.

Mr. Bernays understands this very well. He has actually analyzed it. He has given the process a name. I had, in

my unlettered way, called it the principle of labels; Bernays talks of clichés. Whatever it is called, the meaning of it is simple enough. We have but to put a label on a thing and see that it is set loose in the proper place, and our great, interesting, and interested country will do the rest.

The process is seen best in our daily journals. The daily paper is only incidentally a newspaper. It is primarily a form of entertainment. It is a show, and the men who run it are showmen first and last. It presents to us each day, not so much a play composed of many scenes, but rather a single act in a continuous, serialized drama that has neither beginning nor end. Being a show, it must, of course, have its cast of characters — its villains, its heroes, its funny men, its ingénues, its kind old fathers, its lovers. If these gentlemen do not exist in life and in the news, the paper will invent them. All characters are drawn with heavy, bold, broad strokes, — caricatures, in fact, — so that a deft sweep of the pen is all that is needed to depict any character in any way.

Now let a man or woman of importance stray into the news, no matter how: the copy desk will pounce upon him and put a label on him suggested by the introductory incident. Once this is done, the label will stand for good. These public performers have a way, too, of accepting their labels and making up for the parts, then playing up to them forever thereafter. Nothing this side of heaven can rescue the victim from that label. Let a more or less talkative old Vermonter wander into the news columns with his lips closed tight and a limited dialogue for the day: the desk promptly labels him 'the silent man.' He becomes quickly 'the strong, silent man.' With that label on him he will run through ten thousand editions and a whole career,

garrulous, erupting words at every opportunity, but he will always be 'the strong, silent man.'

As I have already said, Edward L. Bernays understands this well enough. As a masterly practitioner of the New Science of Ballyhoo he knows how to put labels on men, on merchandise, on ideas, on events, and march them properly in front of the reporters and in view of the copy desk. He knows that the desk can be depended upon to act up to form.

VII

What, if anything, is to be done about all this? The subject ought not to be left without looking for one troubled moment upon the great, unorganized, unresisting, and helpless public.

As for the system of propaganda through 'group leaders' which Mr. Bernays has brought to its fullest flower, it is barely possible that its very perfection may eventually provide one element of safety and control which would seem to be required in the public interest. These group leaders who are now so freely exploited for ends which they often neither see nor understand may at last become so familiar with the public relations counsel and his methods that they will stop lending themselves to manipulation. In so far as these men are intelligent and subject to the pricks of social conscience, they may, by refusing to play the game, come to apply a very real check upon the zeal of the propagandist.

On a lower scale, however, there are the actors, the athletes, the public characters of every sort. They are not the trustees of the morals, the appetites, or the health of the public. There seems to be nothing in the code to prevent them from saying that an old

pipe cured them of tuberculosis, or that some pink pill has kept their tummies smaller than their vests. But one might suppose that they have an obligation to themselves, if one may speak of such a thin and vaporous principle in our high-powered civilization. One would think that they owe it to themselves to be truthful, at least in public. Secret sins, of course, are never pretty, and there are some vices which are less objectionable if frankly practised than if carried on privately. Lying, however, is not one of them. There is no kind of prevaricator who is so objectionable as the fellow who stands in the market place and shamelessly lies before the whole world.

Yet there has been so much lying by these lesser 'group' leaders' — actors, singers, golf players, aviators, and the like; it has grown to be such a profitable business; the whole thing has become so much a kind of settled and accepted custom in our lives, that our intellectual honesty and decency have become corroded and ineffectual. I do not know what can be done about it. The Authors' League, at least, has put itself on record with respect to the 'two-check man.' It would be an

excellent thing if the preachers, the teachers, the college professors, the actors, the journalists, in their national and local associations would do the same thing.

To sum up, it seems to be quite all right for each man, each movement, each party, to put its best foot forward, to state its case in the most convincing manner, to address its arguments to the emotions as well as to the mind. This opens up a large field for the special talents of the public relations counsel. The manner in which he has exploited this field makes one wonder, however, what defensive mechanism society can erect to protect itself against such powerful and subtle forces. Mr. Bernays has written extensively on the subject — two books and many magazine articles — and he has laid stress on the necessity of developing an ethical standard with reference to propaganda. Even after that has been effected, if it can be effected, much will still remain to be done for the public itself. I do not pretend to know what it may be. But I throw the problem out as one well worth the attention of the thoughtful student of our complex society.