

# CONTACT

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*Edward L. Bernays, Counsel on Public Relations*

## **Making Public Opinion— An Editorial**

THE New York Herald-Tribune, in its issue of February 11th, supports editorially the ethical principles of the practice of public relations counsel, which we have repeatedly enunciated. We reprint the editorial in full by permission:—

### **"MAKING PUBLIC OPINION"**

"In the last ten years the process of influencing public opinion through the press has passed through several stages. The oldtime press agent has gone and in his place have appeared 'publicity agents' and, more recently, 'public relations counsel'. There has been a refinement of titles and also a refinement of methods. The word propaganda is now often avoided as if it carried with it the taint of dishonesty. Propaganda reached its highest point of development during the war, attaining such sweeping success that the word became in bad odor.

"To draw a line of division between propaganda and honest, informative publicity is not the least of the tasks which newspapers are called upon to perform. The product of the propagandists flows into newspaper offices in an amazingly broad and deep stream. Most of it is obviously and transparently bad. It may be honest in its origin and intention and still give a grossly exaggerated picture. It may be shrewdly designed to convey a false impression. It may be so crudely concocted as to defeat its own purpose. Again, it may be of real importance in giving information essential to the formation of a correct judgment by the public.

"Newspapers have become increasingly important in molding public opinion. That fact is recognized by statesmen and clergy and everyone else in public life. It follows that the press has a correspondingly greater responsibility. The news and the editorial columns combine to shape public opinion. The modern newspaper is not only sensitive to public opinion but it helps to shape it.

"To-day the newspaper is called upon to act as a defense against the army of people seeking to influence public opinion. It must weigh, discriminate and sift. We have yet to hear a really/satisfactory definition of propaganda. Each piece must be judged on its merits. One initial test can be stressed. That is frankness. Publicity that attempts to conceal its source is damned at once. As a matter of fact, frankness is essential to an effective plea; suspicion makes of publicity a boomerang."

## **Hendrik Van Loon's Outline of Publicity**

THERE would be no history if it were not for the publicity sense of the leaders who figure in it. That is brought out by Hendrik Van Loon in "Tolerance", in his introduction to his chapter on the great iconoclast, Voltaire. Van Loon says:

"In this day and age we hear a great deal of talk about the nefarious labors of the press agent and many good people denounce 'publicity' as an invention of the modern devil of success, a new-fangled and disreputable method of attracting attention to a person or to a cause. But this complaint is as old as the hills. Events of the past, when examined without prejudice, completely contradict the popular notion that publicity is something of recent origin.

"The prophets of the Old Testament, both major and minor, were past-masters in the art of attracting a crowd. Greek history and Roman history are one long succession of what we people of the journalistic profession call 'publicity stunts.' Some of that publicity was dignified. A great deal of it was of so patent and blatant a nature that today even Broadway would refuse to fall for it.

"Reformers like Luther and Calvin fully understood the tremendous value of carefully pre-arranged publicity. And we cannot blame them. They were not the sort of men who could be happy growing humbly by the side of the road like the blushing daisies. They were very much in earnest. They wanted their ideas to live. How could they hope to succeed without attracting a crowd of followers?

"A Thomas à Kempis can become a great moral influence by spending eighty years in a quiet corner of a monastery, for such long voluntary exile, if duly advertised (as it was), becomes an excellent selling point and makes people curious to see the little book which was born of a lifetime of prayer and meditation. But a Francis of Assisi or a Loyola, who hope to see some tangible results of their work while they are still on this planet, must willy-nilly resort to methods now usually associated with a circus or a new movie star."

Spiritual leaders of the present also understand the importance of applying these age-old principles in attracting the public, just as business men, scientists, and politicians are doing. Competition and national distribution make publicity and public relations counsel recognized essentials today.

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### What is Publicity?

**PUBLICITY** — Openness to public knowledge — (Webster's Dictionary).

A broader and more constructive definition of publicity is given by Frank C. Builta, assistant to the president of the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, in "Printers' Ink" recently. We quote the salient points, since they apply to all business, political and public service organizations which come in contact with the public:

"Publicity in its broadest sense, I think, means anything and everything that causes the public to form an opinion of our company. It may be what people observe, or what they hear, or what they read.

"What people observe of our service, our plant or our employees is publicity; what people hear from our employees also is publicity, as well as what they read in our advertisements, our company magazine or other printed matter.

"Publicity enters into every activity of our company. Every employee in every department is our company's publicity representative, because all have more or less contact with the public, and through those contacts the company receives publicity. . . .

"The publicity policy of our company, as I understand it, is this: To so conduct our business as to merit public approval, to let the public know at all times what we are doing and why, and to use every practical means to explain our problems, policies, practices, aims and the like. . . .

"All three partners in the telephone business—employees, investors and the public—are benefited by this thing we call publicity—this mighty force whose purpose is to win and hold public understanding, confidence and cooperation.

"And public confidence and cooperation, I think, come only by doing the following:

1. Providing the public with adequate and dependable service.
2. Giving the public the right impression of us from what they observe of our employees, our methods and our plant.
3. Giving the public complete information about our business through what they hear from our employees and our former employees, and what they read about us in newspaper advertisements and other printed matter.

"All this is a publicity job—the publicity job in which every man and woman in our organization has a part and by means of which, when the job is done well, it benefits telephone employees, investors and the public."

**T**HE general of a large army may be defeated, but you cannot defeat the determined mind of a peasant.

—Confucius.

### "Good News Suppressed"

**P**ROFESSIONAL as well as business men have awakened to the need of securing the public's understanding and cooperation. They realize that news of vital importance to the community may be lost to the general public through lack of understanding of the mediums of communication, or through an inability to express technical subject matter in a manner sufficiently plain, forceful and striking to reach popular imagination. This is brought out in an editorial in the Saturday Evening Post, which, under the striking title of "Good News Suppressed", stresses the need for a comprehensive program of popular medical education. We quote in part:

"Popular medical education cannot be achieved in a day, nor can it be accomplished by scattered outbursts of even the best-framed publicity in many days. The enlightened physician has a great body of news of the highest importance to communicate to nonmedical readers. He is fully alive to the educative powers of the newspaper and periodical press, but he does not know how to use the mighty engine he has so long despised. He is unable to frame his warnings with such skill that he can have them printed; or having had them published, he cannot lure people into reading, digesting and heeding them. His love of long, accurate Greek and Latin words is his besetting sin, and his punishment is in witnessing the affliction which might have been avoided if he had been able to deliver his message interestingly in simple vernacular English. . . .

"The old-time prejudice against medical men writing on medical matters for the lay press should give way to a more enlightened code, and young physicians should be encouraged to take pen in hand with a view to bringing about a closer understanding between doctors and patients. The good which would follow would outweigh the evil."

According to Stéphan Lauzanne in "Sa Majesté La Presse", the first journalist in France was a doctor, Theophraste Renaudot, who (we translate) "believed that the best medication was not the apothecary, but literature." This is interesting corroborative matter for the thesis of the Saturday Evening Post.

### The Dramatist and the Public

**T**HE problem of all those whose function it is to reach the public mind through the dramatization of an idea or an event, whether the idea is the wholesomeness of a new food product or the value of a legislative bill, is similar to that of the dramatist, who must tell his story in terms of the receptivity of his audience. This problem



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discussed by Professor George Pierce Baker of Yale in his book, "Dramatic Technique", from which we quote the following excerpts:

"The dramatist shapes his material . . . in relation to the public he wishes to address, for a dramatist is, after all, a sort of public speaker. Unlike the platform orator, however, he speaks indirectly to his audience—through people, and under conditions he cannot wholly control. None the less, much if not all that concerns the persuasion of public argumentation concerns the dramatist. This does not in any sense mean that an author must truckle to his audience. Far from it. Yet no dramatist can work carefree in regard to his audience. He must consider their natural likes and dislikes, interests and indifferences, their probable knowledge of his subject as well as their probable approach to it. . . .

"Insisting on saying what he wishes to say, he must learn to speak in terms his audience will readily understand."

### Futility of Tail-End Campaigns

**K**NOWLEDGE of the technical operation of newspapers and press associations is essential for an individual or organization which desires properly to present its cause or product to the public. This is brought out by Melville E. Stone, Counselor of the Associated Press, in his book, "Fifty Years A Journalist". Mr. Stone calls the political "tail-end" tour with speeches in halls or from railway platforms an "illusory and profitless performance," because the public at large gets limited news of the events. He particularizes the Wilson-Hughes campaign of 1912:

"I told Governor Hughes what was sure to happen with his 'touch-and-go' talking. He would arrive at a town in the evening, make a hasty speech, and move on. The reporters would make a hurried report to be handed to a telegraph operator at the next stopping place. The operator would probably be an incompetent. The report would necessarily be greatly abbreviated in order to secure transmission. On its receipt by a newspaper in the rush hour it would be again 'cut down', so that when Hughes read the story as it appeared in print he would probably be unable to recognize it as his own speech. On the other hand, if he would give me half a dozen well-prepared addresses a week in advance, so that I could mail them to our newspapers throughout the country, they would be put in type during the leisure hours in the newspaper offices and on the day of their delivery would be released by two or three words of telegraph. I told him how President Roosevelt had managed things, how he had given me his messages to Congress on some occasions six weeks in advance, so that they were released and

printed in Tokio and St. Petersburg on the morning after delivery.

"But my advice was not accepted. The managers sent Governor Hughes on his journey. Things turned out as I knew they would, President Wilson made a speech a week at Long Branch and gave it out in advance, and when the campaign was over the Republicans felt that the Associated Press had not given them their fair share of publicity."

### "Publication of Clear and Understandable Statements"

**A** BUSINESS policy of full public information on all questions which concern the public, places moral responsibility on business and so tends to improve business practice. This in turn creates confidence and trust on the part of the public. Full public information in the financial world is made the subject of editorial comment in "The Outlook" of February 17, on the work of the late Seymour Cromwell, president of the New York Stock Exchange:

"Perhaps the greatest service rendered by Seymour Cromwell to the investing public was his insistence upon turning the light of publicity upon the practices of the Street. Under his leadership the brokers affiliated with the New York Stock Exchange accepted an ever-increasing responsibility towards the investing public. The regulations of the Stock Exchange were so broadened that the books of its members were open for examination for every legitimate purpose. The Stock Exchange furthermore became a power in the industrial world towards the making and publication of clear and understandable statements of a financial condition. For this fact a large measure of credit belongs to the late Seymour Cromwell."

**L**IBERTY to know, to utter and to argue freely according to our own conscience, is the highest form of liberty.

—Milton.

### Lincoln—the Public Man

**S**ENSITIVITY to public opinion must characterize any man who aspires to leadership, because he must obey as well as command the public. This sensitivity is admirably defined by Carl Sandburg, in his extraordinary book "Abraham Lincoln, The Prairie Years", which has just been published.

"He [Lincoln] was now what is called a public man; he was trying to read the mind and the feelings of the public, to look under surface currents and find the deep important drifts, and to connect public opinion and feeling with politics. He was reading

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faces, voices, and whispers; he listened for insinuations, pretensions, truths, in the little changes to be seen and heard in the faces, voices, whispers, he met. He was trying how to learn how to tell what men want to live for and what they are willing to die for, by what was spoken in faces, voices, whispers."

Sandburg also says: "There is both a power and a magic in public opinion."

### Public Utilities and Their Publicity

**P**UBLIC utility corporations stress publicity as an important factor in their business. This is evidenced in the following excerpt from an editorial in an issue of "Aera", a magazine devoted to the interests of the electric railway industry:

"Publicity is dangerous if it isn't properly directed. Everybody isn't fitted to handle it, any more than everybody is safe handling rum and dynamite. The man or woman who directs the publicity of a public utility corporation occupies as responsible a position as the man who is directing the operation of the cars, the generation of power, the distribution of gas or any other major branch of the utility. He should be the best obtainable within the means of the company, should always be taken into consultation, should always be fully informed of the policies and objectives of the corporation, and should command respect for his judgment, information and ability.

"Not all companies that need publicity are using it. Some are afraid of it. To such companies we advise a house-cleaning and a trip for their chief executives about the country, viewing what has been done so well in so many places. But above all is good service; nothing can take its place. You might as well try to sell spoiled eggs with newspaper advertising as to try to sell poor utility service through publicity."

**I**S not every able editor a ruler of the world, being a persuader of it?

—Carlyle.

### Professors Study Business Psychology

**A.** J. SNOW, of the Department of Psychology of Northwestern University, in "Psychology in Business Relations", tells how one hotel put an end to a rumor that was injuring its business. It killed this rumor not by denial, because the denial reaches more people than the rumor itself does, but by setting forth a vivid contradictory picture. Many excellent businesses

must contend from time to time with false, injurious rumor:

"A rumor was once spread that a certain hotel did not want children as its guests. The hotel lost business, because families with children went to other places. The effect of this rumor was counteracted by newspaper articles telling of the adoption of special menus for children at this particular hotel. This was something novel and had 'news interest'; therefore it was carried by the papers. The result was that people knew children would be welcome guests at the place, without being told directly."

### Commissioner For International Congress Appointed

**T**HE Paris edition of the New York Herald published the following on February 1, 1926:

"Mr. Edward L. Bernays, of New York, associate commissioner of the United States Industrial Commission which visited the Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris last summer, has been appointed United States commissioner for the International Film Congress recently organized under the auspices of the League of Nations, it was announced in Paris yesterday.

"Mr. Bernays is the author of 'Crystallising Public Opinion', which has created widespread comment in America, and for years has been a prominent figure in Franco-American activities both in the United States and in France.

"The purpose of the International Film Congress is to gather data on the motion-picture industry in all its phases—social, political, educational, economic, artistic and technical. An international conference in connection with the work of the organization will be held in Paris next June.

"Mr. Bernays will appoint a general committee for America to study the evolution and status of the industry in the United States. He and the members of the committee will attend the Paris conference, at which various international aspects of the industry will be discussed."

**M**EN are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely.

—Macaulay.

**T**HE ideas of people who possess the greatest knowledge of a subject are of more weight than those of an equal number of ignorant persons . . . public opinion is not strictly the opinion of the numerical majority, and no form of its expression measures the mere majority, for individual views are always to some extent weighed as well as counted.

—A. Laurence Lowell, in  
*Public Opinion and Popular Government.*