

Bernays tours Barcelona to mark 99th birthday



Dr. Edward L. Bernays being interviewed in Barcelona, Spain.

By Kevin McCauley

Dr. Edward L. Bernays, "the Father of PR," completed a whirlwind week-long tour of Barcelona, Spain, to celebrate his 99th birthday on November 22.

Bernays, who counseled Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and Enrico Caruso, traveled to Spain to mark the publication of a book about his work by Jose David Barquero Cabrera, head of the Barcelona Business School of PR.

He can't wait to find out what is in the book. "It is written in Spanish, so I'll have to wait until it is translated into English before I know what he says about me," Bernays explained.

Bernays described the Barcelona trip as one of the most memorable experiences of his life.

Bernays Treated Like King

Barcelona rolled out the red carpet for Bernays. The tribute to Bernays began shortly after his limousine left the airport in Spain.

He said every lamppost from the airport to his hotel had a banner welcoming him to Barcelona.

"The banners were about four feet wide and seven feet long," Bernays said. "Each banner had a big picture of me and read 'Homage to Edward L. Bernays on his 99th birthday.' I have never seen anything like it."

His arrival also made front page

news in the Barcelona newspapers.

Bernays conducted three meetings while in Barcelona. The highlight was his address at the University of Barcelona Business School to PR executives from throughout Europe.

More than 200 copies of his book, "Crystallizing Public Opinion," published in 1923, were distributed at the meeting of the PR pros.

Bernays said there was one slightly uncomfortable moment during his visit. An overly-enthusiastic Spanish publicist pressured him to accept a cashmere coat and hat as a gift.

"I told the publicist that I wanted to take a walking tour of the city," he explained. "We stopped at a department store and went to the men's furnishings department. The PR person took an overcoat off the rack and kept on pressing the coat against me. Then the publicist found a black hat to match the coat."

The publicist insisted that Bernays keep the coat and hat. Bernays told the publicist that he never accepted a business-related gift.

But the person insisted that Bernays accept the coat and hat as presents.

Bernays did not want to offend his host, so he took the \$700 coat and \$50 hat. "I did not want to start a battle with this PR person," he said, "so now I have a new coat and hat."

Bernays considers his warm wel-



The President of Catalan Parliament visits with Bernays.

come in Barcelona ironic. He hated Spain as a child. "I remember running through the playgrounds of New York shouting 'To Hell with Spain. Remember the Maine,'" Bernays recalled.

But a lot has changed since the Spanish-American War in 1898, according to Bernays, who said "nobody

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remembers the war."

Spain Eager to Learn PR

Spain is an attractive market for U.S. PR firms wanting to expand to Europe. "The country is rapidly building up its industrial base," he said, and added that young people want to learn about PR.

However, Spain is playing catch-up ball with Germany, France and the U.K. Bernays pointed out that Spain was a political, economic and social backwater nation under the fascist regime of General Franco. He believes times have changed in Spain and the people want to be a part of Western Europe. But they need help in sharpening their communications skills especially since Spain plans to join the European Community in 1992, he said.

Bernays was very impressed with the vibrancy of Barcelona. "The city is very similar to New York," he said. "There are many skyscrapers. People rush from one appointment to the next.

Nobody takes a siesta."

Bernays Defines PR

Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, coined the term "counsel of PR."

He defined a PR pro as "an applied social scientist who advises client or employer on the social attitudes and actions an employer or client should take to win the support of the publics on whom the viability of employer or client depend."

Bernays considers "people power" the most dominant force in the world. "It brought the U.S. its independence."

However, he takes a dim view of the current "professionalism" of PR. "Today any nitwit or crook can call himself or herself a PR practitioner. There are 51 different titles used by PR practitioners, none with a legally defined meaning."

He recommended that a strict licensing and registration procedure be set up to monitor PR. "Legal sanctions are needed to make PR a profession."

Centennial Party in Works

Bernays is looking forward to the celebration of his 100th birthday. "I



Bernays embraces statue in the Hall of Catalan Parliament, Barcelona.

know some of my friends are already planning my 100th birthday," he said. "It will be probably be like my 95th party."

His 95th birthday party was held in the Boston Marriott hotel. "More than 500 of my closest friends attended the party," he said. #