

MASS PSYCHOLOGIST

(Edward L. Bernays)

By
HENRY F. PRINGLE



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It is significant that Edward L. Bernays, who has reduced the once jovial occupation of press agent to a science, who is *frater in facultate* at New York University, and now labors "in the spirit of the laboratory," is a nephew of the renowned Dr. Sigmund Freud. Although he is a graduate of the New York State Agricultural College, Eddie knows a very great deal about psychology and cashes in on that knowledge. His uncle, the *Herr Doktor*, may have discovered sex. He may have classified the innumerable reasons, other than economic, behind the "My wife, Mary, having left my bed and board" notices in the agony columns. But he remains, though honored and doubtless immortal, a rather impecunious old gentleman in Vienna.

Nephew Eddie, on the other hand, has a chastely elegant suite of offices in the Grand Central Terminal zone in New York City. Costly etchings, and an occasional modernistic painting, adorn the walls. Beautiful secretaries glide over voluptuous rugs to ask visitors if they have an appointment with the master of mass psychology. Only poets delude themselves with the notion that love, that is to say sex, causes the world to revolve. Mr. Bernays, whose rank as public relations counsel is at least the equal of Ivy Ledbetter Lee's, knows that it is really money that furnishes the motive power. The mass psychologist, moreover, goes much further than the psychoanalyst who, as I understand it, can do no more than explain what has already taken place. Eddie can foretell the future.

He makes no claims to crystal gazing, as such. He would modestly deny that he is clairvoyant. His science, once understood,

is really very simple. What he does is to create a demand by molding the public mind. He creates a desire for specified goods or ideas.

The first task of the public relations counsel, however, is to see whether his client offers something which the public "can be brought to accept." It is sometimes wiser to refuse a fee. When Eddie wrote his text-book, "Propaganda," a year or so ago, he was certain that "women have definitely emancipated themselves from the old-fashioned corset," although they "might be persuaded to adopt a certain type of girdle." Thus he declined to play any part in the futile, as they then seemed, efforts to revive the whalebone era. His position was probably sound, but today he must regret somewhat that the manufacturers did not invite him again.

It is not often that mass psychology fails to find a solution. Only recently, Dr. Bernays won the undying gratitude of the luggage manufacturers, who had experienced a decided drop in their business and had been told by their efficiency experts that modern women, the root of so many industrial evils, were to blame. The hussies now wore such a sparsity of clothing that a week-end outfit could be tucked into a purse. Porters at the railway terminals were in despair. Transfer companies were selling their trucks. And the luggage men found trunks a drug on the market. In their hour of need they turned to Eddie, who smiled confidently and blew on the tips of his fingers. He would see what could be done. Perhaps he refreshed his memory with the second chapter of "Propaganda," in which he had written:

It [propaganda] takes account not merely of the individual, not even of the mass mind alone, but also and especially of the anatomy of society; with its interlocking group of formations and loyalties. It sees the individual not only as a cell in the social organism but as a cell organized into the social unit. Touch a nerve at a sensitive spot and you get an automatic response from certain specific members of the organization.

Stripped of its scientific verbiage, and reduced to terms comprehensible to the lay mind, this means that the public relations counsel establishes contacts with the people who really matter. He persuades them that the cause he is being paid to advance will: (a) heighten the moral tone of the country, (b) increase prosperity, (c) prevent social unrest. His arguments depend, it is obvious, upon the particular cause on hand. So do the important personages—he has a long and varied list of these—whose endorsement he seeks. Delicacy makes one shrink from asking him to name the celebrities importuned in behalf of the luggage manufacturers. In due time, at all events, publicity material was being rushed to the newspapers.

Did it state that the president of the Los Angeles Woman's Club, the secretary of Chicago Rotary and the president of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce felt sympathy for the trunk men and urged the public to rally to their support? Not at all; that would have been mere press agency and as such would have failed to fool the most gullible editor. The news releases, in fact, did not mention trunks at all. They simply said that Mme. So and So deplored the careless way in which women dressed when traveling. Culture, refinement and good taste demanded at least three dresses on the most informal weekend journey. The woman of fashion took with her a complete ensemble (hat, stockings, lingerie, handbag, handkerchiefs) for each of the dresses. Far better not to travel than embarrass one's hostess by appearing without these minimum essentials!

In cities and on farms, the ladies read these items. They knew that Mme. So and So was an arbiter of the mode. They hurried to stores and modistes for new outfits

and discovered, on the occasion of their next trip, that additional luggage was needed to hold it all. So the porters in the railway stations grew cheerful again. The transfer companies flourished. The luggage men declared an extra dividend, and Eddie deposited another check in his opulent bank account.

II

The success he has achieved is well deserved. Not since the days of his novitiate, when he peddled pictures and wrote optimistic puffs for Broadway theatrical agents, has he deluded himself about the country in which he lives, works and prospers. He believes none of the cheerful burblings of Arthur Brisbane. Compared to him, Theodore Dreiser is a starry-eyed romantic. Eddie is a stern realist who operates upon the demonstrable theory that men in a democracy are sheep waiting to be led to the slaughter. I turn again to "Propaganda," a volume which should be studied with care by those who would understand the American mind. In its pages will be found the answer to how Prohibition came about and why it still remains. Therein, too, is a key to the influence of Canon Chase, Dr. Clarence True Wilson, and Dorothy Dix. In an autocracy, declares Mr. Bernays, in effect, the mass psychologist would have a thin time. But in a democracy the set-up suits his purpose to perfection.

The people, now the customers, gained power when kings lost influence. In older days they did about as they were told. Then came revolution; for a time "the masses promised to become king." But now "a reaction has set in—the minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities." It is evident that smart men can "mold the minds of the masses" and thereby control and direct "their newly gained strength in the desired direction."

We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes are formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. . . . In the sphere of politics or in business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the

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relatively small number of persons who . . . understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world. . . .

Propaganda is the executive arm of the invisible government. Universal literacy was supposed to educate the common man to control his environment. Once he could read and write he would have a mind fit to rule. So ran the democratic doctrine. But instead of a mind, universal literacy has given him rubber stamps, rubber stamps inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with . . . the trivialities of the tabloids and the platitudes of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man's rubber stamps are the duplicates of millions of others, so that when those millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all receive identical imprints.

"The unpleasant connotation commonly attached to propaganda, Eddie hurriedly adds, is not necessarily fair. Besides, what is going to be done about it? Propaganda is here to stay. Nothing goes on without it, whether "electing a President, building a cathedral, or endowing a university. . . . In the active proselytizing minorities in whom self interests and public interests coincide," he concludes, "lie the progress and development of America."

My only criticism of "Propaganda" is that it grows long-winded in spots. Perhaps lecturing at N. Y. U., where he trains youth in the new science, has forced Professor Bernays too close to the maundering note of the pedagogue. But he is always full of common sense and truth, and is at his best when most specific. The mass psychologist has learned, he explains, that man will desire things for reasons quite apart from their intrinsic worth. He will buy a piano, although music bores him, because it is fashionable to have a music-room in one's new house. The old-time salesman said, "Please buy a piano." The new persuades the customer to say, "Please sell me a piano."

Similarly with bacon. Hired by the packers, the psycho-salesman sets up "group customs." He causes physicians to sign testimonials that bacon is healthful and should be on every breakfast table. Débutantes cry for it. Otto H. Kahn, Charles M. Schwab and Mrs. Dollie Gann

give what the Vassar girls used to call "bacon bats." Soon the worried little man with an inferiority complex, labeled Common People or You and I by the cartoonist, is hurrying home with his arms wrapped around sides of bacon.

Mr. Bernays, incidentally, once guided the sales psychology of the Beechnut Packing Company.

III

His eminence, even his career in the field of mass psychology, was accidental. It evolved from circumstances whose importance he did not grasp until years later. Eddie never sat back in some chimney corner to dream that President Hoover, Henry Ford and old Tom Edison would one day move at his command and thereby stimulate the use of electric lamps throughout the world. He would have scoffed had he been told that the President of an unborn country, Czecho-Slovakia, would one day wait upon him.

Yet it was so written. The independence of Czecho-Slovakia was assured in the Fall of 1918. Thomas Masaryk, then provisional President, felt that Sunday, October 27, was an excellent day on which to release the historic announcement. He felt that the Sabbath was somehow appropriate. But Eddie, who was abroad at the time, warned him that this was a serious mistake. The item would be lost among the fashion hints and the funnies. The story should be broken on Monday morning, when news is normally scarce. This was done, and so October 28 became the Czecho-Slovakian Fourth of July. School children will salute it through all eternity. Poets will sing of it in immortal rhymes. And all because Eddie Bernays so decreed.

He comes from an old and distinguished family, which was driven from Spain when the Jews were expelled in the Fifteenth Century and settled in various parts of Europe. The father of Eddie, Ely Bernays, lived in Hamburg and Vienna and was married to Anna Freud, a sister of the psychoanalyst. He was a gentleman of importance

more scientific profession of public relations counsel, was delighted to write blurbs for Klaw & Erlanger productions. By 1915 he was managing the tour of the Russian Ballet and was marveling that one could be paid as much as \$200 weekly for having so much fun. In 1917 he was publicity impresario for the great Caruso. With the entrance of the United States into the World War, he fought for democracy as a member of George Creel's Committee on Public Information. His particular task was to write pamphlets for distribution behind the German lines and in neutral countries, setting forth the high ideals and purposes of America. They were designed to persuade even the most ardent Teuton that Kaiser Bill battled without sanction of the Lord.

Historians will some day analyze the profound effect of the Creel Committee on the future of America. Winning the war was a minor matter. Its members, having learned the tricks at the expense of the government, continued their activities when balmy peace returned. They inaugurated endowment drives for universities and cathedrals. They saw that their countrymen had no chance to forget the goose-step. As Eddie himself writes: "It was the war which opened the eyes of the intelligent few in all departments of life to the possibilities of regimenting the public mind."

When the scales fell from his eyes, he perceived that he had actually known how to regiment the public mind for a long time. He had evolved the formula, without knowing it, as editor of the *Medical Review of Reviews*. His campaign for the production of "Damaged Goods" was based on the soundest principles of mass psychology. Eddie used them knowingly, for the first time, when the War Department employed him after the war. He was to see that employers, whose patriotism was cooling, actually offered jobs to the men whose "places, my brave lads, will be held open while you fight our battle in France." Citations, done on parchment, were awarded

to industrialists able to prove that they had not violated these pledges. The assistance of such organizations as the Fifth Avenue Association was enlisted. Newspapers published editorials and honor lists. Important men made speeches.

Such, then, is the formula. By means of it Eddie Bernays has increased the use of Ivory Soap. He has persuaded women to swathe themselves in velvets (Sidney Blumenthal—Velvets). He has hinted that women are smoking more and more cigarettes (American Tobacco Company), that bread is the staff of life (Ward Baking Company), that silk adds to sex appeal (Cheney Silks), that certain areas on Long Island make ideal residential sections (the Queensborough Corporation).

One of his first clients was the Venida Hair Net Company. Bobbed hair had brought its owners to the face of ruin. Consulted, Bernays sent appeals to a famous artist, a labor leader, and a public health expert. Were not long-haired girls more lovely, he asked the artist? The answer was in the affirmative, and was duly given to the newspapers. He asked the labor leader to conduct an investigation into the cause of factory accidents. The labor leader discovered that many resulted from the hair of operators getting caught in machinery.

He stated quite emphatically that even bobbed hair was dangerous; and several State Legislatures passed laws requiring that all women in industry wear hair nets. Similarly, the public health expert came to the aid of the Venida Hair Net Company. He reported that grave danger of contamination lurked in the hair of waitresses. Bobbed heads were tossed to an alarming extent in restaurants, particularly when a customer left too small a tip. Then certain Commonwealths adopted legislation making it a penal offense for waitresses to be caught without hair nets.

When the Procter & Gamble Company, makers of Ivory Soap and Crisco, engaged his services Eddie Bernays rose to new heights. As the National Household Serv-

ice of the company, he offered prizes for the best recipes in which Crisco, a vegetable lard, was an essential ingredient. Other publicity stories suggested menus for Mother's Day and Hallowe'en. Flowers, candy and gin were out of date as offerings for Mother's Day. Why did not the daughter of the house undertake to cook dinner on that day? Mother would appreciate a vacation, and by using Crisco the meal would prove excellent.

In boosting Ivory Soap, Eddie had no end of novel ideas. The Help Cleanliness Service of the Procter & Gamble Company supplied one story which would have landed on the front pages were it not that newspaper publishers had grown narrow minded about publicity material. This revealed that cleanliness was not, after all, secondary to godliness. A scientist at the University of Chicago had sent questionnaires to 800 individuals. His answers proved that "cleanliness is adjudged more important in successful homes than godliness." The 800 typical Americans had ranked cleanliness fifth in importance and "religiousness" fourteenth.

Striking as they were, these stunts pale to insignificance compared to Eddie's most effective idea for publicizing soap. Four years ago he organized the National Small Sculptural Committee and gave \$1,675 in prizes annually for the best sculpture executed in Ivory Soap. Such famous artists as Gutzon Borglum, Lorado Taft, Harvey Wiley Corbett and Charles Dana Gibson served on the jury of award. Art institutions in New York, Kansas City, Rochester, Brooklyn, Indianapolis and Dayton sponsored the exhibitions. Governor Fuller of Massachusetts sent the following message:

This exhibition will, I am sure, do much to awaken general interest in the desirability of fusing artistry and utility. It takes a cunning hand, an artistic temperament, a sense of color and perspective to bring forth that which is pleasing to the eye and, withal, serviceable. This we Americans can do if we will but realize its importance. I bespeak for your exhibition a generous response and support, for your effort is most worthy of encouragement.

These contests, with exhibitions at such high-toned places as the Anderson Galleries, offered a pretty dilemma to city editors. At first the newspapers were cordial enough; the New York *Times* went so far as to remark editorially that "shaping figures in soap" would foster "appreciation of ancient and modern beauties—in the child." Gradually, however, it began to get on the nerves of the advertising departments. They saw illustrations of prize-winning sculptures, and columns of publicity. They estimated the money which would have poured in had all this been paid for at the usual rates for display advertising. In some instances the publishers ordered the name of Ivory Soap censored from the news. The contests were described as "white soap competitions." Under this heading it was announced that the favorite subjects, among 4,000 statuettes at the Fourth Annual Exhibition, were Lincoln, Venus de Milo, Warren G. Harding, Lindbergh, Calvin Coolidge, the Prince of Wales, Theodore Roosevelt, Trader Horn, Christopher Columbus and Rudolph Valentino.

VI

Until 1929, Eddie Bernays could hardly compete in professional standing with Ivy Lee. He had handled large accounts. His work had been, on the whole, satisfactory to his clients. He had advised the King of Arabia, Joan Lowell and Bernarr Macfadden. But Ivy could still high-hat him, for he had the Rockefellers and a number of other multi-millionaires. Then the Pioneer Associates, gentlemen who had worked with Thomas A. Edison years ago, decided to stage a celebration to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the invention of the electric light. Henry Ford had also planned to do something for the occasion, and so forces were merged. It was decided that the jollification would be held at Dearborn, Mich. Mr. Ford promised he would do right by his pal, Tom Edison, and would pay a sizeable share of the bill.

One of the first indications that Eddie

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had a finger in the pie—I use the word advisedly—was when newspaper editors received a communication in October announcing that President Hoover, Henry Ford, Edison and others would be the chief dignitaries at Dearborn. Every arrangement was being made for newspaper correspondents, and Mr. Bernays asked that he be notified as to how many writers and photographers might be expected.

This caused some surprise. It had been customary for the White House secretariat to make press arrangements for journeys by the President. George Akerson, First Secretary to the Chief, said that the invitation to Mr. Hoover had come directly from Mr. Ford. He knew nothing about Bernays. Then Eddie expressed the hope that he had not "embarrassed Mr. Hoover." He was acting, he said, simply as "liaison man between those honoring Mr. Edison and the press of America." Meanwhile publicity material regarding, as it had been christened, Light's Golden Jubilee poured in floods from the Bernays office. Committees were organized. The sovereign State of Ohio announced that it would declare the birthplace of Tom Edison at Milan, Ohio, a shrine. Key men and women again issued statements. Orators went out. Twenty-five cities arranged to celebrate the jubilee. The Italian government appointed distinguished Fascisti as an honorary board of endorsement. The Postmaster-General ordered that a special stamp, with a symbolic design of the Mazda lamp, be issued.

In due time the jubilee was held. Thousands of laborers fashioned a replica of Menlo Park at Dearborn. Even soil from New Jersey was shipped there, so that Tom Edison could dig into it with his toe, eject a comfortable stream of tobacco juice and ejaculate:

"Why Henry's even got that damn New Jersey clay out here!"

President Hoover, with his whole entourage, paid tribute to the old man. Ambassador Dawes, Charlie Schwab, John

D. Rockefeller, Jr., Will Hays, Pat Crowley of the New York Central—in brief, many men who were typical Ivy Lee clients—were there. They did what Eddie Bernays told them to do. He distributed their speeches to the press.

"Congratulations," offered the Newark *Evening News*, "to the unnamed master of exploitation who conceived and directed the Edison programme of publicity."

Amid the hurly-burly it was forgotten that most of this publicity sounded the praises of the electric light. Wherever Mazda lamps were on sale appeared posters advertising Light's Golden Jubilee. Who paid the bills at Dearborn? Maybe Henry Ford paid most of them. But who paid for the publicity? Was it the National Electric Light Association? Had the President of the United States jumped through a hoop in the hands of a press agent? Had the Miracle Man come out to speak so that more Mazda lamps would be sold?

These are questions which Eddie Bernays must, it is wholly natural, decline to answer. He modestly denies that he caused the lamp to be engraved on the nation's postage stamps. Questioned concerning Light's Golden Jubilee, he reaches into a drawer and brings forth a number of silken strips. They serve, he intimates, as symbols of mass psychology. The design, examination discloses, is based on the contours of an incandescent bulb. It was created by a Chicago silk house soon after the jubilee.

"These were sent to me," Eddie explains, "and they illustrate my theories. I had not heard they were being designed. I knew nothing about them. One causes, you see, certain stimuli. A reaction spreads. A designer receives an inspiration. These pieces of silk result from it."

But the Mazda postage stamps? Surely they were the result of clever publicity work. Again Eddie Bernays shakes his head. No. Mass psychology might have had something to do with it. Beyond that:

"Postmaster-General Brown, I should say, was responsible for the stamps."