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OUR MASTER'S VOICE

ADVERTISING

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8 THE THREE GRACES: Advertising, Propaganda, Education

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Modern advertising reaches its highest expression in the United States and under the political and social forms of our democratic institutions and concepts: a free press, popular education, representative government. It is important to note that the contemporary phenomenon is an aspect of our so-called "surplus economy," as is revealed by the use of the phrase "sales resistance" in current advertising parlance. "Sales resistance" means an impedance of the distributive function. It implies a lack of spontaneous demand for the product or service which may be caused,

1. By the inferiority of the product as to quality or price with respect to competing products.
2. By the inertia of established buying patterns in the market at which the product is aimed.
3. By the inter-industrial competition, as for example, brick against lumber or meat against cheese.
4. By the inadequacy of the class or mass buying power with respect to the volume and price of commodities and services offered on the market.

Although existing buying power is ultimately determinative, it is possible to manipulate consumer preferences and the division of the consumer's dollar within this iron limit. In other words the market can be "educated"—or propagandized—as you choose to put it, just as it can be partially or wholly monopolized and the controls established with respect to volume of production, distribution and price. These are, perhaps, the two major factors in the obsolescence of the "law" of supply and demand.

The education, or manipulation of the market may proceed directly through the advertising of the product by the manufacturer or by a group of manufacturers organized as a trade association;

through unsigned publicity prepared and issued by the manufacturer or his agent; through the more or less influenced or coerced "co-operation" of the daily or periodical press, radio and cinema; even through similar influences or coercions focused upon our institutions of formal education. Sometimes all four methods are used. A few typical examples will illustrate the nature of the process, its detailed exposition being left for other chapters.

It happens that a single manufacturer dominates the market for automobile tire valves, caps and gauges. He stands to profit, therefore, by any expansion of this market. Hence his advertising has tended to be primarily "educational"; that is to say, it tells motorists that proper inflation adds to the durability of tires, that improper inflation is dangerous; that the air pressure in tires should be frequently tested, hence the motorist should own his own gauge; that the valves require more or less frequent replacement.

Note that all this "education" is sound enough on the whole and in the consumer's interest as well as that of the manufacturer and distributor. Such education, or promotion, can be achieved more economically, on the whole, by publicity than by advertising, since the publicizing of the manufacturer's name and the brand name of his product, is, while desirable in view of actual or latent competition, not essential.

Many newspapers and magazines carry columns of advice to motorists; the editors of these automobile sections and pages can readily be persuaded to publish small items urging motorists to keep the tires of their cars properly inflated; especially if the manufacturer or his agent does the whole column in which the advice about tires is mixed with other standard bits of information and warning. This relieves the newspaper or magazine staff of labor and expenditure; sometimes a staff member, or a journalist having working relations with several publications, is induced to do the job for a fee paid by the manufacturer, and then see that the "education" or promotion is duly published. *But* such arrangements are precarious unless the newspaper or magazine gets some quid pro quo. Hence an educational publicity campaign of this kind is usually correlated with a minimum expenditure for paid advertising.

There is nothing unusual about such procedures, nor is any violation of the current business code involved. True, the technique requires the application of interested economic pressures. But so does the technique of security promotion represented by the Morgan preferred list. In so far as moral or ethical judgments are applicable to such procedures it would seem futile to apply them to the individuals involved; rather, they should be directed, not merely against the existing business code, but against the system under which such

codes naturally develop.

Another example. General Motors sells automobiles and advertises them in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which is one of the reasons why the *Post* can pay high prices for articles and fiction and yet sell for a nickel. But the fact that General Motors and other automobile manufacturers advertise in the *Saturday Evening Post* also serves to explain certain elements in the editorial content of the magazine. The *Post* by reason of its advertising lineage becomes an important and profitable business property, one of a group of business properties. Hence the editorial policy of the *Post* is inevitably conservative in its policies. With equal inevitability its editorial management is favorably disposed toward the specific interests of its advertisers. The *Post* may or may not consider itself primarily an advertising medium; it is so regarded by the advertiser and his agent. The advertising manager of the *Post* must be prepared to show that the *Post* is a profitable medium, a favorable medium; that the editorial content of the magazine is favorable to, and supplements, the message of the advertiser.

Saturday Evening Post readers will perhaps recall that automobile fiction stories appear recurrently in that magazine; that these and other stories are often illustrated with happy and prosperous people in automobiles. Naturally the artist is not permitted to make recognizable a particular make of automobile.

The implication must, of course, be qualified before it can stand. It would be expected in an automobile age that automobiles should figure in much contemporary fiction. It would be impossible for the *Post*, which solicits and publishes advertising of all kinds of products, to emphasize unduly in its editorial columns the use of any particular product.

But it would also be bad business not to utilize the editorial content of the magazine to increase its value to advertisers, and that is exactly what is done as a matter of course, not merely by the *Post*, but by many other newspapers and magazines of large circulation, such as *Good Housekeeping*, *House and Garden*, *Arts and Decoration*. It is inevitable, since the publication is a business enterprise, that the business accounting should extend to the editorial as well as the advertising management; the deciding vote in any issue is naturally that of the advertising management.

American children, even a heavy percentage of the children of working class parents, brush their teeth. They have been taught to do so. By whom?

By the manufacturers and advertisers of toothbrushes and toothpastes, operating directly through signed advertisements in newspapers and magazines, indirectly through the co-operation of the dental profession, indirectly through the more or less syndicated "health

talks" published in newspapers and magazines, indirectly through the teaching of hygiene in the schools. The co-operation of the dental profession is secured by the distribution of free samples to dentists, the solicitation of salesmen, etc.: but also and more importantly it is sought by "constructive educational" advertising in which the advertiser urges the reader to "visit your dentist every six months": such campaigns—that of the S. S. White Company, manufacturer of dental chairs, mechanical equipment, supplies, etc., is an excellent example—are in turn "merchandized" to the dental profession in the professional publications. "Merchandizing" consists essentially of advertisement of advertisements. The manufacturer points out to the dentist how much he is doing to "educate" the public to patronize the dentist, the implication being that in consideration for the manufacturer's expenditure in such "constructive" publicity, the dentist might well recommend the particular product to his patients. In the case cited the product was a good one, made according to a formula prepared by an eminent dentist, and the advertising copy more or less aggressively de-bunked the unscientific "talking-points" of competing dentifrices. A number of manufacturers, notably Colgate, have followed this policy; others, such as Forhan's, Pepsodent, Ipana, etc., have found it more profitable to select a particular half-true talking point, exaggerate it, use the simple technique of fear appeal, and while continuing to seek the co-operation of the dental profession, discount the opposition of the more sensitive and "ethical" section of the profession.

Education of another sort, secured through fostering the newspaper and magazine propaganda of "health talks," "preventive dentistry," etc., can rarely be made to benefit the interest of any particular manufacturer. In general such education is likely to be sound enough in intent, and at least harmless in effect, although sometimes objected to by dentists on the ground that it is insufficiently critical and informative, and does not—could not, since the publication is an advertising medium—take issue with the bunk which is spread on the advertising pages. If the press were or could be a disinterested educational instrumentality it might be expected to correct the mis-education sponsored by its advertisers, but then, if the press functioned in the interests of its readers rather than in the interests of its advertisers, it would not publish pseudo-scientific, more or less deceptive advertising. Again, the press is merely an advertising "medium"; not until the ghosts which use this medium to materialize their more or less sprightly profit-motivated antics—not until these ghosts are exorcized can we expect the press to be anything except precisely what it is. Ethical judgments are pretty much irrelevant. A "good" medium is not a medium which materializes only good

ghosts; a "good" medium is a medium through which ghosts, good, bad and indifferent can manifest themselves effectively. True, the more respectable mediums are prejudiced against the more disreputable ghosts and exclude them from their pages. But such prejudices and exclusions are also likely to be economically rather than ethically determined; the antics of the respectable ghosts require, for their maximum effectiveness a decent parlor half-light, not the bawdy murk in which the direct-by-mail peddlers of aphrodisiacs, abortifacients, and contraceptives squeal and gibber. And the bigger and better ghosts spend more, and more reliably.

Another form of indirect education—that which makes use of our public schools—has both its positive and negative aspects. A familiar example of the positive use of this "medium" of formal education is the "toothbrush drill" taught children in the primary grades. Manufacturers of toothbrushes and of dentifrices have used and benefited by this technique almost equally. They have enabled school boards to economize by supplying free or at cost the literature used in teaching dental hygiene, including various trick devices for making education amusing to the young. Such education is neither very good nor very bad in and of itself. But if a competent teacher or school nurse happens to believe, as do many dentists, that the toothbrush is a dubious blessing; that it should be used in strict moderation if at all; that the use, say, of dental floss, is considerably more valuable hygienically—such a school functionary is likely to encounter the pressures by which heretics are disciplined—unless she can get the dental floss manufacturers to spring to her aid. And finally, advertised toothbrushes and dentifrices are likely to be absurdly overpriced; education which results in teaching children to buy overpriced toothbrushes and dentifrices when the use of ordinary table salt, with the occasional use of dental floss, would constitute on the whole a more hygienic as well as more economical regimen—such education has a certain unmistakable ghostly quality. But the negative aspect of the advertising controls operating on our publicly owned schools is vastly more important. In recent years a new specialty has appeared in the teaching of economics; it is called "consumption economics" and concerns itself with the consumer as a factor in the economic scheme; how can the consumer best serve his own interest? What is an intelligently balanced budget for a given income level? What items should be bought and how can such items be bought most economically? What are the possibilities and limits of such developments—still embryonic in America—as consumers' co-operatives, credit unions, consumers' research, etc.

On the surface there would seem to be merit in this idea of "consumption economics." But ask the secretary of your local chamber

of commerce, or the business manager of the local paper, or any prominent retailer what *they* think about it. Or ask some of the consumption economists, such as Robert Lynd, author of *Middletown*, just how far they have got in their attempts to introduce such courses in the schools.[1] The writer asked such questions; the answers were somewhat disheartening. In conclusion he asked an even more naive question: to whom do these public schools belong anyway? The answer, of course, is that they belong to the people, since *all* the people, directly or indirectly, pay taxes for their support. But their use in the interest of *all* the people is simply impossible, because the interests of the people are divided and conflicting. In the case of "consumption economics," any attempt to perform for the masses of the population even the modest service which Consumers' Research performs for its 50,000 subscribers—an expert measurement of the qualities and values of products and services offered for sale—is and will be met by the united opposition of business and the allies of business: manufacturers, distributors, bankers, publishers—all the people who profit quite legitimately by selling products and services in as great a volume as possible and for as much more than they are worth as the traffic will bear: all these people and all the people whose political voices they control: their employees, wives, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins—even perhaps some of the cousins who would like to consider themselves disinterested school superintendents and teachers serving the interests of all the people. The opposition is unqualified and rigorous. Business men are also in a sense educators. They use advertising and its related devices and techniques to "educate the consumer," to "break down sales resistance"; your earnest "consumption economist" would like to use education to build up sales resistance. But let him try to do it. Anybody who would want to cut the Gordian knot of this "educational" dilemma with the liberal sword of "ethics" is welcome to his pains.

In these few examples we have encountered advertising, propaganda and education as parts of a single economic nexus. It becomes necessary at this point to define these categories more sharply and to show their interrelations.

The complex of phenomena is economic, institutional, technical, psychological, whereas the tendency of current criticism by liberal publicists has emphasized invidious ethical judgments. Yet it is only by re-defining such value judgments that the play of forces can be accurately described and analyzed. It is even more important to avoid the artificial isolation of phenomena which superficial moral and ethical criticism engenders. What we are dealing with is the institutional and ideological superstructure of competitive capitalism. Whether we take our cue from Marx or merely from the respectable

[1] [Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929).]

social ecologists, we may be sure that the mutual interaction of social phenomena, whether categoried as economic, sociological or psychological, is an immitigable fact; that when we seem to find isolate, perverse and irreconcilable elements in the picture, we are merely victims of our own thought patterns, for there can be nothing mysterious or isolate about the phenomena. The contemporary French historian, André Siegfried, is obviously aware of the continuity and mutual interaction of the social and economic phenomena we have been describing when he writes, in *America's Coming of Age*: "Under the direction of remarkably intelligent men, publicity has become an important factor in the United States and perhaps even the keynote of the whole economic structure."[2]

[2] [André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age: A French Analysis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927).]

Note that M. Siegfried is using "publicity" as an inclusive term to denote all forms of advertising, propaganda and press agentry. The writer would both widen and sharpen this inclusion by showing that the apparatus of newspaper and periodical publishing, radio broadcasting, motion picture production and distribution; with the conjoined apparatus of advertising agencies, public relations experts, and dealers in direct-by-mail, car card, and poster advertising, constitute in effect a single institution; further, that the institutions and techniques of formal education, both secondary and collegiate, are also closely related and functional within the general scheme; that the purpose and effect of these conjoined institutions and techniques is rule; the shaping and control of the economic, social and psychological patterns of the population in the interests of a profit-motivated dominant class, the business class.

The necessity of such broad inclusions in any systematic analysis of the phenomena becomes apparent when we come to define our major categories. The definition of advertising offered by Frank Presbrey in his *History and Development of Advertising* is as follows: "Advertising is printed, written, or graphic salesmanship, deriving from oral salesmanship."[3] This, of course, should be corrected to include radio and motion picture advertising, but otherwise may be allowed to stand. The point to be emphasized is that the practical advertising man views all these instruments of communication — newspapers, magazines, radio, motion picture—as *advertising media*; that this is in fact the accurate, realistic and significant view to take of these instruments of social communication, whereas the thought patterns of liberal laymen tend to make them appear to represent some sort of ideal functional relationship between editor and reader, or broadcaster and Great Radio Public—a relationship which these curious parasitic growths, advertising and publicity, are insidiously, immorally perverting. The layman sees that the tail is wagging the dog. The advertising man knows that the tail is the dog and acts

[3] [Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1929).]

accordingly. He knows that there is no real separation between the business and editorial offices of a modern publication; that where such a separation appears to obtain it is purely a management device, designed to insure the more effective functioning of the publication as an advertising medium. He knows, for he is called in as a "publisher's consultant" to plan and execute the job—that the conception of a modern commercial publication starts with the definition and segregation of a particular buying public, which may be recruited and held together by a particular type of editorial policy and content. The publisher's consultant sees an unoccupied, or insecurely occupied niche in the crowded spectrum of daily and periodical publishing. The publication is thereupon concocted to the specifications necessary to entertain or inform that particular section of the buying public. The objective is not attained, however, until the circulation so recruited is sold to advertisers at so much per head, the charge being based on the average buying power and the demonstrated "reader-interest" of the readers. "Reader-interest" is measured by response to advertising and the editorial content of the magazine is carefully designed, as already indicated, to strengthen this response. You pay your money and you take your choice, depending upon the nature of your product or service and the methods by which it is promoted. The readers of *True Romances*, for example, are poor but numerous and credulous, whereas the readers of *The Sportsman* are comparatively few, but very rich—and susceptible to the arts of flattery and sycophancy. In both cases the collaboration of the editorial and business managements is intimate and accepted as a matter of course. Criticism of such arrangements by the more or less obsolete criteria of an ideal reader-editor relationship is beside the point, since the determinants are the objective forces of the competitive capitalist economy.

In propaganda we encounter a phenomenon even more disturbing and puzzling to liberal publicists and sociologists, especially since the experience of the war demonstrated the dominance of this technique of social control in modern societies. Again, contemporary students have been frustrated by their tendency to view the phenomenon as isolate and adventitious.

The latest book on propaganda, which digests and summarizes much that has been written on the subject by contemporary sociologists and publicists, is *The Propaganda Menace* by Professor Frederic E. Lumley, of Ohio State University. Professor Lumley experiences much difficulty in reaching a satisfactory definition of propaganda. After rejecting innumerable definitions offered by contemporary educators and sociologists, he offers us the following:

> Propaganda is promotion which is veiled in one way or another as

> to (1) its origin or sources, (2) the interests involved, (3) the methods employed, (4) the content spread and (5) the results accruing to the victims—any one, any two, any three, any four, any five.[4]

[4] [Lumley, Frederick E., *The Propaganda Menace* (New York: The Century Co., 1933), 44.]

In Professor Lumley's view the contrasting opposite to propaganda, necessary in defining any term, is "education." And it is precisely there that his definition falls down, because of the highly conditioned and shifting quality of the latter concept. More or less aware of these confusions, aware that education must be related to some conception of social change, Professor Lumley takes refuge in the relatively sophisticated and acute definition of education offered by Professor Bode as follows:

> When formal education becomes necessary in order to fit the individual for his place in the social order, there arises a need for reflection on the aims and purposes of education and of life. Many aims have been proposed, but if we view intelligence from the standpoint of *development*, the conclusion is indicated that aims are constantly changing and that education is, as a matter of fact, the liberation of capacity; or in Bagley's phraseology, it means training for achievement. To make this liberation of capacity or this process of growth a controlling ideal means the cultivation, of sensitiveness to the human quality of subject matter by presenting it in its social context. The fact that a given type of education is classed as liberal or cultural is no guarantee that it fosters this quality of mind. Unless this sensitiveness is deliberately cultivated, many human interests, such as business, science and technical vocations, do not become decently humanized. And to cultivate this sensitiveness deliberately means that it is made the guiding ideal for education.[5]

[5] [Boyd Henry Bode, *Fundamentals of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1922).]

In this definition Professor Bode recognizes the necessity of relating education to social change. He does not, in the passage quoted, take account of the dynamics of social change. One does not need to insist upon a strict Marxian interpretation to describe the essential nature of social change. It will be readily granted by most readers that the conflict of pressure groups within the social order results in shifting balances of power; that these pressure groups tend to represent economic classes; that the issues of conflict tend to be economic at bottom; that the basic cause of change is the changing level of the productive forces—in our day the machine technology. This is not to ignore the equally real rôle played by pressure groups in the fields of the social mores, religion, race, etc., but merely to emphasize the economic and class roots of this perpetual conflict, where propaganda is so powerfully instrumental.

If this is so, then there are certain crucial undefined terms imbedded in Professor Bode's definition. What, for example, is meant by "fitting the individual for *his place* in the social order"? Obviously the students whom Professor Bode proposes to educate after this

fashion occupy not the same but different places in our social order, which, while retaining a certain residual fluidity manifests an increasing rigidity and class stratification. To fit a third generation Rockefeller for his place in the social order is obviously a task different from that of fitting Isidore Bransky, son of a radical East Side pants maker, for *his* place, which is a matter of strictly limited but crucial choice, depending upon whether young Bransky leaves his class or doesn't; whether he is fitted to become a labor organizer, legal defense worker, radical journalist or merely an energetic legal ambulance chaser, political fixer or other capitalist functionary in business or in the professions. Should or can the educator remain above the battle as respects this choice? Will not the educational means by which capacity is liberated necessarily affect it? Finally, would Professor Bode attempt to deny that education in a typical university does inevitably indoctrinate and that on the whole it indoctrinates in the direction of conformity to the existing order? In honesty, must not the teacher tell his student that ordinarily he must save his body by serving an exploitative system and, if possible save his soul by helping to destroy this system?

What is meant by presenting subject matter "in its social context"? Whose social context? Does Professor Bode mean by social context the contemporary class conflicts of American capitalism exacerbated by the internal and international conflicts of our "surplus economy"? Does he mean the perhaps imminent "freezing" of the capitalist structure into the corporative forms of Fascism?

Returning to Professor Lumley, it might well be alleged that in urging "education" as a preventive and cure of the propaganda menace, Professor Lumley is really writing propaganda for a particular concept of education: the concept of an objective, disinterested effort to release capacity. Further, it might be argued that this concept is doomed to remain in the field of theory, since it is observably nonexistent in practice. Finally, it may be suggested that to erect a purely conceptual theory of education, while ignoring the contemporary practices and very real economic determinants of educators and the institutions they work for, is itself a kind of propaganda: propaganda by suppression which is one of Professor Lumley's recognized categories.

The necessity of such realistic clarifications cannot be evaded, and to Professor Bode's credit it must be said that he, at least in his later, more advanced position does not try to evade them. With Dewey, Counts and other modern educators he acknowledges frankly that the theory of education propounded in the passage quoted above is applicable only in a classless society.

Behold, then, this precious absolute, education, the hope of democ-

racy! The more we turn it up to the light, whether we examine its practice or even its theory as expressed by leading educators, the more it dissolves in relativity. And our crucial problem remains with us: what is education and what is propaganda with respect to the problems of the individual in our society, faced as it is, with the self-preservative necessity of fundamental social change?

If it were only possible to posit an ideal disinterested objectivity on the part of the educator, and an absence of pressure controls operating upon our educational institutions, the problem would be greatly simplified. But, as we have seen, leading educators properly discard such claims. The facts of class interest and individual subjectivity must be and now are, generally admitted. The coercions of the social order, for achievement in which the student is trained, these, too, are frankly acknowledged. Recently Dr. Abraham Flexner has noted with proper but perhaps futile indignation the tendency to vocationalize our institutions of higher learning, that is, to make them functional with respect to the requirements of business, and to the survival necessities of students. And we have with us always the issue of "academic freedom": the degree to which a teacher is permitted to express views in conflict with the economic and social status quo. The underlying fact, of course, is that in both privately and publicly supported educational institutions the interest and prejudices of the ruling class are ultimately determining, whenever education enters the field of contemporary social and political struggle.

Many teachers, even of the social sciences, are quite unconscious of these determinants and preserve the confident illusion of "scientific objectivity" in the very act of asserting creedal absolutes which are obviously a product of social and economic class conditioning. Professor Lumley is himself a conspicuous example of this. In his concluding chapter he writes: "No sane person wants *revolutionary* communistic propaganda spread in this country." Is this the language of an objective, disinterested educator? Professor Lumley urges that instead of deporting and lynching Reds, their agitation be combatted (1) by destroying the soil of gullibility through education and (2) by removing desperate need through liberal reformism. Such recommendations may seem relatively enlightened and civilized, but they are not quite sufficient to rehabilitate Professor Lumley in his rôle of disinterested educator.

The dubiousness of his position would quickly appear under circumstances such as the following: suppose that because of the disinterested teaching of Dr. Lumley one of his students had escaped the class-conditioned thought patterns of his family and friends, or that, because of the logical capacities released by education he had broken through these patterns. Suppose that this student, having

acquired some acquaintance with Marx, Engels, Veblen, Lenin and others, should elect as the subject of his doctor's thesis *The Position of the Social Scientist under American Capitalism*. The application of the Marxian analysis to this material might well result in "revolutionary communistic propaganda." Would Professor Lumley pronounce his student insane and withdraw his fellowship? If not, should he not have to consider himself insane for permitting the spread of "revolutionary communistic propaganda"?

One thinks of a third solution for this imaginary academic dilemma: shove the student back into the educational mill and trust that on his re-emergence he would have more sense. Then suggest to him, as an interesting subject for a thesis, *Paranoiac Traits in Modern Radical Leaders*.

It is indeed difficult to escape the conviction that the god of education, like other gods, is not merely man-made, but made by a particular group of men as a rationalization of their role in the complex struggle of social forces—of "pressure groups": further, that the institutions built up to exemplify and discharge this rôle—our schools and universities—are similarly subject to such rationalized determinants. The claim of disinterestedness, of universality, is also made for the press, although Professor Lumley has no difficulty in seeing that the latter institution becomes inevitably an instrument of pressure groups. The same claim is even made for business, the instrument of profit-motivated property owners. All of these claims are of course equally invalid; none of these institutions is separate or self-sufficient; all are swept into the struggle of conflicting social forces; advertising, propaganda and education are inextricably merged and intertwined.

The contemporary fact of this confusion is excellently illustrated by the propaganda activities of the National Electric Light Association, to which Professor Lumley devotes an indignant chapter. The investigation of the Federal Trade Commission and the writings of H. S. Raushenbush, Ernest Gruening and others have familiarized most readers with the theory and practice of this propaganda campaign in behalf of our privately owned light and power corporations. It will be sufficient here to point out that the instruments of advertising, propaganda and education were all used in such a way as to reinforce each other, all contributing to the crude economic objective of protecting and conserving the vested interests of private property in exploiting for profit an essential public service.

Direct, explicit, signed propaganda by the National Electric Light Association and its member companies was used in the form of paid advertising. This provided an economic leverage for the control of the news and editorial content of the press as effecting the interests of the light and power companies. Note that the press was in a bar-

gaining position. Newspaper publishers could and did on occasion threaten to expose the iniquities of the "power trust" unless the local companies could be brought to see the propriety of buying advertising space in their papers. Once this concession was made, the papers willingly "co-operated" with the NELA campaign, by printing the propaganda furnished by the publicity directors in the form of mats, boiler plate and mimeographed releases. One interesting and important point is totally missed by Professor Lumley. In the case of the NELA campaign, as of other propagandas by vested commercial interests, what was in effect a method of control by bribery (blackmail from the point of view of the NELA) was practicable only with respect to the smaller and less powerful newspapers, just as it was only the less eminent professors who accepted fees for making speeches and writing texts favorable to the power interests. Integrity, as Stuart Chase has pointed out, is a luxury in our civilization. It is, with certain qualifications, one of the privileges of wealth and power. No evidence was produced to show that the NELA had bribed the *New York Times*. Attempts were made to influence the Associated Press, but that is a mutual corporation, in which the pressure upon individual members backs up inevitably upon the directing officials.

On the other hand, it is equally important to note that it wasn't necessary to bribe the *New York Times*, and that, stupid as the NELA publicity directors proved themselves to be, they probably had more sense than to try to bribe either the *Times* or other major publishing corporations. Yet the editorials in the *Times*, and its handling of public utility news, especially with respect to the private versus public ownership issue, have been pretty consistently favorable to the power interests. Why? Obviously, because the *Times* is itself a major capitalist property. It is part of the complex of financial, business and social relationships which produces what is called a "conservative" point of view. The owners and managers who express and make effective this point of view are often not aware of the economic and social pressures which influence them. They act unconsciously, much as an experienced driver operates an automobile—he is "part of the car." The specific allegiance rarely becomes overt and fully conscious.

Respectable and powerful newspapers and magazines cannot be expected to swallow and approve the rawer aspects of contemporary commercial propaganda. The *Times* duly slapped the wrist of the National Electric Light Association, following the exposures of the Federal Trade Commission. It did not go down the line for Mr. Doheny and Secretary Fall during the Teapot Dome scandal, though from time to time it deprecates Congressional investigations as in general "bad for business."

Some service—not only lip service but actual service—is due the

concept of a "free press" and a modicum of such service can usually be obtained even by radical minority groups. The amount and quality of such service is determined by the circumstances of the individual case. The major determining factors are: the inherent news value of the incident and its relation to other current news; the success with which current liberal concepts of free speech, legal rights, etc., can be appealed to; the class origin and political orientation of the reporter who covers the story; the current pressures of local, national and foreign news; the reputation of the radical propagandist as a reliable news source; the mass pressure brought to bear upon the newspaper.

The writer has served as a commercial publicity man, an advertising man and as a radical propagandist. All these techniques require careful measurement and utilization of the forces operative in a given complex of public relations. Neither as a commercial propagandist nor as a radical propagandist is it intelligent to act on the assumption that the capitalist press is "kept," to use the familiar half-true radical jibe. It must always be remembered that the press has to "keep" itself; that it has its own particular values, traditions and technical requirements to conserve. Although, primarily because of the dominance of advertising, the press functions in general as an organ of business, it functions with relation to circulations which usually include a variety of more or less organized and articulate pressure groups. Also, journalism is a profession with an ethical tradition. Both the somewhat eroded and romantic professional traditions of journalism and our somewhat debilitated concepts of democratic freedom and fair play can still be used to temper the winds of "public opinion" to the shorn lambs of radical protest and agitation—especially when mass pressure in the form of protests, strikes, and demonstrations is used to force the issue.

Yet it must be confessed that these are all frail reeds to lean upon in a pinch, especially if the pinch is local. To illustrate this last point, it is sufficient to point to the contrast between the handling of the 1931 disorders in the Kentucky coal fields by the Kentucky press, as against the performance of the distant metropolitan journals and press associations. The local editors editorialized against the "Red menace," and in their news reporting suppressed and distorted the unquestionable facts of starvation of strikers, discrimination in the administration of public and private relief, the capture of the machinery of justice by the coal corporations and the violence of middle-class mobs. True, on that occasion the Associated Press also broke down, because the local A. P. reporter happened to be also one of the leaders of the middle-class mob which illegally deported one of the successive delegations of writers and students which entered the

strike area to bring relief to the strikers and to report the facts of the situation to the country at large. *But* the protests of Dos Passos and others were effective on that occasion: the offending A. P. correspondent was dismissed. And shortly afterward the *New York Times* sent a special correspondent, Mr. Louis Stark, to Harlan County, where he did an honest and competent reporting job in a series of signed articles.

A similar situation developed in connection with the Scottsboro case, in which seven negro boys faced legal lynching in a situation growing out of race prejudice and conflict fostered by ruling-class economic interests. The evidence on which the boys were convicted, later shown to have been largely perjured, was accepted pretty much without question by almost the entire Southern press. The lynch atmosphere surrounding the first trial was largely suppressed. The case was consistently "played down" throughout the South. Citizens of New York learned more about the Scottsboro case through the papers than citizens of Alabama. As a result of the efforts of the International Labor Defense, a Communist-led organization, a new trial was ordered by the United States Supreme Court. The boys were again convicted by a jury obviously swayed by anti-negro, anti-Jew and anti-radical appeals to prejudice. But the *New York Times* reporter, Mr. F. W. Daniell, reported the trial with notable accuracy and fairness, whereas the Southern press for the most part continued the policy of suppression and distortion, dictated by the pressures of local and regional ruling-class prejudice and interests. In this case the factor of professional pride entered also into the equation. The prosecution made the mistake of treating Mr. Daniell and other correspondents with scant courtesy. Promptly and without trepidation, Mr. Daniell, both in his personal conduct and in his dispatches, made it clear that the Alabama authorities were in no position to bully and coerce the correspondent of the *New York Times*.

The press handling of the communist-led Hunger March to Washington in the fall of 1932 provides another interesting example. In this case the Hoover Administration broadcast appeals to State and local authorities to "stop the Hunger March." The evidence is overwhelming that the press, actuated by the alarm of the administration and of business, undertook more or less concertedly to play down and ridicule the demonstration. The dispatches, both while the columns were enroute to Washington and after their arrival, were so colored and so flagrantly editorialized as to surprise even experienced radical organizers. The demonstrators were "neither hungry nor marching." The March was treated as a Communist publicity stunt and both the leaders and the rank and file were consistently ridiculed. Radio and news reels joined this hostile chorus. But in

the end, after the Washington police had executed their melodramatic coup, and the 3,000 marchers were practically imprisoned on a stretch of windswept highway on the outskirts of the capital, the unity of the conservative press front began to crack.

There were several factors in this partial failure of the anti-communist propaganda. In the first place, the Communist organizers of the Unemployed Councils, hugely handicapped as they were by lack of funds and by the terrified inertia of the destitute unemployed workers, had by sheer drive and energy accomplished a notable feat in bringing the three columns of marchers to a point of convergence on the capital within a few hours of each other. In the second place the more radical working class groups in the cities through which they passed had cheered the marchers, aided them with contributions of food and shelter, and otherwise counteracted the efforts of the authorities to disintegrate and abort the enterprise. In the third place, Herbert Benjamin, the Communist Director of the march, proved himself to be a cool, resourceful, courageous and humanly appealing leader. He contrasted favorably with Major (Duck-Legs) Brown, who directed the forces of the District of Columbia police. The genuine discipline of the marchers contrasted favorably with the provocative brutality and obvious unfairness of the police. Protests, sponsored by more or less well-known liberals, and invoking the rights of free speech, appeal to the government, etc., were duly printed in the conservative papers. From the publicity point of view, the most effective effort on the radical side was the delegation of socially prominent New York women which came to Washington and protested to Vice President Curtis and various Congressmen and Senators. Known radicals, however prominent, are comparatively useless for such purposes; their protests are not "news" and the conservative press virtuously plays them down as "publicity-seekers."

In the case of the Washington Hunger March the protests of the prominent liberals and radicals helped, but what helped most was the fact that Hoover, his official family and the brass hats of the army were personally unpopular with the Washington correspondents and with the staff members of the local papers. This unpopularity was a factor in the forthright protests and the vigorous news writing which accompanied and followed Hoover's expulsion of the Bonus Army a few months before. The *Washington News* printed the flagrant facts of police brutality and provocation and editorially protested. (The *News* is the local Scripps-Howard paper and the city editor happened to be a liberal, as well as personally popular with the newspaper fraternity.) At this point the hitherto almost unanimous hostility of the capitalist press began to falter. The disparity of forces, as between the microscopic army of determined, but unarmed and unviolent

marchers, and the armed might of the government police and military made the administration's effort to convert the demonstration into a Red scare seem a little ridiculous. The climax came when Benjamin executed his hair-raising "dress-rehearsal," after which he had said: "Tomorrow we march." The next day came the official order permitting the marchers to enter Washington.

What, by the way, was this performance? In its essence it was propaganda, or if you like, education, in one of its highest manifestations: that of strategic, dramatic action. It had its effect, despite the effort of the conservative press to suppress and distort its significance and muffle its reverberations.

With respect to this case there are a number of interesting points to be noted. First, the Washington press, especially the *News*, treated the marchers more fairly on the whole than the New York papers. In some instances the latter headlined the dispatches of their correspondents in such a way as to distort, always in derision of the marchers, the true bearing of the story.

The apparent reversal of the usual in such situations is simply explained. In this case the pinch was not so much local as national. The ruling-class and middle-class interests and prejudices served by the capitalist press throughout the country were vigorously hostile to the Communists and especially hostile to that particular demonstration. But in Washington thousands of people had witnessed the inept and brutal performance of the police. Although middle-class Washington public opinion was in general hostile or indifferent to the marchers, Washington didn't like Hoover, nor did it like the repetition, by a defeated and discredited administration, of tactics rawer if anything than those employed against the Bonus Army.

The Washington papers did nothing comparable to the exploit of a *Daily News* reporter who invented out of whole cloth and published a speech alleged to have been made by Herbert Benjamin, violently inciting his followers to a bloodthirsty attack upon Washington. Theoretically, the *News* couldn't do such a thing because it is a mass paper sold to "Sweeney," the working man—or at least its promotion literature so alleges. It was the Struggle of Sweeney that Benjamin was supporting. Actually, something of the sort was to be expected. The *News* uses sensational tabloid methods to exploit, for purely commercial purposes, the economic illiteracy and the economic and psychological helplessness of its readers. The *News* is a business property, a commercial, profit-making enterprise, and an *advertising medium.*

With the foregoing case histories in mind, let us return to our major categories, advertising, propaganda and education, and examine once more the liberal views of Professor Lumley and others. The

thing to look for in any system of social communication is the point of control. Obviously, the key phenomenon is advertising, which is in turn merely an instrument of competitive business. A commercial publication is an advertising medium, that is to say, an instrument by which advertisers, with the complex of interests and prejudices which they represent, shape and control the economic, social and political patterns of the literate population: directly through the signed advertisements themselves; indirectly through the controlled or influenced editorial content of the publication; indirectly through the controlled or influenced content of formal education in the schools and colleges.

When a powerful vested interest, such as the electric power industry, wishes by means of propaganda to shape public opinion favorably to its interests, it is advertising that enables it readily to employ the instruments of the daily and periodical press, radio, motion picture, etc., for this purpose. Advertising is, of course, itself propaganda, but more important, the granting or withholding of an advertising contract offers a means of bribing or coercing indirect propaganda in the editorial columns of the publication. Finally, where such bribery or coercion is impracticable, as in the case of powerful publications like the *Times*, the same end is secured by reason of the fact that the *Times* is an advertising medium. As such it is an instrument of business, and its editorial policies are conditioned by the pressures of the dominant economic forces.

Professor Lumley exclaims at the omnipresence of propaganda. Our civilization, he says is "spooky" with the ghosts of propaganda hiding behind every bush. The professor has had nerves. Propaganda is no more and no less omnipresent than the vested interests of competing and conflicting economic and social pressure groups. The balance of power is held by business, which, through advertising, controls the instruments of social communication. There is nothing mysterious about it, nothing moral, nothing ethical and nothing disinterested. How could there be? Miracles don't happen in the body politic any more than they do in the physical body of man.

Advertising is propaganda, advertising is education, propaganda is advertising, education is propaganda, educational institutions use and are used by advertising and propaganda. Shuffle the terms any way you like, any one, any two, any three, to paraphrase Professor Lumley. What emerges is the fact that it is impossible to dissociate the phenomena, and that all three, each in itself, or in combination are *instruments of rule*.

Whether the use of these instruments is veiled or overt will doubtless continue to be a matter of grave ethical concern to liberals like Professor Lumley. But the majority of the propaganda to which he

objects is overt.

Every journalist knows this. The editors of *The New Yorker* are journalists, highly competent and sophisticated in that field, and they take great pleasure in jibing at the bizarre efforts of the "public relations" experts. On occasion they become as disgusted as any man about town can permit himself to become without risk of rumpling his hair. The following comment from *Talk of the Town* in its issue of Feb. 10, 1934, is an example. The note is headed *Many Happy Returns* and I quote the first and the concluding sentences:

> The Quadruple-Screw Turbo-Electric Vessel Queen of Bermuda, Capt. H. Jeffries Davis, was the scene last week of a novel birthday party for President Roosevelt and the Warm Springs Foundation on behalf of the Bermuda News Bureau, the Furness Bermuda Line, the Fashion Originators Guild, and *Island Voyager Magazine*, by special arrangement with James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy, Carl Mueller, John LaGatta, McClelland Barclay, forty mannequins, the six most beautiful girls in America and Lastex. Mrs. James Roosevelt, mother of the President, received....
> Her son, Franklin, in whose honor the party was given, was fifty-two years old; and there were moments... when we wondered whether the country he has been working so hard to save was worth the effort.

One is moved to ask Professor Lumley if there is anything insidious or lacking in frankness about this extraordinary synthesis of personal, political, philanthropic and commercial propaganda? Let us consider for a moment, realistically, this question of the veiled or overt use of the instruments of social communication as a problem in tactics. One admits that the public which sees the end result only is frequently unaware of the origins of propaganda. But ordinarily the propagandist himself proceeds quite overtly in manipulating his instruments.

Advertising is overt enough as to its origin or sources because it is signed by the advertiser. The interest involved is overt; the advertiser wants to sell you something for more than it is worth, so that he can make a profit on the transaction. The method is more or less tricky, since it usually involves taking advantage of the economic, social and psychological naivete of the reader. The results accruing to the reader or to the advertiser are pretty much unpredictable as to either party.

The majority of successful propaganda practice, whether by commercial "public relations counsellors" like Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee or by radical propagandists is overt; the name of the propagandist or the company or organization he represents is typed or printed at the top of his release. Sometimes commercial interests use dummy organizations as a "front." For example, the munitions makers are more or less back of the National Security League, just as the Communists are more or less back of various peripheral organizations in

the field of labor defense, relief, etc. But to suppose that the hard-boiled publishers and editors of the commercial press are taken in by these fronts is to be impossibly naïve. Also, in the case of a powerful commercial client, such as, for example, the Rockefeller interests, Mr. Lee has everything to gain by having the release come from 26 Broadway. And in the case of the radical propagandist, nothing makes the city desk so suspicious and sour as clumsy attempts at indirection. As already pointed out, Benjamin's "dress-rehearsal" of the Hunger March into Washington was excellent propaganda and surely that was overt enough. Admittedly, occasional veiled publicity coups come off successfully; but the percentage of such triumphs is relatively negligible and the backlash the next time you try to make the papers more than wipes out your gains.

The publicity Machiavellis of the National Electric Light Association were the laughing stock of the public relations profession and the catastrophe which befell them was cheerfully predicted long before it happened. They failed precisely because they were not sufficiently overt. So far as the press was concerned, all they had to do was to walk in the front door of the business office, sign their advertising contracts and get pretty nearly everything they wanted. Expense? "The public pays the expense," to quote Deak Aylesworth's classic line. Instead of which they employed the most extraordinary collection of publicity incompetents that has ever been assembled under one tent. They were equally stupid when it came to professors. All they succeeded in hiring were cheap academic hacks who in the end did them more harm than good.

As already pointed out, business can influence or control our schools and universities when it wants to or feels that it has to. Professor Lumley's ideal purification of the educational function falls down at this point and at a number of others, suggested in the following questions: how does an educator, unless one grants an inconceivably psychological self-awareness, know whether or not be is "veiling" the origin or sources of his instruction, the interests involved, the methods involved or the content spread? How can he anticipate the results accruing to the victims of either education or propaganda?

Apparently, what chiefly confuses liberals like Professor Lumley is the residual ideological and institutional débris of "democracy." The thing becomes instantly explicit and forthright when rule is exercised by a dictatorship and competition for rule is eliminated by force. The liberal illusions of a free press, free radio, free speech, constitutional rights, objective education, etc., all disappear almost overnight. This has been happening under our eyes in Russia, Italy and Germany. Do liberals have to be cracked on the head before they can see it?

Pinkevitch, in his *Education in Soviet Russia*, classifies propaganda, and agitation as forms of education operating on somewhat lower intellectual levels.[6] Press, radio, schools, colleges, are all owned and operated by the state as instruments of *rule* in behalf of the ruling class, the class of workers and peasants. The purpose for which these instruments are used is to make Communists, just as they are used in Italy to make Fascists, and in America to make our curious menagerie of capitalists, capitalist snuggle-pups, saps, suckers, morons, snobs, pacifists, militarists, wets, drys, Communists, liberals, New Dealers, double dealers and Holy Rollers.

In America the industry is hugely ramified but the underlying motivations, controls and mechanisms are relatively simple, although, of course, as in any transitional period of social conflict, the balance of power is constantly shifting. A capitalist democracy is a state of conflict almost by definition. Rather than to catalogue these conflicts, expressing themselves in the form of propaganda, it would seem more profitable to accept our instruments of social communication for what they are: *instruments of rule*; then to describe how these instruments are used, in whose behalf and to what end.

[6] [Pinkevich, A. P., *The New Education in the Soviet Republic* (New York: John Day Co., 1929).]