

# THE MINORITY RULES

By Edward L. Bernays

**T**HOMAS JEFFERSON said that the world was made, not for Cæsar, but for the common man. The contemporary common man, however, shows no sign of giving three whoops in East New York whether it was made for him or not. Cæsar leads him along by the nose.

Universal literacy was supposed to educate the common mortal into control of 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 a rubber stamp, a rubber stamp inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with published scientific data, with the trivialities of the tabloids and the profundities of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man's rubber stamp is the twin of millions of others, so that when these millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all receive identical imprints. It may seem a wild exaggeration to say that the American public gets most of its ideas in this wholesale fashion. But to say so is merely to state a fact that is as real as it is unrecognized.

The mechanism by which it is done is propaganda—propaganda, that is, in its broad sense of an organized effort to spread a particular belief or opinion. The extent to which it shapes the progress of affairs about us comes as a surprise even to well informed persons. Nevertheless, it is only necessary to look under the surface of newspaper headlines for a hint as to its authority over public opinion.

Page one of the New York "Times" on the day these paragraphs are written contains eight important news stories. Four of them, or one half, are propaganda. The casual reader accepts them as accounts of spontaneous happenings. But are they? Here are the headlines which announce them: "Twelve nations warn China real reform must come before they give relief", "Pritchett reports Zionism will fail", "Realty men demand a transit inquiry", and "Our living standard highest in history, says Hoover report".

Take them in order: The article on China explains the joint report of the Commission on Extra-territoriality in China, presenting an exposition of the Powers' stand in the Chinese muddle. What it says is less important than what it is. It was "made public by the State Department today" with the purpose of presenting to the American public a pleasant picture of the State Department's position. Its source gives it authority, and since opposing points of view—of which there are many in China—are with one exception absent, the American public tends to accept and support the State Department view.

The report of Dr. Pritchett, a trustee of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, throws cold water on Zionism. It is an attempt to find the facts about this Jewish colony in the midst of an Arab world which is, to put it gently, restless. When Dr. Pritchett's survey convinced him that in the long run Zionism would "bring more bitterness and more unhappiness

both for the Jew and for the Arab", this point of view was broadcast with all the authority of the Carnegie Foundation, so that the public would hear and believe. The statement by the president of the Real Estate Board of New York, and Secretary Hoover's report, are similar attempts to influence the public toward a definite opinion. One presents a studiously doleful picture of New York's transit troubles, and the other a rosy one of prosperity under President Coolidge.

If it is objected that these four specimens are not propaganda, that objection rests on a false notion of what propaganda really is, and an ignorance of the depths to which it has penetrated into public affairs. Thanks to the war, we have an idea that propaganda is the effort of some reprehensible person to poison our minds with lies. But propaganda is something far more subtle, more intensely powerful, and more vital than the mere spread of misinformation. The most effective propaganda, indeed, is that which enlarges and presents the truth so that an indifferent public will understand it and accept it.

A single news story like those mentioned above seems unimportant by itself. But the events those articles describe, the like of which can be found on any first page in the country, bear the same relation to the science of propaganda that a single railroad tie bears to the entire stretch of track from New York to San Francisco. Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring policy of creating or shaping events to influence the relations of the public to a given enterprise. Perhaps "public relations" is a more accurate term than propaganda.

It cannot be too sharply emphasized that this practice of creating circumstances and of stamping a desired

picture into the minds of millions of persons is far more common than the stampees realize. Virtually no important undertaking is now being carried on without it, whether that enterprise be launching a book, building a cathedral, endowing a university, marketing a moving picture, floating a large bond issue, or electing a president. Sometimes the desired effect on the public is engineered by the professional counsel on public relations, and sometimes it is attempted by an amateur, whose work is usually less efficient. The important thing is that it is universal and continuous; it is regimenting the mind of the public every bit as much as the War Department regiments the bodies of its soldiers.

The amazing readiness with which large masses accept this process is probably accounted for by the fact that no attempt is made to convince them that black is white. Instead, their preconceived hazy ideas that a certain gray is almost black or almost white are brought into sharper focus. Their prejudices, notions, and convictions are used as a starting point, with the result that they are drawn by a thread into passionate adherence to a given mental picture. It was only necessary for the Scopes trial to dramatize the battle between science and an old theology for the embattled mountaineers of Tennessee to shut tightly whatever openings were left in their minds. They became proof against the scientific wickedness that sought to corrupt the state from the outside, and one and all resisted the "new" doctrine with a unity and doggedness that brings to mind the word "phalanx" — though a phalanx is not a unit large enough nor powerful enough to describe the vastness and toughness of the group mind when united about a single idea.

So vast are the numbers of minds which can be regimented, and so tenacious are they when regimented, that a group at times offers an irresistible pressure before which legislators, editors, and teachers are helpless. The group will cling to its stereotype, as Walter Lippmann calls it, making of those supposedly powerful beings, the leaders of public opinion, mere bits of driftwood in the surf. When an Imperial Wizard, sensing what is perhaps hunger for an ideal, offers the common man a picture of a nation all Nordic and nationalistic, the common man grasps the picture which fits so neatly on his prejudices, and makes it his own. He buys the sheet and pillowcase costume, and bands with his fellows by the thousand into a huge machine powerful enough to swing state elections and to throw a ponderous monkey wrench into a national convention.

All propaganda is not evil. There is good and bad propaganda, just as there are good and bad politicians, or books, or peanuts. It must be remembered that the word "propaganda" had its origin in an endeavor to spread nothing more reprehensible than Christianity. It came into general use long after it was first applied to the commission of cardinals charged with management of Roman Catholic foreign missions.

While some of the descendants of these original propagandists may have sold themselves to the devil, many have remained righteous. Given our present social organization, approval of the public is essential to any large undertaking. Hence any laudable movement is lost unless it impresses itself on the public mind. Charity, as well as business and politics and literature, for that matter, has had to adopt propaganda, for the public must be regimented into giving money just as it must be

regimented into fighting a war. The Near East Relief, the United Jewish Charities, the Federation of Charities in New York, and all the rest have to work on public opinion just as though they had pieces of Ivory soap to sell. We are proud of our decreasing tuberculosis rate — but that too is the work of propaganda.

The fact remains that, good or evil, propaganda is always with us. In fact, its use is growing as more and more its efficiency in gaining public support is recognized. One professor in Columbia University is so convinced of its efficacy that he assures his students that if martial propaganda were administered skilfully to the United States for only three weeks, the temperature of the entire country would be raised to the point at which it would willingly go to war, flags waving and orators orating.

Even if this professor is unduly pessimistic — and that remains to be proved — his opinion reflects a tendency that is undoubtedly real. Propaganda does exist on all sides of us, and it does change our mental pictures of the world.

If this means anything at all, it means that anyone with enough money, or enough influence, can lead the public where he will, at least for a given time and a given purpose. Where then does this state of affairs leave the common man for whom the world was made?

In the first place, it is clear that society is returning to its historical balance — if indeed it ever left it. Formerly kings were the leaders. They laid out the course of history by the simple process of doing what they wanted. And if nowadays the successors of the kings, those whose wealth or intelligence gives them power, can no longer do what they want without

the approval of the masses, they find in propaganda a tool which is increasingly powerful in gaining that approval. Propaganda is here to stay.

In the second place, since propaganda is not necessarily evil, it is only the misuse of propaganda that is to be feared. But there is an automatic check on the misuse of propaganda — its limited power. Propaganda cannot be really successful in regimenting the public unless it sticks to the truth. If it strays into untruth, the course of events will show it up, and its power will end. If on the other hand it seeks only to magnify a truth of which the public is unaware, and subsequent happenings show it to be the truth (as the decrease in deaths from tuberculosis has done), it will find its strength reinforced and its support more enthusiastic.

It makes no difference, then, if the tabloids with muck and murder, and the advertisers with their slogans, standardize the minds of the millions. What matters is that the independent minority must realize what is going on, and that that smaller mass which is capable of thinking for itself must be unified, propagandized, and standardized into independence. The common man is content to let his affairs be run for him; let the intelligent see to it that they do the running.

If we seek a commercial sample of this process of regimenting the group mind, there is an enlightening one which took place in 1925. For several seasons the cloche hat, the small, simple felt with little or no trimming, had been the only woman's hat in style. The effect was to run the American millinery business dangerously near the rocks. Dealers in ribbons, flowers, feathers, hair braids, and similar gadgets used on the gayer headgear were in despair; several firms failed and others

ran at a loss. The trade called in a public relations counsel, who improved on what his predecessor of only ten years before would have done, by ignoring local publicity stunts for an attack on the source of the trouble.

He sent abroad to get from the leading milliners of Paris photographs of the many styles of broader, decorated hats being made there, and then used the spring exhibit of the Eastern Millinery Association to launch large, trimmed hats as very much the thing to wear. Having secured his hats, he turned to his public, the hat using women. A committee of artists and art critics was appointed to select the fifteen most beautiful women available, young women not only good to look at but able to wear the new wide hats with a flair. Finally, a committee of society women was chosen to pick the most beautiful hats as worn by the young women. From these sources the public took its cue. It saw that the subtle winds which blow the chance of fashion were turned toward large, trimmed hats — and it wore them by the thousand.

It is certain that these thousands of women were unaware that they had literally been made to enlist in the large-hat regiment. They thought they were obeying the whims of an unintentional Dame Fashion, instead of an intentional one. Through the substitution of a directed for a haphazard fashion, an entire industry was saved from ruin.

The success of the various books loosely classed in the Outline category, offers a case, showing how the minority point of view is more broadly appealing than it hoped to be. H. G. Wells's "Outline of History" created such a storm of interest because of its new and controversial treatment of history that it reached a far wider public than

a history ordinarily would have. Other sagacious publishers and authors realized that they could capitalize on the stereotype of an Outline book created by the first one. The public was ready to accept histories, biographies, scientific works, written with the human interpretation Wells had made acceptable. And we find today that serious works in these fields have encroached on the territory of fiction's best sellers — an "Outline of Literature," an "Outline of Science," "The Story of Mankind," "The Story of Philosophy," the "Microbe Hunters".

In biography, the recent enormous popularity has been due to the propagandizing effect of Lytton Strachey's "Queen Victoria". Another interesting literary example is the minority movement of psychoanalysis, which, starting with a small group of half a dozen scientists in Vienna, widened its influence in larger and ever larger circles until today the psychological novel, biography, and history all have responded to its impulse.

The cross word puzzle books are an example of a minority idea capturing the public mind. While the social and educational implications may not be so far reaching as in the case of the Outline, who can gainsay the advantages of adding "ibex" and "emu" to the vocabulary?

A startling illustration of this propagandizing influence is the growing number of people subjected to a new point of view in their magazines, as a result of the "American Mercury" success. This magazine, starting with a circulation of 15,500 in January, 1924, reached a circulation of 105,000 in December, 1926. Such continued growth proved to the editors of other quality magazines that its policy of militant truth appealed to a large discriminating public. Whereupon they

in a sense modified their point of view to correspond with "The Mercury", subjecting a larger public than originally anticipated to this new point of view.

Even contemporary art has been presented to the United States with the technique of propaganda. Fifteen years ago this country cared even less for modern art than it does now, but a small interested group decided to change that. Walter Pach, together with several other artists, hired a hall — the Seventh Regiment Armory — and filled it with modern pictures. Through sheer force of numbers the artists sought to convince the public that there were modern pictures as well as old masters, and that these modern ones amounted to something. The same definite, psychologically correct effort must be made if anything smacking of the highbrow is to be presented to the public. Mr. Woodward's biography of George Washington, differing as it does from the schoolbook story about the hero with the cherry tree, does not take with the country at large. Let it be attacked, however, by some clergyman, or some angry Daughter of the Revolution, and the public becomes aroused. A fight always holds its interest. And once the public is interested, the truth can be presented to it. The more there are interested, the better, for the force of numbers tends to be an enlarging snowball. Once it is known that "The Story of Philosophy" is a best seller, it becomes a still better seller.

We can best explain, perhaps, by glancing backward over the last century or two. In the good old days when kings were kings, Louis XIV made his modest remark, "*L'état, c'est moi.*" He was about right. Within certain limits, whatever the State of France did was what Louis XIV

wanted to do, for the State of France and Louis XIV were pretty much one and the same. So much so, indeed, that the nearest approach to state buildings were the royal châteaux.

But times have changed. The steam engine, the multiple press, and the public school, that trio of the industrial revolution, have taken the power away from kings and given it to the people. The doctrine that the king, the state, and the earthly voice of God were identical gave way to the doctrine that the voice of the people was the voice of God. Whatever the truth of this belief — which becomes increasingly unpopular with the doctors of political philosophy — the people actually gained power which the king lost. For economic power tends to draw after it political power; and the history of the industrial revolution shows how that power passed from the king to the bourgeoisie, and in smaller measure to the proletariat. Universal suffrage and universal schooling reenforced this tendency, and at last even the bourgeois stood in fear of the mob. For it promised to become king.

In this century, however, a reaction has set in. The minority has discovered a powerful help in retaining control of the mob — the mob, that is, not so much in the economic as in the mental sense, though the two often overlap. It has been found possible so to color the mind of the mob that it

will throw its newly gained strength in the desired direction. Given the present structure of society, this practice is inevitable. Whatever of social importance is done today, whether in politics, finance, manufacture, agriculture, charity, education, or anything else, must be done with the help of propaganda.

But if it is really so easy to stain the public mind to a desired tint, is the prospect cheerless? We do not believe it is. Small groups of persons can, and do, make the rest of us think what they please about a given subject. But there are always opponents and proponents of every propaganda, both of whom are equally eager to convince the majority. So that the majority in reality has its choice of action for every subject. Propaganda is not always so correct as it is effective. But the minority which uses this power is increasingly intelligent, and works more and more on behalf of ideas that are socially constructive. Intelligent people are recognizing the difficulty of convincing the public of facts that are against its own interests.

In the active proselytizing minorities in whom personal and public interests necessarily coincide lie the progress and development of America. Only through the active energy of the intelligent few can the public at large become aware of and act upon new ideas, usually good, occasionally bad.



## THE NEW SEASON IN FICTION

By Isabel Paterson

ALTHOUGH the vigorous and slightly embittered impulse toward satiric realism which has dominated postwar fiction is by no means exhausted, a tentative survey of the first novels of 1927 seems to discover that other points of view are beginning to attract the novelists. The list of current and forthcoming novels is extraordinarily varied; it includes a little of everything: sentiment, romance, smart sophistication, æsthetic detachment, old fashioned melodrama, impressionism and expressionism, cinematographic effects, rustic simplicity, savage irony, exotic fantasies, drab sociological studies, historical and "problem" novels, and a vast quantity of acceptably contrived stories of the type designated "the literature of escape", intended to entertain without calling for any intellectual exertion on the part of the reader. There doesn't seem to be any main current or tendency. And there is no obvious, phenomenal "best seller" in sight; nothing that promises to create a sensation. But until all the returns are in, there is always a chance.

Sinclair Lewis's "Elmer Gantry" may prove to be the big event, of course. The theme and treatment, as announced, leave the matter open for speculation. It is a vitriolic exposure of the psychology and methods of a modern Tartuffe, an evangelist of the blatant, self advertising species, aware of his own hypocrisy. Nobody can portray a "type" better than Sinclair Lewis; his astonishing gift of caricature, which never slips over the line into

burlesque unintentionally, has been amply demonstrated. The book is said to be brutally clever, and it is bound to provoke much critical discussion. It is a long novel, crammed with episodes and characters. And it might be supposed that a novel dealing with the universal question of religion cannot fail to find a multitude of readers. But the highly popular religious books of the past have been serious, pious to the verge of smugness. "Tartuffe" was suppressed in its time; "The Damnation of Theron Ware", though brilliant and vital enough to have survived its day, was not exactly popular in the large sense. "Elmer Gantry" may be; but if so, it must break all precedents. Anyhow, it seems to be the one designedly "devastating" novel of this spring.

Anne Parrish's "Tomorrow Morning" is a realistic presentation of obscure, frustrated lives; but it is sympathetic to the verge of sentimentality. An Australian story, "Working Bullocks", by Katharine Susannah Prichard, is said to be in the same genre as Ellen Glasgow's "Barren Ground", though the scene is set in the Antipodean backwoods. Mary Badger Wilson's "The Painted City", described as "drypoints of Washington life", is more like an acid etching of the narrow lives of petty office holders in Washington.

May Sinclair, who has always regarded modern life through the rose colored spectacles of a romantic, in that she sees her characters as governed by their own personal emotions rather