

The Public Relations and the debate about propaganda in the period between wars

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Abstract

Originating from the United States, Public Relations is the activity whose appearance and first reviews are linked to the conversion of propaganda in historical phenomenon of political and intellectual impact. The article provides some historical information to deep and to clarify this process, yet little noticed among researchers in Communication, at least in Brazil. It places the subject in the context of convergence but also of confrontation between society and propaganda in that country until the early 1940s. The approach follows a historical bias, without sacrificing critical reflection on the materials presented. Highlighting the pioneering work of Noobar Danielian, starting point of the study of political economy of Communication, the paper concludes that Public Relations were transformed in a professional activity as a way of trying to legitimize but also to take the focus of scrutiny and criticism that the phenomenon of propaganda had aroused in vast sectors of American society after World War I.

Keywords: Public Relations. Theory and criticism. Political and organizational propaganda. History.

During the second half of the twentieth Century, Public Relations have become a professional activity whose history, at least with regard to the Anglo-Saxon world, has been, in essence, well reported by authors like Scott Cutlip (1999) and Jacquie L' Etang (2004). Still little known or available only in fragments, in contrast, is the history of the political reactions to its appearance and intervention in society (see although ST. JOHN

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III, 2010). The criticisms and objections to the practice of Public Relations are ancient and originate from various fields of social life. Despite this, they do not attracted enough attention from researchers of this area in itself (exception is Moloney, 2006) or, when it happened, the study was limited to a structural approach (as we may see with the pioneering work of PERUZZO, 1982).

Early on, the activity sparked controversy and protest in several spheres of society, including business itself, especially newspaper companies. Among other accusations, people denounced its condition of free or disguised propaganda. Above all, they put in doubt its condition of legitimate instrument of political influence, if a democratic point of view is assumed. According to the newspaper man Frank Cobb, the press agents had become, in the early 1920s, “the media through which news comes to the newspapers in the United States” (ST. JOHN, 2010, p.48), and that was a problem for the free flow of information and citizenship formation required by a strong democracy.

Including for some of its theorists, the effect of all this is the ambiguous situation the activity has to face as matter of fact it acquired today: Public Relations managed to organize themselves professionally, but for various reasons, still are far from being able to say that they have a political and social legitimacy.

Returning to the scene of the first decades of the twentieth Century, in particular to its American setting, we want to explore in detail in this paper the origins of this field, and assuming a critical attitude, we intend to analyze its historical connections with what in that period people use to call propaganda. Our thesis is that we can find in those historical roots at least part of explanation about the political, ideological and moral problems that until now burden the profession worldwide, as reported by some social critic scholars (MILLER; DINAN, 2008).

At first, we will report how the practices of press agents or publicity helped to shape the era of propaganda. Following the article examines the political, intellectual and journalistic criticism that, denouncing it as disguised form of propaganda, they gave rise. After that, we show how, under the impact of this criticism, the

activity was restructured professionally under the name of Public Relations. The result of all this exposition, we believe, will be a more critical and less linear and superficial view of the period that preceded the birth of Public Relations as a profession on the eve of World War II.

Public Relations and propaganda

When we asked for the origins of “Public Relations”, we should avoid the common mistake to confuse the social field with professional activity that carries that name. This happened later and, in many places, without the historical semantic of its original context, finishing for monopolizing the meaning of expression after the World War II. As John Hill says, until the 1930s, “the term ‘Public Relations’ was scant used” (quoted in CUTLIP, 1994, p.420). Even then, however, the expression was commonly used to refer a field of experience or historical positivity, instead of an activity or practice: it designated “the way people and institutions relate with respect to other social groups or the public as a whole” (JONES, 1939, p.15).

Similarly, it would be useful to keep in mind that the connection between Public Relations activities and its scope is more than a historical fact. It is a fact that comes from a specific time and context too: the United States before the beginning of World War II. Public Relations, we must observe, were spreading around the world as an expression and practice, very unevenly, only after the end of War, during the second half of the twentieth Century.

The services we now call with the name of press office and that traditionally were part of its field, not of journalism, appeared in the 19th Century. The first press secretaries were created by governments and began to be organized in Europe (PUCHEN, 2006). The private sector, by contrast, had its pioneers, very informally, among the Americans. Westinghouse created one of the first professional bureaus in 1889. By 1900, press office providers began to appear in the open market. The most famous of which became the one Ivy Lee opened in New York in 1903.

From that time on, many were the poorly paid reporters and unscrupulous publishers that, negotiating with private interests, practiced in the shadow or hidden from the public view the activity that under that time and context experts called 'publicity'. The Public Relations are now counted by many among Communication professionals. In the first decades of the past Century, however, was different. Public Relations were not understood as a professional occupation, but as a field of intervention of the practices of publicity. For this it is not surprising that, in those times, publicity came to be understood as "the science of Public Relations", although in the field of connections between the company, shareholders, employees, government agencies, press and public that the noun referred, it always represents the view of one side only (RIIS; BONNER, 1926).

As already pointed out by many authors, "Public Relations as practiced today born out of publicity and still has it as its main ingredient" (STEPHENSON, PRATZER; CASE, 1953, p.4). During the turn to the 20th Century, it is worth explaining, American society was passing through a profound cultural transformation, entering in a new political and economic cycle. Primary activities and small property yielded economic leadership for industrial companies of oligopolistic vocation. With the arising of large metropolitan centers, agriculture and livestock lost their economic hegemony. Million workers from various parts of the world were docking at the main cities of the country. Politics become a mass scale business that needed increasingly bureaucratic and mechanical action schemes as were advancing, under pressure from all these facts, the democratic institutes (BENIGER, 1986).

At the time on focus, the term 'Public Relations' served to name the field emerging out of the contact between the public and the new organizations (KERR, 1911; BAUMGARTEN, 1913). The term referred to "the relationship of an individual, association, government or corporation with the publics that they all need to take into consideration to fulfill their social functions. These may include public voters, consumers, employees, shareholders, members of groups opposing pressure, neighbors, etc." (BERNAYS,

[1923] 1951, p.50). James Rorty provides us evidence that this understanding still was valid during the mid-1930's. The author notes that commercial advertising, institutional advertising and propaganda are all "techniques that require measurement and utilization of the forces operative in a given complex of Public Relations" (RORTY, 1934, p.163). Even in the early 1940s, when the term began to prove itself as name of a profession, it was not uncommon to find their understanding as historical positivity. According to Harwood Childs, for instance, Public Relations are a sphere of social life, instead of an activity owned of certain professional protocols.

Public relations are not forge mental attitudes or create harmonious relations is not propaganda technique or etiquette. Public relations are definable as a social activity whose characteristics and problems should be studied to cut losses and increase the positive effects from the point of view of the relationship between the public and organizations (CHILDS, [1940] 1964, p.4).

In the author's words, "Public Relations is just a name for our activities and relationships that are public, who previously had a purely individual meaning, but now, with the the dynamics of social change, are influencing the public interest" (CHILDS, p.5). Reflecting historically, he notes that the social processes at work in his time had produced more than a massive public to deals with. It had also produced a better informed and less liable public, thanks to the growing of the media occurred since 1900 (CHILDS, p.11). The main point, however, is that all these processes have begun to create problems in the relationship among these groups and the representatives of large institutions, allowing the emergence of the sphere of Public Relations for the organizational consciousness arising at that historical moment (CHILDS, p.16).

As the economy and business, private and public, were expanding their field of action out of the communities of origin and belonging, there was, in fact, the appearance of all kinds of problems with the public integrated by this expansion. There was the emergence of a sphere which, at that juncture, began to

be identified as the relations among these groups, are citizens, taxpayers, consumers or users, and the organized political and economic powers, as well noticed Edward Bernays:

On every side of American life, whether political, industrial, social, religious or scientific, the increasing pressure of public judgment is being felt. Generally speaking, the public relationship and interaction with everything that occurs, became more than obvious [i.e., they are Public Relations] (BERNAYS, [1923] 1951, p.35).

The problem became very alive because among these powers it was the popular press. Despite its growing organization in corporate structures, the new journalism was, by the same reason, marked by strong marketing competition. Until the time of the World War I, newspapers, although increasingly big part of the business, did not hesitate to explore the political and social claims of his readers, to increase their sales and prosper as business. At its pages were not uncommon to find complaints against the barons of industry, a group to which many of their owners sometimes were part. The editorial strategies to enlarge the reader market not always converged with the efforts to keep his conscience under control of corporate interests.

Among the main characters in this drama were the muckrakers, publicists of various professions which, in the first two decades of the past Century, used the word with great repercussion to show social ills and report about their responsible to the great public. Ida Terbell, for instance, gained notoriety by revealing the predatory practices of the public interest and the market economy committed by Standart Oil, in the series of articles he published in McClure's Magazine from 1905. In the words of Russell Nye:

Muckraking, both good and bad, was part of a wider political, social, and intellectual reaction to industrial expansion and political corruption, a result of the same forces that produced Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and La Follette. It was an exposure of fraudulent, misrepresentative governments, of monopoly, of industrial immorality, of the trusts (RUSSELL, 1965, p.71; SPROULE, 1997, p.22-51).

The whole situation has led several companies and organizations to take care of the Public Relations field, hiring press agents to convey its views in newspapers and, more generally, advertise to defend their authority, reputation and interests before the public and sometimes the authorities.

Business community launched its own counteroffensive, whose beginning coincides with the Ivy Lee's hiring by anthracite coal industry in 1906 as a publicity agent. Later he was hired by Pennsylvania Railroad and by Standart Oil. The public relations counselors became an essential business equipment with this practice, which was followed by other corporations. (RUSSELL, 1965, p.171).

A point in this time, critics with populist origin had appeared. They were regarding the press that were spreading among people engaged in the social movements such as the feminist, progressive and socialist. Among their, the response was not restricted people who take the public word to denounce the negative press coverage and the linkages of the newspapers with the dominant political and economic interests. Upton Sinclair was one of them, a muckraker who denounced the abuses of publicity and press agents, and took as its "vital task" to show how that practice covers up the "economic crimes of predatory social classes" (SINCLAIR 1919, p.165).

Accusing the publishing of private materials secretly provided by publicity agencies that provided services to corporations in exchange of payment by the press, the author became famous as a critic of the "cult of publicity for-profit", as illustrated by the following passage:

Armour & Company were paying over two thousand dollars a page to all the farm publications of the country – and this not for advertisement, but for 'special articles'. J. Ogden Armour was put on the stand, and some amusement developed. He had given a banquet to the editors of these farm-journals; he did not expect this banquet have any influence upon the advertising, but he did have a vague hope that both banquet and advertising might dispose the editors to look with less disfavor upon the Armour business (SINCLAIR 1919, p.309).

Unlike others before, Sinclair however also practiced the press agency or publicity, opening an office to promote and issue their own works both as the activities of his party (socialist). Although he did not elaborate the point, and by this way motivated accusations by his opponents (LIPPMANN [1922] 1965, p.336), Sinclair outlined in practice the distinction we may trace today between integrated and alternative publicity.

Anyway, the fact is that the author has advanced the sociological understanding of the subject, calling attention to the fact that:

This system of publicity in return for advertising is a fundamentally dishonest, but it is inseparable from the business of publishing for profit, and the legitimate and the illegitimate shade into one another so gradually that it would be hard for an honest editor to know where to draw the line; it may differ with every editor and every mood of every editor (SINCLAIR, 1919, p.285).

Therefore, the fact is that, after the war, “the press agent or, as he now prefers to be called, the Public Relations counsel” became a powerful source of influence in journalism. Although before this time, as seen, it was already present, a new wave occurred. There was a fever in his employment, which increased their number from 1,200 to 5,000 between 1914 and 1920, only in New York. Corporations and politicians began employing them regularly, with the object of “manufacture public opinion”, selling an idea, party or corporation. Their work became one of the main venues by which the information reached the press and, correspondently, the interests this information contained were diffused among the public (DAVIS, 1935, p.312-313; LIPSKY 1925, p.84-100).

Propaganda and publicity

Stuart Ewen explains that at this time happened an extraordinary growth of the capitalist economy, the strengthening of corporate power and the decline of the political and social movements that had put it in a defensive attitude before the War (EWEN, 1995). Amid this, “the press agent has become perhaps the most

significant symbol of our social life”, to use the words of Dewey ([1930] 2008, p.61). Corporations have taken with full force the idea, originating from before the war, that, “if it to secure the co-operation of the public, a more aggressive position as regards the presentation of its claims to the consideration of the public must be taken” (Walter Allen, apud EWEN , 1995, p.89).

Labor traumas, extending from the 1914 Ludlow massacre and wartime worker shortage to post-1917 fears of the influence of bolshevism, prompted many executives do recognize an insufficiente loyalkty and dedication within their expanding, high-turnover labor forces. At the same time the efficacy of wartime propaganda, which demonstrated the power of words and images to impart ideias and stir emotions, deeply impressed business leaders. They now looked increasingly to the cultivation of corporate image as the key to both solving internal problems and maximizing new marketing opportunities (MARCHAND, 1988, p 88; IRVIN, 1936, p.265).

In the midst of a business cycle expansion and, at the beginning at least, imposed civil peace, the effect of this strategy was that the existing social and political criticism in the press reporting of the preceding period almost disappeared. The public relations professionals have managed, with the support of political and economic power of their masters, to do the newspapers accepting the practice of the press release and to integrate the contributions originated from employees to corporate policy sectors. Corporate publicity managed to create more and more media events, packaging information for press reporting and thus influence the media agenda and the community life (MARCHAND, 1988).

Ivy Lee, pioneer of practice, became in time one of its first scholars, arguing that publicity should be done openly, avoiding the employment of the matter paid or exchanging favors with newspapers and journalists. Press agents, he argued, have tasks that are not limited to the care of the public image of their employers and placement of favorable news in the pages of the press. The publicity man should also guide the work of the contractors, wherever emerge facts capable of awakening the interest of the press. The essence of his business, acknowledged, consists of expressing ideas

that affect people even if they do not have the interest, to get the public understanding for and the public agreement with ideas that came from the people to whom we conduct (LEE, 1925).

For this pioneer, the publicity was a form of propaganda, a word that has become widespread since World War I (JOWTT; O'DONNEL, 1999, p.104). Before the word propaganda became popular, people spoke about the press and, sometimes, education. The campaigns of what would later be called Communication were known as public opinion campaigns, of which an exponential example came out from the suffragettes of the first 1900's. During the conflict, the expression, however, was popularized in a new way, becoming the loose word that designates the systematic and concentrated use of media with persuasive goals, whether or not in covert action.

Charles Higham, British press secretary, stressed the novelty of the situation at a work suggestively titled *Looking Forward* (1920). For the author, the conflict confirmed that we entered a phase “where a sane public opinion is more vitally important than in any other period in our history” (HIGHAM, 1920, p.35). The whole problem is to organize it, preventing it from becoming a prisoner of destructive forces, or at least unproductive to society, as demonstrated during the War. Despite the possibility of bad use, government propaganda (public publicity) is able to run through this miracle, because “scientifically organized”, its techniques are “an amazing powerful force” (HIGHAM, 1920, p.186) to intervene in the social environment for good too.

Since then, the fact is that, despite contrary opinions, no one can dispute the value of the conscious use of media to influence public opinion (HIGHAM, 1920, p.192-193). People do well to note that this is the case, that we are dealing with something “extremely powerful” because the propaganda, thus understood, really could be “extremely dangerous”. The government publicity, of course, causes a “healthy instinct of revolt in many people”, however, it tends to sag over time, as it begins to “deliver us their fruits” (HIGHAM, 1920, p.186).

There is no good habit or mild idea that can not be inculcated in people in a few years, if proper method is used:

[That is] what we might call mass education is now a practical idea [...] If we set a national ideal, and deliberate, continuous and publicly promote it in the columns of newspapers, a very quick difference could it be made in the tone and temper of the whole community. In my opinion, this is the most astounding thought of modern times. We can create a new outlook; we can vivify thought; we can move human energy in any direction by organized and public persuasion (HIGHAM, 1920, p.124-125).

Edward Bernays, the historical creator of the figure of the Public Relations professional, made clearer the extent that the field of propaganda owned until the time of World War II. Bernays used to connect the terms propaganda and Public Relations, making the latter a field from the first at least until the late 1940s. For him, the Public Relations counsel “is the propagandist who specializes in interpreting business ideas to the audience, while preparing the audience to interpret the promoters of these companies and ideas” (LENNON, 1999, p.153).

After 1920, Bernays began to present himself for the likely contractors for their services as Public Relations counsel, an expression that he coined, aiming scoring the occupation and differentiate his job from that made by a mass of press agents which, then, already formed an industry in the United States. “Roger Babson put it correctly when he said, ‘War taught us the power of propaganda’. We were now experiencing it”, report Bernays in retrospect (BERNAYS, [1923] 1951, p. xxxviii). The point to emphasize, however, is that, in the expression, ‘Public Relations’ refer to the field of professional intervention, not to the profession in itself. The novelty of it all is, therefore, the word ‘counsel’, however arising out of propaganda activities, as it will make clear in his second book, not coincidentally entitled “Propaganda” (1928).

Unlike Lee, Bernays not only theorized about the concept, but also predicated on the role of publicity and propaganda in the new industrial society. The first one sought to legitimize the work of press relations (publicity) based on the provision of corporate

information service to society. Bernays has not only adopted the idea but practically elaborated the principle that the public became mass and thus must first be persuaded if not manipulated by them, through propaganda. The Public Relations counsel, according to him, is nothing but a professional propagandist with scientific education, a high level specialist in Communication with the publics of the most diverse institutions (TYE, 1998).

Origins of criticism

“Bernays coined the term ‘counsel on Public Relations’ in the early twenties to insist that he was a new professional in a new role, not the old ‘press agent’ of the nineteenth Century” (SCHUDSON, 1978, p.136). In fact, however, the expression was received as euphemism by various sectors of the public, unhappy with the practices of the press agent for different reasons. Newspapermen, for instance, have been at least ambiguous about the practice. The professionals in the field, though eventually tolerating it, for interest or convenience, still early attacked it in defense of ideological transparency and editorial health of their business. They have entering in a relatively compromise with it only in late 1930s (ST. JOHN III, 2010).

During the 1920s, the enlightened public, meanwhile, took a more incisive attitude, realizing that the practices of publicity threatened the very idea of information and journalistic opinion. It was argued that they undermined the principles of press freedom and thought. The belief among the most serious press and the enlightened public of liberal culture was that these practices came from “a too dangerous occupation, to go unnoticed”, as one newspaper editorial said in 1924 (PENNING, 2008, p.354). The news, seemed to them, were becoming “less the reporting of events than the reprinting of those facts that in the universe of facts which appealed to special interests who could afford to hire a Public Relations counsel” (SCHUDSON, 1978, p.138).

In several areas, the most critical sectors of the public began to notice that, as practices of publicity , the expedients of war

propaganda was becoming techniques of domestic propaganda. Many people even began to believe that propaganda designed by Public Relations advisers could “control the mass mind” (Business Week, 01/23/1937, quoted by CAREY, 1987, p.38). At the end of the period we studied, still existed, even among the business community, prevention against the understanding of Public Relations as a field in that occurs “the use or misuse of the machinery of publicity to ‘influence’ public opinion” (JONES, 1939, p.8-9).

Walter Lippmann and John Dewey, for instance, were two of the many liberal intellectuals offended with the tremendous advancement of Public Relations counselors, as then beginning to be called professionals publicity and propaganda, in the conduct of public life after the War. According to the first, the problem is not only that they create events, to make the newspapers give news favorable to their contractors, following a route that the suffragettes had ingeniously exploited (LIPPMANN [1922] 1965, p.346). The point is that with these services emerge a strong and influential group of “censors and propagandists responsible only to their employers and only care about the truth to the extent that it is consistent with how it fits in interests and conceptions of these employers” (LIPPMANN [1922] 1965, p.345; PENNING, 2008).

Apparently, concludes the other author, we were with this approaching to a “government managed by promoters of opinion called publicity agents”, these people who “have the ability to handle social relationships for their own benefit”. They have “the strange instinct for detecting the intellectual trends that even remotely threaten to limit their control”, and developed “the extraordinary power to enlist to his side the inertia, prejudice and emotional partisanship of the masses, by techniques impeding free research and expression [of thought]” (DEWEY, 1927, p.169).

Inside American Congress, there were concerns about the practices of institutional propaganda too, prime by that made by the utility companies, then with that made by lobbying against the New Deal. At this time, there was also hearings about the one promoted by the totalitarian regimes, being discovered that the press offices of Ivy Lee and Carl Byoir were furnishing ser-

vices to the governments of Hitler and Machado (Cuba) in the 1930s (SELDES, 1938, p 307-312; MILLER; DINAN, 2008, p.19-20).

There was criticism in political circles and some signs of retake of the offensive against corporations of the pre-War period, when it was not uncommon to accuse the publicity men of “nefarious conduct campaigns to divert attention from the public and undermine the perception of the problem [with the authorities], through underground methods”. Senator from Iowa, Albert Cummins, for example, said the following about the railways just before the entering of the United States in the First World War:

The railroads are trying to mislead and pervert the judgment of the people. They are trying to awaken sympathy by false pretenses. They are trying to deceive the country with exaggerated cries of suffering and distress. [To do so] they made extraordinary campaign that has filled the newspapers with headlines, with dispatches. It gives dinners and holds public banquets where the eloquence of orators paints lurid pictures of empty treasures, of worn-out tracks, of falling bridges and dilapidated equipment (Albert Cummins quoted by LEE, 1915, p.56).

During the period between the world wars I and II, the process not only deepened but got increasingly elaborate features, as summarized Senator La Follete, creator of a committee on the issue in Congress during the year of 1939.

[Since the mid-1930s] the National Association of Manufacturers has blanketed the country with a propaganda which in technique has relied upon indirection of meaning, and in presence on secrecy and deception. Radio speeches, public meetings, news, cartoons, editorials, advertising, motion pictures, and many other artifices of propaganda have not, in most instances, disclosed to the public their origin within the Association (quoted in CAREY, 1987, p.37).

“High Power Propaganda” and “Power Control”, wrote by Stephen Raushenbush, and “Power and Ethics”, by Jack Levin, explored and commented on the research of the Congress Committee on the activities of propaganda made of electricity companies during the twenties, later summarized in “The public pays”

(GRUENING, 1931). Their works show how these companies have articulated institutionally themselves to develop “the art of Public Relations” and, with it, “mislead public opinion of the nation” (RAUSHENBUSH, 1928b, p.5-6). After first World War, these corporations followed the example of what happened during the conflict, creating Committees of Public Information to practice publicity in vast and pervasive scale and, thus, to promote “industrial private profit” at the cost of meeting the needs and welfare of the population.

In modern politics, utility propaganda is a technique whereby those dependent upon the electorate for privileges attempt to persuade the public to reject the views of their adversaries at the very time they seek benefits or immunities for themselves (LEVIN, 1931, p.31).

The National Electric Light Association has created a paradigm for other public service companies, developing campaigns by the media, schools, associations and political parties, with the aim of promoting the private system of exploitation of this public need among various sectors of the population. Considering this view, “no opportunity is missed by it to cite the alleged weakness of public ownership and the advantages of private enterprise” (RAUSHENBUSH , 1928b, p . 29) .

As Levin notes, “an enlightened public opinion is solely dependent upon an honestly informed public will”. Without this, the public can not think consciously and can not act responsibly about their interests. The apathy of the masses is a minor fact to understand the power of advertising companies providing public service. “The rise of privileged private groups” in the industry is function of the bad information that the public receives, the Public Relations and propaganda techniques used to indoctrinate him through corporation opinion public campaigns. “The kind of public opinion” is always derived from the existing “type of information those people received” (LEVIN, 1931, p.4-5).

Raushenbush emphasized how the high schools and universities were the target of an effort aiming to win support in favor

of the industry against the interests of the government. The cost was paid by the consumer, while the personal electrical account of the participating teachers was subsidized by the utilities (RAUSHENBUSH 1928a, p 28-29; LEVIN, 1931, p 70-86). Faced with a situation where they were being questioned, the purpose of publicity these companies was to convince citizens that the current legislation was not only threatened with the risk of government intervention, but it was enough to make sure the proper care of their needs and protect their rights. The National Electricity Light Association employment of the press and various other means to do publicity, accused the author, had as its only goal “to protect and keep the interests of private property profitably exploit in an essential public service” (RAUSHENBUSH, 1928a, p.61).

Criticism as discipline

During the depression years, criticism of corporate propaganda returned with force, despite the reflux of Muckraker movement before the stock market crash of 1929. The federal government began to use it on a large-scale, and according with this was focused on their actions that most reactions from the business sector were leveled. “After the presidential election of 1936 (which Roosevelt won) and the labor troubles of that year and 1937, the businessman began to think of Public Relations almost as a panacea” (BERNAYS, [1927] 1951, p.xlii). At that time, “became known to the more sophisticated reader of any newspaper the fact that any pressure group in the United States has its publicity director in charge of influencing public opinion”, as said Time Magazine (01.08.1936, p.56).

Only campaigns and initiatives to control public opinion and put it against the growing state interventionism in the economy and social areas generated a more robust sociological literature on the subject however, if we ignore the work of Irvin (1936).

Georges Seldes and James Rorty, both critical, respectively, press and publicity of their time, were some who proceeded to denounce the practices of corporate propaganda, noting that “the

agent of big business who is not hypocrite or a sinister underhand propagandist, is generally known as Public Relations counsel” (SELDES, 1938, p.312). For both, America was incapable to get a new, more democratic relationship between the public and corporations required by the progress of civilization. Instead of this, those men were recruited by business to manipulate the information and thus try to shape public opinion.

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 describe how these instruments are used, in whose behalf and to what end (RORTY, 1934, p.173).

Among the liberal intellectuals predominated the same attitude. We equally see a growing concern with “the new and advanced technique of creating public opinion [represented by propaganda]”, as said Will Irvin (1936, p.311). According to him, journalism has progressed towards democratizing and offer better services to the population. However, it is slowly becoming a prisoner of propaganda. The problem is not its editorial policy, which, although it may displease some sectors, it is easy and openly recognized by the reader. The public can follow or not with their consumption. The concern of the author is with the nearly inevitable more or less covert use of press for propaganda purposes (IRVIN 1936, p.111), by the publicity and Public Relations of private enterprises, political parties, social movements and government agencies, in particular those of totalitarian regimes, but also by the Roosevelt government.

From the liberals of more modern and technocratic court, however, the problem should be put in new terms. For Lasswell, as instance, consulting and Public Relations services eventually become the main source of propaganda of the world post-1914. The Public Relations counselors, he asserted, are “the most distinctive group engaged in propaganda” (LASSWELL, 1941, p.38). Stressing their professional and non-ideological character, the author compares their work with other similar activity, in particular private

advocacy to criticize the venality which would be intrinsic to it (LASSWELL, 1941, p.75-76). But then he notes that, despite the many sectors of the public reluctance, mainly from the intellectuals, propaganda has become an essential institution to democracy, amid a period of ascent of the masses and the emergence of powerful new media. Of Public Relations consultants, anyway, the most you could expect would be ethical attitude - the rest would be propaganda, concludes Lasswell.

Seeing well, the goal of public policy in a democracy can not include propaganda prohibition, even the totalitarian. The democratic forces “must make propaganda in favor of itself and against the propaganda hostile to it” (LASSWELL, 1941, p.98). The conflict of ideas and the struggle for consciousness are part of the democratic game, making legitimate the practice of propaganda. “The channels of public discussion must be left open to opinions for and against democracy” (LASSWELL, 1941, p.114). All the rest is illusion. The public tends to get confused and suspicious more than never in an age like ours, but this fact is in itself a sign that people remains alerts to attempts to manipulate the population whenever society avoids the totalitarian option (LASSWELL, 1941, p.95).

In this context, deserves special attention the monograph on the American Telephone & Telegraph written by Noobar Danielian. “AT&T, the story of industrial conquest” (DANIELIAN, 1939), indeed, matters because it opened up a field of study that would later be developed by the so-called political economy of Communication (MOSCO, 1995). The author goes further than had done the work of Gruening, Raushenbush and Levin, that focusing on the utilities of electricity, gas and transport services. Danielian studies the history and influence of AT&T in the United States with a variety of aspects and breadth of historical perspective. The company had gained a virtual monopoly of telephony services in the country. The report he wrote put its focus on its various interfaces, giving us a broad panel of the formation, organization, influences, problems, relationships and strategies of the corporation.

Danielian draws upon the documentation the company provided to government investigators, and call attention, among other features, to the way the services of publicity and Public Relations, creating a kind of “corporate art”, have been converted into an essential part of a corporate strategy that “is tending to transform business into a political force of dangerous proportions [for democracy]” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.xvi).

After the 1929 crisis, he observes, started a fight by corporations to “save the system”, which had begun in the early decades of the 20th Century. They retake to an even broader scale the employment of propaganda to retain their power, and keep with themselves the control over the middle class (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.417). Facing a government policy of interventionist nature, corporations began to compete more strongly to gain support from these social stratum, the axis of the balance of power in the United States (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.333). Amidst the economic, social and ideological crisis of the 1930s, they have given new impetus to the practice of propaganda, “to try to regain the political power [who thought they were losing to New Deal of Roosevelt]” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.417; EWEN, 1995).

For the author, the progress of democracy and media developments checked in our era become more difficult to keep the citizens and customers under the control and powerful command of the corporations, causing them to “convert political propaganda in an indispensable tool of business policy” (DANIELIAN, 1939 , p.xvi). With her help, companies not only began to support anti-union organizations or merely defend its interests before the public and various sectors of society, but “substitute propaganda and ‘public education’ for sound industrial statesmanship” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.411).

AT & T, the focus of his study, would be, in fact, more than a business, in that it is also, like so many other corporations, “a propaganda organization” (DANIELIAN, 1939 , p.325), that put in risk with their actions “a real subversion of the democratic process” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.307). The company would be the great proof of how corporate propaganda has managed to “acquire

wide circulation and acceptance among people, through constant and tireless reiteration of their interests [through the media]” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.291). The company would not be limited to commercial advertising, because she also employs it as part of a broader strategy of political propaganda, whose meaning is to convince citizens of the benefits of private exploitation of public services and the need for restriction of controls that can put on it the government (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.420-421).

Danielian note in his work that the company publicity was not content of, directly or indirectly, to influence public opinion (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.312), through actions of Public Relations, in particular the creation of media events for the various sectors of society and “the purchase of goodwill of the press” (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.315). Like others, the company managed to promote the belief that the buy of bonds and shares by the public is the American way to promote the property democratization. The control of the public by the companies occurs through the growth of shareholdings participation among the population instead of governmental intervention over the corporations (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.184-190). The strategists of businesses found that one of the best forms of make propaganda in their favor is to mobilize shareholders, potential and indeed, to prevent the public control over the services of collective interest and enlarge the space and freedom of maneuver of corporations (DANIELIAN, 1939, p.196).

Conclusion

After becoming popular during First World War, the word propaganda started to be controversial in the 1920s. The use of the term by radical movements (communists and fascists), combined with complaints about their misuse during the war, overburdened negatively its use. In the United States, was with evil eyes that public opinion began to watch their employment by the corporations. Intellectuals began to worry about its scope and powers. With the passing of the years, the word assumed the meaning of the job with the media that an adversary practices with spurious

goals, a sense that imposed itself throughout the civilized world after the second Great War.

During the 1930s, Public Relations were still seen as a field of social life in which institutions, as they could, should intervene via the publicity or propaganda. There was, however, a quick turn around in meaning of the term, whose starting point perhaps may have been the use of the term as synonymous with Public Relations publicity, by John Long, in a work of 1924. For Childs, nevertheless, the year that “the concept of Public Relations cuddled up suddenly in the hearts of a whole generation of businessmen was 1938 (CHILDS, [1940] 1964, p.1). Despite the signals that have been given before, Public Relations began from then onwards to acquire a new meaning, going to signify an activity conducted by companies and organizations, rather than mere field in which, with this title, they had discovered themselves around 1900.

Amidst the New Deal and the growing influence of the state in the economy, it would become increasingly clear to companies that “in addition to selling its products in adverse conditions, it was also necessary to sell them to the public, explaining their functions in the assembly of the economic system” (BERNAYS, 1937, p.147). In 1934, the National Association of Manufacturers created its committee of “Public Relations”, to “sell a good picture of the business world to the public” (BARNES, 1942, p.568). In 1938, a magazine of professional interest, called ‘Public Relations’, appeared on newsstands. “No large business, no labor union, no charitable organization will be able to conduct their affairs without adequate Public Relations” (Sokolsky quoted in George Seldes, 1938, p.238) – this idea was starting to become doctrine on the eve of World War II.

After the 1929 crisis, we saw, American corporations were again being questioned by the workers movement and saw their power threatened by the growth of state interventionism. The sense of urgency that corporate propaganda had until the entering of the United States in World War I returned. The problems with social legislation and the unions were radicalized. The internal and external audiences turned themselves to be of great care and

concern for the main corporations. Companies now try to show the benefits of free enterprise in comparison not only with the criticism of unions, but with the interventionist projects unleashed by governments Roosevelt (EWEN, 1995, p.233-336).

In this context, the corporate publicity was renewed in strength and expanded in scale, facing a new backlash not only from liberal opinion but from the groups that, despite their use of it, denounced the propaganda not originated from their own actions. The main result of this as a whole is that, to differentiate one from the other, arose “a general movement to simply wipe the term propaganda from the vocabulary and replace it with such terms as education, information, Public Relations and other such terms [among some spokesmen of the time]” (GLANDER, 2000, p.27).

John Long leaves no doubt in his pioneering treatise on the subject: Public Relations was proposed as title and should name the activity of publicity to “take the focus out of scrutiny and criticism that this last term had awakened” and “to emphasize a more mature and enlightened vision of publicity” (LONG, 1924, p.2). In the 1930s the trend consolidated itself, as we may see with the American Council of Public Relations creation in 1939 and, in 1944, of the National Council of Public Relations.

New times were beginning, when people started to understand propaganda as “illegitimate publicity”, and publicity as part of Public Relations, a professional activity whose central meaning or main task would be “convert the one-way street of reporting and disclosure, for a two-way street of influence [reciprocal between the public and organizations] (MOSHER, 1941, p.7). Putting aside the conceptions originated from the heydays of Bernays, appeared a new discourse, and based on that a concentrated effort was launched with the aim to halt the identification of their activity with propaganda. There is no doubt that this would help Public Relations to institutionalize themselves and spread over the world as managerial practice, but at same time it is questionable if this brought to them theoretical autonomy and professional legitimacy, as have shown its history in second half of the twentieth Century (MILLER; DINAN, 2008).

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