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PROPAGANDA, PUFFING AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST: CIGARETTE PUBLICITY TACTICS, STRATEGIES AND EFFECTS

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Abstract. Publicity has long played a prominent role in promoting the public acceptance of cigarettes. Its role changed in response to public awareness of the health hazards of smoking, shifting from the recruitment of new (women) smokers to the retention of existing (concerned) smokers and supporting legal and political battles. The efforts of Bernays (for Lucky Strike) and Hill & Knowlton (for the Tobacco Industry Research Council) are discussed in detail, documenting the role of publicity both before and after WWII. Based upon archival documents never before made public.

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A judge recently decided that the Federal Trade Commission could not act against a tobacco advocacy ad because it was "entitled to the full protection of the First Amendment, including the right to deceive." This "baroque convolution in legislative and regulatory thinking" provided total licence to advocacy ads to be propaganda, without any standards of truthfulness. More recently in 1989, Philip Morris launched a major national campaign, including TV ads, endorsing and distributing copies of the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment freedom of (commercial) speech.[1]

Recent PR efforts have also portray constraints on public smoking and concerns of non-smokers as intolerance. Direct mail efforts organize smokers to "Fight Back" against such regulations and taxes. Specific efforts organizing citizens and using advertising have fought state taxation initiatives by foster fears of black market trade and crime. Proposed ad bans have been fought by shifting the argument focus from health to "free speech," asserting a basic right to advertise any legal product, no matter if addictive or lethal, or both.

Publicity has long played a prominent role in the tobacco industry's promotion of the public acceptance of smoking, and the associated political and public opinion battles. The public opinion front was judged especially crucial "because here is where the beliefs, attitudes and actions of judges, juries, elected officials and government employees are formed."[2]

The role of publicity changed dramatically in response to public panic in the early 1950s about cancer. The publicity focus shifted from the recruitment of new (women) smokers to the retention of existing (concerned) smokers. Edward Bernay's work for American Tobacco and Hill and Knowlton's work for the Tobacco Industry Research Council TIRC), the precursor to today's Tobacco Institute (TI), are both discussed. The tactics and strategies of these previous efforts are studied here to illuminate the practical, legal and moral issues in today's campaigns and debate.

Men Came Before Women in the Old Days

Cigarettes first became the most popular form of tobacco usage in 1921. Earlier factory made cigarettes had been an expensive item, succeeding best

with the urban carriage trade. After the Supreme Court broke up the American Tobacco Trust in 1911, several competitors launched national brands, beginning with R. J. Reynolds launch of Camels in 1914. The advertising campaigns for these were closely coordinated by the highest tobacco executives and their advertising agencies.[3]

The market for cigarettes was dramatically affected when cigarettes were made part of every U.S. soldier's ration pack in WWI. By the 1920s cigarettes had lost their dandified image, as thousands of stalwart young heroes returned from overseas service as habituated cigarette smokers. It was then primarily a men's habit, with only 5% of cigarettes consumed by women. Minor brands did target women in their advertising, however. Marlboro, for example, was positioned in the 1920s as a female brand and sold as being "Mild as May." Murad and Helmar brands displayed women in some ads, invoking the criticism of the advertising trade journal Printer's Ink. A billboard campaign for Chesterfield in 1926, showing a woman asking her male partner to "Blow Some (smoke) My Way," precipitated moral outrage, for smoking in those days was an audacious behavior for a woman, symbolizing a rebellious, libertine lifestyle. It was done primarily by young urban women free of family discouragements, college girls and city sophisticates - "flappers."

The Early Role for Public Relations

George Washington Hill, the heir to American Tobacco, decided to begin a more concerted effort targeting women, an effort unprecedented in both its extensive use of public relations and its success. Competitors also used public relations to fight its success and its excesses.

Hill began by hiring ad agent A. D. Lasker because of his success with the delicate task of selling Kotex sanitary napkins to women via national magazines. Some early Lasker ads claimed health benefits for cigarettes. One campaign cited a survey of physicians claiming Luckies to be "less irritating," while another featured opera stars whose precious voices were unaffected by smoking. These health campaigns were criticized by the American Medical Association and the New York Times in editorials, and by the National Better Business Bureau, who called some "the lowest hokum."[4]

Edward Bernays was hired by Chesterfield to do public relations to combat both of these campaigns. Bernays ridiculed the opera star campaign by

creating the "Tobacco Society for Voice Culture." Its letterhead slogan was: "So to improve the CORDS of the THROAT through cigarette smoking that the public will be able to express itself in songs of praise and more easily swallow anything." Its satirical aim was "to establish a home for singers and actors whose voices have cracked under the strain of their cigarette testimonials." To combat the survey of physicians, 5,000 copies of an article from Editor and Publisher with the headline "Cigarette Copy Bunk, Physicians Declare Blanket Endorsement used in Ads Unwarranted," were distributed to influential people. Lucky Strike's "It's Toasted" health claims were also attacked by R. J. Reynolds' with publicity tactics. They spent $300,000. about $2 million in today's term, "Turning the Light of Truth on False and Misleading Statements in Recent Cigarette Advertisements."[5]

The best known of American Tobacco's efforts instructed women to "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet," previewing today's female brands positioned as symbols of slimness. Once this idea was well established in the public mind, the ads become more visual and featured unattractive shadows with large double chins. Brand sales went up 312% in the very first year, despite the public protests of the sugar and candy interests. Ivy Lee, who directed American Tobacco's public relations, mediated the conflict, persuading the aggrieved sugar people that the campaign was stirring public interest in both tobacco and sweets and would do more good than harm for both.[6]

The actions of American Tobacco testified to their judgement about the power of publicity. Hill hired Bernays away from Chesterfield's, but still retained Ivy Lee, without telling either about the other. He would ask Lee for advice and critical comment, for example, on an ad campaign concept of Lasker's, and then ask Bernays what he thought of Lee's advice. Only later did Bernays and Lee discover this duplicity and duplication when they met by chance in Hill's reception room. Hill explained: "If I have both of you, my competitors can't get either of you."[7]

The Modern Public Relations Professionals

The services and personal attention of Lee and Bernays came at a rich price. Hill paid Lee's firm the then substantial sum $40,000 per year retainer, and Hill once said that $10,000 was for the publicity efforts of the staff and the remaining $30,000 was to be able to consult personally with

Lee. Bernays was paid $25,000 per year retainer, and at first given few responsibilities, being asked only for occasional advice and press releases.[8]

They had many competitors, however. Public relations firms proliferated during the 1920s and early 1930s and there were an estimated 5,000 publicity agents in New York City alone. The old fashioned press and publicity agents, still in evidence today, were "newspapermen hired by business as apologists" to distribute selective favorable information in a "whitewashing ... space-grabbing" style.[9]

Lee had expanded the role of the public relations professional, funnelling much information to his clients, as well as from them, via his clipping services. He ultimately encouraged his clients to set up their own internal publicity departments to handle daily routine operations, so he could consult on "the larger framework of ideas from which to base public policy." Bernays, distinguishing the new professional from the press agent, identified "the propagandist who specializes in interpreting enterprises and ideas to the public ... (as a) 'public relations counsel.'"[10]

Both Lee and Bernays operated with psychological insights and used more subtle and indirect approaches than was the publicity agents' norm. Some of their efforts contained no direct mention of the client's product category at all, perhaps to finesse editorial resistance to more obvious publicity. For examples, bacon was promoted by publicity about the healthfulness of hearty breakfasts, and hair nets by stories about food contamination and factory accidents associated with hair. This indirectness, also used in promoting cigarette consumption, was justified with the theory that the emphatic, reiterative efforts aimed at explicit, immediate reactions, attacked but also hardened sales resistance. Bernays saw himself and his peers working obliquely to "set up psychological and emotional currents ... instead of assaulting sales resistance by direct attack ... (to) swing emotional currents so as to make for purchaser demand."[11]

Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, once edited the Medical Review of Reviews, but served with many of the nation's best advertising and public relation professionals on the nations WWI Committee on Public Information. There he learned the arts of propaganda, a more noble term in those days, which were the foundation for his practice and professional publications. He showed no hypocrisy, nor moral reservation, about his "molding of the

masses," justifying it with blunt candor. "The manipulation of the news, the inflation of personality, and the general ballyhoo by which politicians and commercial products and social ideas are brought to the consciousness of the masses ... are necessary to orderly life." Those "who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses ... pull the wires which control the public mind." He saw individual consumer citizens as coming to common mind as the result of digesting a common media diet. "Universal literacy has given him (the common man) rubber stamps, rubber stamps inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with ... the trivialities of the tabloids and the platitudes of history, but quite innocent of original thought."[12]

PR to Make Cigarettes Female and Fashionable

Despite considerable early success, George Washington Hill remained convinced of the remaining growth potential of the female market, which he likened to "opening a gold mine right in our front yard." To attack the female market with more psychological sophistication, Bernays, on behalf of Lucky Strike, hired the famous psychoanalyst, A. A. Brill, who counseled that "cigarette are symbols of freedom ... (and) sublimation of oral eroticism." This was ingeniously translated into action by Bernays, who hired models to smoke in public for publicity purposes. In the New York Easter parade, a major spring fashion event known and covered across the nation, smoking models wore placards that identified their lit cigarettes as "torches of liberty." Pictures and stories went to newspapers across the nation.[13]

In the 1930s, Bernays worked for six months to make green the fashion color of the year for the benefit of American Tobacco. Research indicated that Luckies' dark green package was unpopular with women because it clashed with their clothing. Bernays organized a "Green Ball" with socialites, the New York Infirmary for Women, and art galleries. He lined up manufacturers of accessories, dresses, textiles. He sent 6,500 letters and kits to department stores, fashion editors, and interior decorators telling them of this "trend" toward green. He got Harper's Bazaar and Vogue to feature green on their covers on the date of the Green Ball. A silk company held a Green Fashion Luncheon, featuring green fashions and foods. Press releases told of psychologists suggesting benefits of the color green as the "color of spring, an emblem of hope, victory (over depression) and plenty." The effort was

highly organized and for this "engineering of consent ... I drew up a comprehensive blueprint, a complete procedural outline, detailing objectives, the necessary research, strategy, themes and timing of the planned activities."[14]

The Healthy Era for Cigarettes

Public relations aided the promotion of cigarette smoking among women, paving the way for, and supporting, the heavy advertising expenditures in all media. Many ads for various brands directly appealed to women and showed female celebrities of stage, screen and social status as smokers. Other advertising reached a youthful audience of both sexes through radio programs featuring the emergent and highly popular big bands. Wartime ads featured both men and women in uniform. Smoking among women, and in total, grew throughout the late 1930s, the wars years and into the early 1950s.

The most remarkable aspect of that era's promotion, by today's standards, was the persistent and explicit emphasis on health themes. Camels claimed, among other things, healthy nerves, renewed vitality, relief from fatigue, better digestion, and that "They Don't Get Your Wind." Old Gold promised "Not a Cough in a Carload." Phillip Morris cited unnamed "eminent medical authorities" for their "less irritating" claim, based on an additive they described in bold red headlines as "an ounce of prevention." Chesterfields claimed that they "will not harm nose and throat" because they were "much milder."

Camels claimed "More Drs. Smoke Camels Than Any Other Cigarette." They never disclosed the specific data, gathered at a medical convention. "Unbeknownst to the people who read the ads based on these claims, was the fact that the interviewers had placed in the doctors' hotel rooms on their arrival cartons of Camel cigarettes. The chances are that the doctors ran out of cigarettes on arrival, and conveniently put a pack of Camels into their own pockets."[15]

Coping with a Crisis of Confidence

Medical claims were so commonplace in the industry that Old Gold in 1952 felt unique in offering "a treat instead of treatment" as "tobacco men not medicine men." The efforts to offer health reassurances, however, inevitably

kept consumers conscious of health issues. Philip Morris' claim in 1953 that they "took the fear out of smoking," for example, may have alarmed as much as it allayed fear. As Fortune noted, many campaigns were "riddled with warning and appeals to fear" so that "the present turmoil could be considered an inside job" and the "industry may be promoting itself toward a dead end."[16]

The "present turmoil" was the fear of cancer sparked in late 1952, when the widely read and respected Reader's Digest, with no advertising revenue at risk, published "Cancer by the Carton." Medical studies linking cigarettes to cancer, while not new, were now being reported in the popular press. This lead to much media discussion and some changes in policies during the following year. Good Housekeeping stopped accepting cigarette ads in 1952. The New Yorker is said to have literally thrown Kent ad copy, and the associated potential ad revenue, out of their 17th floor window in vehement objection to a health benefit claim. The New York Times published 12 health and cigarette articles in 1953, and 21 more in the first three months of 1954. In December 1953 Woman's Home Companion, Look and Cosmopolitan were each considering articles on the topic. Cigarette sales actually declined, a novel and challenging experience for the cigarette industry executives.[17]

The industry responded to the "health scare" in a number of ways. They rapidly developed and launched new products with filters made of cotton, cellulose, and even asbestos. These were "miracle tips" which were "Just what the Dr. Ordered" offering an "extra margin (of safety)." One unsubtle campaign said "The secret to Life is in the Filter."

But the industry also felt that relying on health advertising by individual brands, even if for new and more credible filtered brands, would not solve the problem of the "health scare." Indeed, it appeared to be salt in the wound, keeping the health issue prominent in people minds. When the industry CEOs caucused to take unified action, Hill and Knowlton, their chosen PR firm, intended to ask if the industry's advertising and competitive practices had been a principal factor in creating a health problem. "The companies voluntarily admitted this to be the case even before the question was asked."[18]

The Tobacco Industry Research Council (TIRC)

Public relations was the primary tool used by the collective industry to

fight the health scare. All of the many tools of public relations were employed: scores of press releases, created advocacy organizations and advertisements, media monitoring, using personal contacts with media managers, helping authors write and place favorable stories, producing films and pamphlets, redistributing favorable items in large quantity, and coordinating political action.

The planning group was called together in late 1953 by Paul Hahn, CEO of American Tobacco. He had been issuing statements on his own attacking "loose talk" that linked cancer to cigarettes, and had staff assembling material for a "white paper." When the CEO's met, all firms were represented except Liggett & Myers, who seemed to prefer an ostrich strategy of ignoring the health controversy, trusting it would fade from the media limelight in due course. The others wanted to keep unfavorable publicity to a minimum but, when unavoidable, to counter it so as to promote the idea of scientific uncertainty and controversy.[19]

Their "Frank Statement to Cigarette Smokers." Almost instantly, the TIRC spent $257,276 to place a full page advocacy ad in 448 newspapers of 258 cities, reaching an estimated 43,245,000 people on January 4th or 5th, 1954. Weekly, foreign language and negro newspapers were generally avoided, but special versions of the ad were prepared for Editor and Publisher, Publishers' Auxiliary, American Press, and 11 tobacco industry publications. The "Frank Statement" questioned research findings, reminded smokers of the "solace, relaxation, and enjoyment for mankind," and pledged to sponsor "impartial" studies and "let the results speak for themselves." The signing sponsors "accept an interest in people's health as a basic responsibility, paramount to every other consideration in our business ... We always have and always will cooperate closely with those whose task it is to safeguard the public health."[20]

TIRC Goals and Activities. This ad placement, as dramatic as it was, was merely the opening salvo in the very large public relations program that followed. The CEO committee felt that they shouldn't be merely reactive and defensive, but "should sponsor a public relations campaign which is positive in nature ... promoting cigarettes and protecting them from these and other attacks that may be expected in the future." The active information service for the TIRC had the "following objectives in mind: (1) avoid encouraging or

stimulating further publicity on the subject, but (2) assure that those planning to write or talk about smoking and health receive our material, and (3) enable staff to keep Committee members informed of the trend of publicity." In addition, a $50,000 public opinion poll and depth survey of smoking habits was commissioned, special efforts for congressmen planned, surveys of medical literature authorized for the "white paper," and plans made to announce the position of [Medical] Research Director.[21]

Statistical research was undertaken to confound the cancer issue. Among the questions raised, and surviving executive evaluation, were: Why was the rise in lung cancer most marked among men, when the greatest recent rise in cigarette use was among women?; Were there variations in lung cancer rates city to city? urban to rural? cold to warm climates?; What were the smoking habits of long lived distinguished public leaders?; and what human ills were historically, but erroneously, attributed to tobacco? This last line of argument was ultimately "found more marketable and has received the placement emphasis thus far."[22]

The international searches "marshalling scientific facts and published materials to prepare for meeting future attacks" became increasingly proactive in purpose. Copies of scheduled conference papers were obtained in advance, coverage planned, and representatives attended the meetings. "Unfavorable publicity was anticipated with preparation of possible TIRC statements."[23]

Organization, Coordination and Cooperation. The TIRC was a large organization with the large operating staff of Hill and Knowlton authorized and supervised by more than fifty tobacco executives, lawyers and public relations professionals. Under the leadership of the CEOs were: an Industry Technical Committee of firms' Research Directors, a Law Committee of ten, a Scientific Advisory Board of nine, and the PR Advisory Committee of twelve.[24]

The day to day public relations chores were executed primarily by Hill and Knowlton, Inc. This pre-eminent international firm was ranked a few years later as the country's leading PR firm by newspaper editors and other PR firms in polls by Printers' Ink and the Gallagher Report. Proud of its history of never having to solicit clients, the New York office and its work for the TIRC was guided in the 1950s by its principal founder and partner John W. Hill. His philosophy of public relations and the management of

public opinion recognized that "merely putting facts before people is not always enough. Attitudes tend to be based more on feelings and emotions than upon cold logic ... (so one must) tie in with the deep motivations of people." Public opinion is based on what people hear, see and read, with individual responses dependent upon each individual's "racial, religious, political or economic interest, their background of culture and tradition, and their degree of education and level of intelligence."[25]

Hill and Knowlton did not, of course, operate in a vacuum. Public relations specialists from the manufacturing firms and their agencies provided advice and assistance through the PR Advisory Committee. Tommy Ross, partner of Ivy Lee, apparently had the closest working relationship. In addition to whatever phone calls and face to face meetings there may have been, many letters were exchanged in 1954, with Mr. Ross providing solicited comments in detail on plans and progress reports.[26]

As the TIRC public relations activities were taking shape, the principals of Hill and Knowlton obtained the comments and suggestions in face to face meetings with senior executives of the principal advertising agencies, like Young & Rubicam, Biow, Esty, and BBD&O, including comments on the copy of the "Frank Statement." In addition, a meeting of the Research Directors of the ad agencies discussed the matters of a poll and a depth survey, an action strongly encouraged by Young & Rubicam to guide and track the public relations program.[27]

The need for a coordinated approach was felt from the very beginning. R.J.Reynolds, through its ad agency, William Esty, and its PR agent, Grant Clark of the Bureau of Research Information, had been planning to spend "around a million dollars" on "full page ads in some 10,000 papers," an action made unnecessary by TIRC's "Frank Statement." Mr. Clark was "instructed to put Hill and Knowlton first" and said that Esty's ad copy writer was also "yours to call on." Grant claimed he had the needed "connections" with the medical journals, Public Health Service and American Medical Association. He continued to issue press releases independently for a short while until one prompted the CEO of Philip Morris to write directly to the CEO of American Tobacco suggesting that "no releases go out, now that we have formed a parent holding company (TIRC), except through Hill and Knowlton ... any other procedure would get us in serious difficulties."[28]

Getting off to a Fast Start

The first few months of TIRC activity were intense, with files and procedures reminiscent of Bernays' "comprehensive blueprint for action." The report summarizing the early activities took 24 pages and its cover letter identified it as "highly confidential" in three of its four paragraphs, suggesting that "no additional copies be made and that this copy not be placed in files."[29]

Files on Experts and Media. The TIRC library included: a cross indexed card file of medical and scientific papers from some 2,500 medical journals, with most pertinent information obtained in full; special files of all pertinent press clippings; a cross indexed card file on medical opinions as noted from press, radio and other popular media; full texts of speeches, announcements, and panel discussions which were germane and available; files drawn from documents of the U.S. Health, Education and Welfare, Internal Revenue, Agriculture departments, the U.N., and other official bodies.[30]

General News Releases. During the first six months, 11 general news stories were distributed, each supported by "direct personal contact." An illustrative case history was provided of the steps taken to publicize a talk by a Dr. Hueper at Sao Paulo, Brazil for the International Cancer Congress. Advance checking of the program found that Dr. Hueper was talking on environmental cancer, so an advance copy of his paper was obtained and studied. Because no press distribution of the talk was contemplated by Dr. Hueper, permission to distribute copies was obtained. Timely "personal delivery of the Hueper release was made to important newspapers and services as well as distribution to science writers, editorial writers and feature writers ... Stories questioning the link between smoking and cancer were given wide attention, both in headlines and stories" despite the fact that many of the science writers covering the convention "failed to mention the Hueper talk in their dispatches."[31]

Media Monitoring and Meetings. One of the major benefits of having "carefully monitored" the press, radio, television and newsreels was that it allowed timely personal contact and letters to the editors requesting revisions, retractions, cancellations or rebuttals to unfavorable stories. When LIFE wrote "New Cigaret-Cancer Link," a meeting was held four days

before the publication date where many TIRC responses were considered. These included a strong protest with simultaneous release of the protest to the general press, a full page ad in LIFE to rebut the story, a counteracting story in Look, and a "factual protest to LIFE to be followed by a conference with Henry R. Luce, Editor-in-Chief ... (to request) prominent attention to TIRC's position." The luncheon meeting that did result was "friendly and congenial" and, although Mr. Luce did not attend, his assistant and six other editors and science writers did. The TIRC team emphasized the need for a "balanced presentation" and "editorial responsibility in handling stories that rouse unwarranted fears." A visit of editors and writers to TIRC and Hill and Knowlton headquarters was planned. Similar meetings and correspondence occurred with many others, even Reader's Digest and William Randolph Hearst and his top executives. Hearst was thanked for the "fair minded and helpful approach" and the "considerable time and trouble ... helping give balanced attention to stories affecting the tobacco industry," a very major advertiser in the national magazines.[32]

"Helping" the Media. There were too many items to be listed in the summary report, but specific mention was made of personal contacts with Time, Newsweek, U.S.News and World Report, and Business Week. "Considerable source material" was provided to Hal Boyle for an Associated Press story sent nationwide, and to Donald Cooley for his story in True magazine. Further research and personal conferences provided aid to Cooley in his writing of a paperback for newsstand sales called Smoke Without Fear. When published, "1,000 advance copies sent to city editors, science writers and other newsmen of leading daily newspapers throughout the country." Editorial writers, including those on the New York Daily News and "influential Washington papers," wrote "several positive editorials" after receiving help. Editorials pre-written by TIRC and distributed by the U.S. Press Association were used heavily by "home town" dailies and weeklies.[33]

Early in the PR program, a survey was done of twenty national magazines, and feature and syndicate writers, to find who was working on tobacco stories. "Contact was established with authors and editors. Such regular checking continues as standard practice, requiring numerous contacts weekly." This proved helpful in permitting timely inputs and a chilling influence that yielded revisions and killing of planned stories. An article by Bob

Consodine for Cosmopolitan was subject to "seven revisions and five qualifying additions to the story which was already in type." A TV show was "postponed after discussion." A pamphlet written by the Science Editor of the American Cancer Society was "discussed several times" by the TIRC Publicity Committee, "underwent several revisions" and was "guided to completion" by Hill and Knowlton. The author had earlier been subject to a "special conference" when he was critical of the TIRC.[34]

Illustrative Examples. The April release of "A Scientific Perspective on the Cigarette Controversy," and a June press conference introducing a Dr. Little of Maine as the Chairman of TIRC's Scientific Advisory Board, illustrate the preparation, execution and follow up characteristic of TIRC's activities in 1954, their first year of operation.

"A Scientific Perspective ..." was a compendium of selected quotations from 36 "distinguished cancer authorities," prepared by Hill and Knowlton. The 18 pages of excerpts quarrelled with both "the alleged statistical association" and lab studies where mice, painted with cigarette tars, develop cancers. It presented studies, carefully culled from an international search, with inconclusive or contrary results. These were handsomely laid out, with bold italic marginal headlines featuring key phrases, such as "None of Evidence Conclusive," "Questions Role of Cigarette," "Unwarranted Conclusion," and "Tobacco Relatively Unimportant." The preface was careful to state that the TIRC did "not suggest that these views represent the entire body of scientific opinion on the subject." It reiterated its "interest in peoples health as a basic responsibility and paramount to every other consideration."[35]

A total of 205,000 copies of this booklet were printed, with the majority, 176,800 sent to the nation's medical community. The booklet, with a covering press release, also went to a press distribution of 15,000, and copies were sent to all members of Congress. News magazines received advance copies and, several days in advance, "key press, network, wire services and columnists contacts were alerted by phone and in person. The booklet was hand delivered ..." Hill and Knowlton field offices around the country "alerted local press, radio and TV to the story." A week after the mailing, a follow up personal letter from TIRC's Chairman went to "114 key publishers and media heads." Substantial stories were used by AP, UP, INS and Dow-

Jones wire services. All the New York City dailies carried stories, as did "hundreds of papers and radio stations throughout the country." Special "staff-written stories developed with the help of Hill and Knowlton field offices" appeared in newspapers like the Cleveland Star and Chicago American.[36]

The press conference announcing TIRC's research program and personnel was held at New York's prestigious and academic University Club concurrent with that year's AMA convention. All of the wire services, New York newspapers, news and business magazines, television and radio networks, and Movieton news were personally contacted to learn who would cover the story. The release, statement and photos were given "full distribution." Because of the news magazines' special schedules "the essential facts were given to them several days in advance." TIRC staff "serviced the tobacco trade publications ... medical journals, veterans publications, National Association of Science Writers, medical colleges, dental journals and colleges ... and cancer organizations" among others. Special film, owned and edited by TIRC's publicity department, was provided to CBS, ABC and Dumont, with only NBC choosing to shoot their own footage. Records of attendance were kept, and follow ups included delivery of rushed transcripts within three hours.[37]

Dr. Little opened the press conference by expressing his gratitude to the industry for funding "pioneering" (basic) research, rather than "clinical or applied research." He claimed that "We are not trying to prove anything. We are trying to find facts." He also alleged that tobacco was "good therapy for many nervous people." When questioned about the nature of the scientific evidence for this claim he said: "You know it probably yourself. It is common sense. I don't think you have to prove it statistically." This displayed remarkable inconsistency regarding the burden and nature of proof asked of health authorities compared to that offered by the TIRC.[38]

The press conference was successful, nonetheless, with all the news services and networks carrying the story, despite the fact that the AP and INS science writers were attending the AMA convention. The reach of this was considerable, as AP radio alone serviced 1400 stations, and "there is no telling how many additional TV and radio stations picked up the story from the above sources and wire service dispatches." The debriefing did note three problems: "Dr. Little was a bit more candid than anticipated;" There

were "too many H&K people there in proportion to press attendance;" and the "take over" by TV and film crews and their equipment suggested scheduling them separately from the print press.[39]

The pattern of exhaustive distribution of releases and reprints, coupled personal invitations and follow up, was apparently the rule rather than the exception. Press releases went out periodically announcing increases in the cumulative amount authorized for research purposes. TIRC issued statements via its scientific directors, whose papers, editorials and speeches were given wide dissemination in press releases like the one headlined "Anti-Smoking Theories Not Based on Complete Scientific Knowledge." Scientific studies that aided the industry cause, found from the careful scrutiny of the world's medical journals and conferences, were distributed too. A New Zealand study of immigrants, for example, was reported in the Washington News as "This Takes Cigaret Smoking Off the Hook."[40]

Appointments of TIRC personnel were also given full press releases, hitting both the science and financial desks for many news organizations. When the Scientific Advisory Board was completed in 1955, a 12 page "background memorandum for Press, radio & TV, and Special Writers" was prepared describing the research program, and supplemented with biographies of the board members. The Research Booklet was mailed to 134,549 recipients, primarily physicians under 65, hospitals, medical schools and libraries, cancer societies, medical journals, and selected members of the National Research Council and American Medical Writers' Association.[41]

Budgets and Priorities. Hill and Knowlton's staff operation for 1954 used all or part of the time of thirty-five (35) different staff members. Of the total TIRC expenditures in 1954 of $948,151, Hill and Knowlton got almost exactly a quarter, $223,994. Another 26% went to the media costs of the "Frank Statement" ad. Sixteen percent was consumed by TIRC administrative and operating costs, which included the costs of reprints. Of the remaining 33%, or $314,448, some $156,268 in grants had been approved but not paid out in 1954. This means that the much ballyhooed grants to scientists in 1954 actually amounted to at most $158,000, less the overhead costs of running the Scientific Advisory Board. As this was budgeted at $78,000 for 1955, it seems that only something about 10% of the total TIRC budget of 1954 actually found its way to the selected scientific projects. The lion's share went to

public relations, including the advocacy advertising, reprints and related TIRC operating expenses. Despite the magnitude of these expenses, money never seemed to be in short supply. Throughout the 1950s, the TIRC authorized budgets for Hill and Knowlton consistently larger than the actual expenditures. During this same time period, the leading manufacturers also increased their brand advertising budgets more than 60%, going from $76 million in 1953 to $122 million in 1957.[42]

Success with the Media. By mid-February 1954 the clipping files already contained 416 items, including 23 radio scripts. The majority of these clippings were judged by Hill and Knowlton to be favorable to the industry. Indeed, even after eliminating the many items announcing the formation of the TIRC, the "favorable stories" outnumbered unfavorable "tobacco critic's publicity" by more than a 2 to 1 margin. This was true in both large and small cities, and more importantly in the nationwide news and feature stories. It was only in the less frequent and special interest financial stories that "unfavorable" items were the more numerous, presumably because they reported the facts of falling sales. Favorable stories, including syndicated serials by INS, Scripts Howard, New York Post syndicate and AP, were reported to be 16 times more numerous than items with publicity from the American Cancer Society, the U.S. Public Health, and Veteran's Administration combined.[43]

Despite the volume and repetitiveness of the press releases, the media continued to carry them. "Newspapers, fearful of offending cigarette advertising, have given full coverage to the industry's statements." One ad executive noted that "The public ... was also put under heavy sedation by the public relations program of the tobacco companies which effectively cushioned every piece of unfavorable news ... with standardized rebuttals."[44]

A 19 page booklet of selected "Editorial Comment on Tobacco and Health" evidenced their success in getting favorable stories in the media and their efforts to foster a bandwagon effect by displaying editorial opinion that was uniformly favorable. Reprints of favorable articles, book reviews, and letters were individually circulated as well. A Harper's article, "Do We Have to Give Up Smoking?" was mailed to "all doctors under 65 years of age, to press and broadcasters, and other public opinion leaders."[45]

Carrying On

Ghost writing. "The Fight Against Lung Cancer," a 1955 work, was nominally by John Pfeiffer, a well known science writer. Internally, Hill and Knowlton advised that this "has been prepared ... and is designed as the basis for a TIRC document and for other public distribution material, for articles and for policy statements." Another book, by Northrup, was being titled in January 1956 by Hill and Knowlton in consultation with the publisher, with considered titles like "Smoking -- Science and Nonsense" and "Smoking and Health -- Fact vs. Fiction."[46]

Special Projects. The American Cancer Society surveyed doctors for their opinions on the relation of smoking to health. The results must have disturbed the TIRC, for they commissioned Ernest Dichter and his Institute for Motivational Research to critique the validity of the questionnaire. This critique may not have been put to much use because it ends with a clear warning that it "must be used circumspectly," avoiding "indiscriminate press releases and publicity."[47]

On the Political Front. In early 1958, Hill and Knowlton was involved in political and lobbying battles to defeat labelling legislation because the "(Tobacco) Institute which had been formed to do this job was not yet ready to function." This state by state effort required Hill and Knowlton to "plan for opposing the legislation, select people to appear at the hearings, and develop a line of opposition argument." Hill and Knowlton also sent regular mailings to all Members of Congress. The entire list received all issues of Tobacco News, Tobacco and Health, The Annual Report of the Scientific Director, and individual items as they appeared like Tobacco, Source of Pleasure, Source of Wealth, Tobacco and the Health of a Nation, and Tobacco and Americans. State specific materials were "frequently delivered to individual office of Congressmen."[48]

Consolidating and Clarifying its Position. Also in 1958, a restructuring and renaming created the Tobacco Institute (TI) which still survives. The CEO of American Tobacco, speaking for TI's Directors, wrote to Hill and Knowlton regarding "certain important questions of policy." He indicated that the "major objective should be: To defend the tobacco industry against attacks from whatsoever source on tobacco as an alleged health hazard, including efforts to impose labelling requirements." Taking the

position that health charges were "unfounded," he counseled against "frontal attacks" on the motives of groups like the American Cancer Society, preferring instead to challenge them and muddy the waters "by exposing flaws in the charges and presenting contradictory evidence." The TI should present the view that "smoking is not harmful to normal individuals," although "overindulgence or excess in anything may be harmful."[49]

Budget Increases. By 1962 the proposed budget for the TIRC was $5 million, equal to about 20 million today. When they offered speakers to State Medical Societies "to tell our story," but not to debate opponents, they asked for as much advance notice as possible claiming that they were "not a public relations group and our headquarters staff is small."[50]

A Small Scandal. The planting of stories, and reproducing them for mass distribution, was still in evidence in the late 1960s. In 1968 the Federal Trade Commission exposed the Tobacco Institute's role in placing stories in True and the National Enquirer. The latter's headline filled the front page with a bold declaration that "Cigarette Cancer Link is Bunk." The nominally different authors were in fact the same person, paid and fed material by the Tobacco Institute, and soon to join the staff of Hill and Knowlton. Ads in the daily press encouraged readership of the True article and hundreds of thousands of reprints were sent to doctors, educators, researchers and members of Congress with an "editor's message" attachment rather than disclosing TI's role. The American Medical Association mailing list was obtained with the pretense that it was for a circulation campaign for True. The newspaper ad bills and mailing costs were paid Tiderock Corp., Rosser Reeves' PR firm working for the Tobacco Institute. The FTC judged these as "not the acts of an industry either confident of its facts nor solicitous of its reputation."[51]

Evaluations and Discussion

A Tobacco Institute internal memo of 1972 reviewed the preceding twenty years, and described its activities as defending the industry on "three major fronts -- litigation, politics, and public opinion." The core elements of the "holding strategy" included "creating doubt about the health charge without actually denying it (keeping alive the notion of scientific 'controversy'), and advocating the public's right to smoke, without actually

urging them to take up the practice." A decade earlier, an internal memo stated: "Historically, it would seem that the 1954 emergency was handled effectively. From the experience there arose a realization by the tobacco industry of a public relations problem that must be solved for the self-preservation of the industry."[52]

To accomplish this holding strategy, the world was scoured for scientific and medical opinions that contradicted or confounded the ever growing evidence of tobacco's carcinogenic nature. That which could be found was reproduced, re-packaged and distributed with the full machinery of the nation's leading PR firm in high gear. The essential tactic was to gather, reproduce, and scatter seeds of scientific doubt to magnify and maintain the appearance of a scientific controversy. Despite claims that the TIRC existed to fund impartial research, and pursue public health as "paramount to every other consideration," the activity reports and budgets show that influencing public opinion was actually the primary, perhaps exclusive, objective.

A 1974 internal memo from Lorillard's research director to its CEO stated that: "Historically, the joint industry funded smoking and health research programs have not been selected against specific scientific goals, but rather for various purposes such as public relations, political relations, position for litigation, etc. Thus, it seems obvious that reviews of such programs for scientific relevance and merit ... are not likely to produce high ratings."[53]

The judge in the recent and temporarily successful liability trial, Cipollone v. Liggett et al (NJ 1988), was required, by a motion of the cigarette defense, to review the evidence. He judged that the jury could reasonably conclude that the TIRC and the work it performed was "nothing but a hoax created for public relations purposes with no intention of seeking the truth of publishing it ... The intensity of the advertising and public relation was sufficient to create the desired doubt in the minds of the consumer, and overwhelm or undermine pronouncements as to the dangers... (The) magazine entitled Tobacco and Health, and mailed free to practically every doctor in the country ... was a blatant and biased account of the smoking 'controversy.'" The evidence supported, in his view, an "industry wide conspiracy to accomplish all of the foregoing in callous, wanton, wilful and reckless disregard for the health of consumers in an effort to maintain

sales and profits ... vast in its scope, devious in its purpose and devastating in its results."[54]

Another measure of the success of this sustained public relations effort lies in the extent to which, even now, most citizens, even well educated readers, tend to substantially underestimate the scientific consensus and the degree of medical health risk. Few people realize that there have been 20 Surgeon's General reports over 25 years on cigarettes, with recent ones dealing with special topics like addiction, or the hazards of passive smoking. None of these has been equivocal about the health hazards of cigarettes. In 1989, more than 1,000 Americans were estimated to have died every single day from their cigarette smoking and nicotine addiction, more than from heroin, crack, fire, homicides, auto accidents and AIDS combined.

Conclusion

From at least the 1920s, public relations has displayed a sophistication of analysis and action, creating sometimes dramatic, even if indirect, impacts. Early professionals like Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays approached their challenges with the same care as modern professionals. They researched the attitudes, motivations, information and ideologies of their target audiences, developed campaign concepts which displayed psychological sophistication, and conducted well organized campaigns with multiple activities orchestrated in time and selective in their focus of intention.

Modern public relations, as in the efforts by and for the TIRC, and distinct from the cruder press agentry and publicity seeking, was a practice of propaganda, in the classic sense. The term "propaganda" was abandoned by the profession as it was used disparagingly to refer to the despised efforts of enemies.

Public relations has served many roles for the cigarette industry over the years, presaging all of its present activities. Public relations counselors helped the manufacturers in many ways: increasing the perceived fashionability and popularity of smoking, especially among women; resolving conflicts between manufacturers of different industries; contradicting and dispelling rumours and opinions negative against the firms' products or services; supporting and coordinating with advertising campaigns; authoring advocacy advertisements; writing and distributing materials to influence

government officials, physicians and other opinion leaders.

Bernays valued attitudinal and ideological management more than the autonomous social and political liberties of the average citizen. "The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. The freedoms of speech, press, petition and assembly, the freedoms which make the engineering of consent possible, are among the most cherished guarantees of the Constitution of the United States." Small wonder that these constitutional freedoms are also cherished by the Tobacco Institute, and by Phillip Morris in its latest "Bill of Rights" advocacy campaign. They have much at stake in the "right" to use advertising and publicity to influence the media and public opinion, to use Bernays' propaganda for the engineering of public consent for their continued promotion of products with devastating health consequences.[55]

1. John E. O'Toole, "Advertising and Democracy: Is Advertising Second-Class Speech?", Gannett Center Journal (Columbia) (1987), p97-108. Emphasis added.

2. Antonio Cipollone v. Liggett Group et al, U.S. District Court (N.J.), Civil Action 83-2864 (hereafter L&M): Plaintiffs Exhibit, P-1105: Panzer to Kornegay re: Roper Proposal (5/1/72).

3. Nannie May Tillie, The R.J. Reynolds Company (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1985). Sources for miscellaneous information, otherwise not referenced, can be found in Richard W. Pollay, "Promotion and Policy for a Pandemic Product: Notes on the History of Cigarette Advertising," History of Advertising Archives, Vancouver, B.C. (1/88), 96p.

4. "Advertising Practices of the American Tobacco Company," (National Better Business Bureau, 9/30), 5p.

5. Edward L. Bernays, Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p374. Tilley, op.cit., p333.

6. Ray Eldon Hiebert, Courtier to the Crowd: The Story of Ivy Lee and the Development of Public Relations (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1966), p179.

7. Hiebert, op.cit., p180.

8. Hiebert, op. cit., p153, and Bernays (1965) op. cit., and Edward L. Bernays, "Emergence of the Public Relations Counsel: Principles and Recollections," Business History Review, Vol. 45 #3 (Autumn 1971), p296-316.

9. Bernays (1971), op. cit., p300.

10. Hiebert, op. cit., p152 and Edward L. Bernays, Propaganda (NY: Horace Liveright, 1933), p37.

11. Bernays (1933) op.cit., p54.

12. James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1939). Bernays (1933), op. cit., p12, 10 and Bernays, Propaganda, Ch. 2, as cited by Henry F. Pringle, "His Master's Voice," American Mercury, Vol. 9 (10/26).

13. Bernays (1965), op. cit., p383-6, 395.

14. Bernays (1965), op. cit., p390.

15. Letter from J.J.D. to John W. Hill, of Hill & Knowlton, 12/14/53. John W. Hill papers (hereafter H&K), State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Box 24, TIRC Correspondence.

16. "The Uproar in Cigarettes," Fortune (12/53), p130ff.

17. On planned articles, see H&K: B24, "Preliminary Recommendations," 12/14/53. On New Yorker, see Howard Luck Gossage, Is There any Hope for Advertising? (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986).

18. H&K: B24, "Background Material" by Bert Goss, 12/15/53, p3.

19. See "American Tobacco Hits 'Loose Talk'" Wall Street Journal (11/27/53), or "Cigarette Concern Scouts Cancer Link," N.Y.Times (11/27/53). CEO Meeting held 12/15/53 in New York City.

20. H&K: B24, "Progress Report," (1/15/54).

21. H&K: B24, Bert Goss memo, "Outline of Progress Report," (1/11/54) and "Confidential Report on Meeting 1/18/54."

22. H&K:B24, "Outline of Progress Report" (1/11/54), p3. "More marketable" in "Public Relations Report" (6/21/54), p7.

23. H&K: B26, "Public Relations Report" (4/28/55), p3.

24. H&K: B31: Committee Structure as of 11/12/56.

25. "Hill and Knowlton - II," Harvard Business School, Teaching Case, 1966, p247.

26. H&K: B24 & B26.

27. H&K: B24, "Progress Report" (1/15/54) and Correspondence 1954.

28. H&K: B24, Cullman to Hahn, Correspondence (1/5/54).

29. H&K, B24, "Report of Activities through 7/31/54." Cover memo from Carl Thompson to T. V. Hartnett (8/17/54).

30. Ibid, p6.

31. Ibid, p7-9.

32. H&K: B31, Meeting minutes for 6/7/56; H&K memo to Hartnett, "Conferences with Life and Reader's Digest, 7/17-18/56." R. W. Darrow letter to Hearst, 10/14/54.

33. H&K, B24, "Report of Activities through (7/31/54)."

34. Ibid, and H&K: B26, memo to T. J. Ross from Hill and Knowlton (4/22/55) re: Pat McGrady,"Cigarettes = Lung Cancer?" (Public Affairs Pamphlet, 4/55).

35. H&K: B46.

36. H&K: B24, "Report on TIRC Booklet" (5/3/54).

37. H&K: TIRC 1954, "Preliminary Report" memo from B. Littin to John Hill (6/18/54).

38. H&K: B24, TIRC Press Conference (6/15/54), Condensed transcript.

39. "Preliminary Report" op. cit.

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46. H&K: B26, "Public Relations Report" (4/28/55); "Highlights of Recent Activities," p4. "Nonsense" in Zahn memo to Darrow (1/25/56), re: "Title of Northrup Book," H&K: B31.

47. H&K: B26, "Report on the American Cancer Society Questionnaire Entitled "Survey of Medical Opinion Towards Smoking" (10/55).

48. H&K:B31, John Hill memo to Carl Thompson re: "Phone Call with Mr. Joseph Cullman" (2/4/58). Carl Thompson memo to Timothy Hartnett, "Materials to U. S. Congress" (4/19/61).

49. H&K: B31, TIRC, letter to John Hill from Paul Hahn (2/5/58), p1-4.

50. L&M: P-912. Memo from J. M. Brady to C. C. Little (4/19/62) re: TIRC Program.

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