

Press Agents of the New Deal

By William E. Berchtold

AMERICA



ROOSEVELT

Washington news as it appears in the American press today is largely the handicraft of New Deal press agents. No government ever has had on its payroll such a large and efficient staff of ballyhoo artists who work to sell a party's program in the form of news of administration activities.

IF you can name the ten members of the Roosevelt Cabinet easier than you can recite the Ten Commandments, the reason may lie behind this simple fact: the Ten Commandments are not printed on the Front Page of your newspaper nearly every day in the week. The New Deal's phenomenal success in commanding attention through every medium of publicity known to the modern art of ballyhoo has been no chance happening; it has been carefully planned by the largest and most efficient staff of publicity experts ever to grace the government's payroll.

The same publicity tactics which proved so successful during the Democratic Presidential Campaign and which sent Franklin D. Roosevelt to the White House are being employed on an even larger scale to keep the New Deal before the public. In fact so important has press agency become to the New Deal that several of the key men in the Democratic National Committee's publicity machine have been transferred to the government payroll with important assignments. Even the press intelligence set-up which the Democratic National Committee found so effective during the campaign has been transplanted almost in its entirety into the government service. No party organization, however, could afford the elaborate press relations machinery which the New Deal has erected to augment the small nucleus which existed on March 4, 1933. Its cost, including salaries, printing, supplies, etc., is today in excess of \$1,000,000 annually, and it is being paid for by the American taxpayer.

New Deal Press Agents

a score of OK's on statements he prepared, including that of President Hoover himself, Michelson had no such obstacles to hurdle. Michelson laid the groundwork for a Democratic victory; Howe and Farley made it a Roosevelt victory, since Michelson's backers, Raskob and Shouse, were outwitted at the convention. Michelson, however, was kept at his task, accompanying Roosevelt on his western campaign swing and actively advising the Presidential candidate. Rather than accept a post in the government service, which he most likely could have had, Michelson prefers to continue his work for the Democratic party on his long term contract at \$20,000 a year. No government post would have paid him that. His trouble-shooting work at the Treasury, CCC, London Economic Conference and NRA was without compensation from the government.

GEORGE BUCKLEY (*Publicity Adviser to General Johnson*). When Michelson left NRA to tend to some important knitting at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, Buckley was appointed as public relations adviser to the temperamental, bombastic Administrator of the NRA, General Hugh S. Johnson. One-time president of Crowell Publishing Company, publisher of Hearst's "*Chicago Herald and Examiner*" and vice-president of a New York bank, Buckley has the dual assignment of administering the Newspaper and Graphic Arts Codes and aiding the General on publicity policy. He apparently has not been able to dissuade the General from his rather bad habit of calling newspapermen on the carpet when they write stories which do not meet his standards of "accuracy," sometimes suggesting that he may tell their bosses and they might get fired. Buckley is the General's fourth public relations adviser since NRA was started a year ago. Boaz Long, Latin American diplomat in the Wilson Administration and public relations man for N. W. Ayer & Son, was first called on the scene to organize NRA's public relations division. Within a month Long was switched to other tasks and Charles F. Horner, long-time chautauqua organizer, chief of the speakers' bureau during Woodrow Wilson's campaigns in 1912 and 1916 and director of Liberty Loan oratory, was called from his music conservatory at Kansas City. The NRA confusion became unbearable by August and the old master himself, Charley Michelson, was brought in to play a few harmonious chords to soothe the Blue Eagle.

WILLIAM V. LAWSON (*Chief of NRA Press Section*). Two weeks before the National Industrial

New Deal Press Agents

Recovery Act was passed by Congress, Lawson was on the job setting up the press relations machinery for NRA. Despite frequent changes of directors in the public relations division, he has continued as the active head of the New Deal's largest publicity unit. His staff now numbers thirty, including a thoroughly trained corps of newspapermen to collect, write and edit NRA "handouts" and the secretarial force necessary to mimeograph, mail and disseminate the product. When the Blue Eagle was soaring last summer, the staff numbered as high as fifty. Among the press agents of the alphabet agencies, he deserves the No. 1 ranking. With a background of twelve years with the "*Chicago Tribune*," six of it as Washington correspondent, and a stretch with N. W. Ayer & Son handling Ford publicity, he has a firm grasp of both the newspaper and publicity technique. His staff is organized like that of a daily paper with eight "reporters" (among them Clarence Peter DuBose, formerly UP's man in London and Tokio and AP's bureau chief at Mexico City and Madrid; and Laurence M. Benedict, erstwhile UP and Scripps-Howard man) to cover code hearings. William B. Hassett, veteran Washington publicity and newspaper worker with the "*Washington Post*," "*Philadelphia Public Ledger*" and Associated Press, serves as "city editor" of NRA. W. Bruce MacNamee, one-time Hearst employee, public relations man for N. W. Ayer & Son and Director of Exploitation for the Cord Mayer real estate interests, is assistant to Lawson. Their executive assistant is Miss Marshall Coles, clever publicity and advertising woman and an expert on fine printing.

Lawson has directed the preparation of NRA's news release "handouts" (now numbering more than 5,200); radio speeches for all speakers except Johnson, Richberg and the President; subjects for motion picture news reels; a weekly "clip sheet" for the lazy editors of hundreds of rural and small town papers; and a daily press digest of NRA news from forty major newspapers. The weekly "clip sheet" even contains a boxed "editorial suggestion," so if your favorite rural paper carries an editorial on NRA, it more than likely has been written by NRA's own staff of press agents. As Michelson learned when he was turning out the Democratic campaign publicity, small town editors wield wicked shears when it comes to cutting out these choice morsels from the "clip sheets" and sending them to be set up in type. The NRA's weekly "clip sheet" has been used extensively throughout the country. It has been well written and, while no stories unfavorable to NRA can be found in some representative samples examined, the whole project

New Deal Press Agents

has been free from what Steve Early would call "propaganda." But then, after all, perhaps the best definition of "propaganda" is that it is "publicity which the other fellow is putting out."

The NRA has been accused of exercising a press censorship on three occasions, despite General Johnson's insistence that all business will be "done in a goldfish bowl." It is true that minor officials have been kept from discussing policy matters, a right reserved for the General himself. It is likewise true that a guard was placed over the mimeographing room in which the huge document resulting from the Darrow-Johnson row was being turned out, chiefly to keep some aggressive newsman from scoring a *clean* "beat" on all his competitors. Aside from these instances, the opaqueness of the famous "goldfish bowl" can be ascribed to the jittery condition in which reporters find themselves after wrestling with the traveling salesman's code or the code for buttonhole makers or some other equally interesting subject. Lawson's salary: \$6,120.

NORMAN WASHINGTON BAXTER (*Reconstruction Finance Corporation*). One of the stars of the Democratic National Committee's public relations staff who have been assigned key positions in the New Deal's publicity organization, Baxter handles all press contacts on news developing out of the RFC, including Jesse Jones's many, many speeches. Baxter was formerly managing editor of the "*Washington Post*" and spent more than a decade in the London and Washington bureaus of the "*Philadelphia Public Ledger*." He handled Governor Ritchie's publicity before the Chicago convention and directed the Washington publicity office of the Democratic National Committee while Michelson was in New York. Had Ritchie obtained the nomination at Chicago, Baxter would have been in line for the White House Secretariat. He was Early's choice for the RFC post.

ROBERT MOORES GATES (*Department of Justice*). Another former member of the Democratic National Committee's publicity staff who has been appointed to a government press post, Gates combined his Democratic propaganda job with acting as Washington correspondent for the "*Florida Times Union*" before coming to the Department of Justice. He is a veteran Washington newspaperman, having spent 25 years as Washington correspondent for the "*Memphis Commercial Appeal*." The Department of Justice, seldom an important news source under previous administrations, has taken on new life from a publicity standpoint since Gates has been on the job. The extension of in-

New Deal Press Agents

terstate crime laws has produced numerous stories of national interest. His biggest story of the season, the Attorney General's proceedings to obtain a grand jury indictment of Andrew W. Mellen, turned out to be a political boomerang.

ALFRED D. STEDMAN

(*Agricultural Adjustment Administration*). Head of the government's second largest publicity set-up with a staff of from 15 to 20 persons, Stedman is the highest paid public relations man outside the White House Secretariat. His stipend is \$9,800 a year. Having spent years as Washington correspondent and editorial writer for the "*St. Paul Pioneer Press*," he is well acquainted with and sympathetic to the interests of the Bellyache Belt, but he has had difficulty living down his ill-timed denials and circumlocutory statements on published accounts of some early phases of the AAA program. The Associated Press's clean scoop on the cotton and wheat processing taxes, which knocked the bottom out of the market in those commodities, was met by one of Stedman's circumlocutions which characterized the report as "premature" and intimated that it was without foundation. The market placed faith in the AP report and showed no signs of rising when the AAA finally put out its "official" release, which was almost identical with the AP's story. Stedman was selected for the AAA press section post by George Peek, but was elevated to his present position as Director of Information by Chester Davis, Administrator of the AAA, after the smoke had cleared from the Peek-Tugwell-Davis fracas. His chiefs, Davis and Wallace, are both veterans of farm newspaper editing.

They handle newsmen with agility, carefully noting that their "asides" are "off the record," a precaution which Tugwell recently neglected when he answered a request for comment on Senator Smith's holding up his appointment as Under Secretary of Agriculture by replying: "You couldn't print what I'd say about the Senator." The remark got into print and Tugwell into more hot water. Nothing short of a constituent's appointment as United States Marshal could assuage the Senator's feelings.

PAUL PORTER (*Chief of AAA Press Section*). This lanky, likeable Kentuckian has done much to take the early curse off AAA press relations through his friendly, helpful, courteous handling of requests made by newspapermen assigned to the AAA. Formerly editor of farm papers in Oklahoma and Georgia, he is thoroughly informed on cotton problems and came to Washington before the

New Deal Press Agents

Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed to handle cotton program publicity. He is responsible for the amendment to the Act which made it possible to publicize price and production predictions. The amendment circumvented a previous restriction, growing out of a heated Congressional investigation in 1926, which would have made it a felony to tell the farmers that they might expect 5-cent cotton unless they came under the AAA cotton program. Porter had no desire to spend any time in the penitentiary, yet he realized that such price and production predictions would be necessary to his publicity program. The "Porter Amendment" (as his friends jokingly call it) was written on the back of an envelope in a cab headed for Capitol Hill. With E. R. McIntyre (Dairy publicity expert) and Arthur T. Thompson (Corn-Hog publicity specialist), Porter turned out radio speeches and publicity news releases like doughnuts from a Salvation Army canteen during the early stages of the three major AAA programs. The speakers seldom saw their speeches until they connected with them at the broadcasting studio. On one occasion Porter rushed to the studio with a speech he had prepared for C. A. Cobb, Chief of the Cotton Section, just as Cobb was to go on the air. Written and timed for Cobb's usual drawl, the excited speaker reeled it off in half the time allotted. Before Porter could realize what was happening, the bewildered announcer was introducing "another expert from the AAA who will give us the latest news on the cotton situation, Mr. Paul Porter." He was equal to the occasion and, just to prove something about the fickle radio audience, his fan mail exceeded Cobb's.

MILTON S. EISENHOWER and **CHARLES E. GAPEN** (*Department of Agriculture*). With the AAA in the role of the tail that wags the dog, these two old-timers, whose appointments date back into the Harding and Coolidge administrations, have been somewhat eclipsed by the fireworks of the New Deal's press agents in the AAA. Gapen has kept up his prolific production of news releases on scientific investigations of particular interest to farm papers, an important service of the Department of Agriculture for nearly a quarter century. The Department has long had one of the most extensive systems for getting its "handouts" printed through the use of field workers in nearly every county to call on the local editor and enlist his aid. The system has been used to the limit by the new AAA press agents who have adapted it to their needs in publicizing the major agricultural programs of the New Deal. The Depart-

New Deal Press Agents

ment's prosaic "handouts" on scientific subjects seldom reach print in metropolitan papers unless some Congressman calls attention to such a classic study as "Where the Sheets Wear Out."

HERBERT GASTON (*Treasury Department*). When Henry J. Morgenthau, Jr., moved into the office of Secretary of the Treasury, he brought Herbert Gaston with him as the Treasury's first press agent. He got off to a bad start when Morgenthau, who has been traditionally suspicious of newspapermen, issued an order making it necessary for all information to clear through Gaston and closing up direct contact of the press with Treasury officials. Coupled with an order put out by a clerk which directed all Treasury guards to stand and salute when the Secretary passed, the press corps had the makings of a Roman holiday. A telegram of protest to the President at Warm Springs put Steve Early into action to soften the well-intentioned, but badly executed, order. It's just such little troubles as this which a smart public relations man can save his chief. Multiply a few slips like this by two or three and your favorite Washington correspondent will be leaving with you, written between the lines, the impression that the U. S. Treasury is about to collapse. Gaston, with ten years' experience on the desk of the old "*New York World*," went to Albany with Morgenthau in 1931 as press agent for the New York State Conservation Commission. When Morgenthau went to Washington, Gaston assisted him, successively, as secretary of the Federal Farm Board and Deputy Governor of the Farm Credit Administration before going to the Treasury.

HAROLD F. AMBROSE (*Postoffice Department*). Two kinds of news come out of the Postoffice Department, the latest political machinations of Big Jim Farley and notes on the government's biggest and most costly business enterprise, the postal service. Ambrose, who formerly combined publicity work with his reporting for the "*Boston Transcript*," had an opportunity to weave both politics and postal news into his biggest story of the year: cancellation of the air mail contracts. Judged now as an Administration blunder, Farley's cancellation looked like a *coup de maître* for the politically minded Postmaster General in the early stages of the story; and Ambrose made the most of it. More recently he has prepared from six to ten "handouts" a week "designed to build up the air mail service," which was badly damaged by the cancellation. Ambrose will have a major part in carrying out the Postmaster General's proposed plan to

New Deal Press Agents

spend \$100,000 in promoting development of the air mail "through billboard advertising, radio programs, magazine stories and lots of newspaper publicity." Ambrose is an abler press agent for Farley and the Postoffice Department than Isaac Cregg, the civil service man appointed by a previous administration, who was sidetracked for the Farley appointment.

STUART GODWIN (*Interior*) and **MICHAEL STRAUSS** (*PWA*). Before Secretary Ickes came to the Interior Department and appointed these two capable press agents and their staffs, Washington newspapermen looked upon this department as a news source with about as much favor as they did local museums. Godwin was on the Washington staff of Hearst's International News Service and Strauss was with Hearst's Universal Service as Washington correspondent for the "*Chicago Herald and Examiner*" when Ickes was appointed. Both have had long careers in newspaper work. Mr. Ickes's expenditure of the \$3,300,000,000 public works fund has manufactured news of interest to every section of the country and Strauss has used a staff of seven, including two photographers, to tell the story by word and picture. Godwin has had the part-time aid of two of AP's most promising young staffmen: Roy Hendrickson, now in the Subsistence Homesteads Division; and Don Kirkley, now in the Petroleum Administration. Both resigned from AP to take a hand in the New Deal.

CHARLES FITZGERALD (*Department of Labor*). An able publicity worker for the Democratic party in the Women's Division of the National Committee in New York, Fitzgerald drew the assignment as press agent for America's first woman cabinet member and the Department which she heads. Despite her hatred of publicity on her personal affairs and the constant references to her three-cornered hats, Secretary Perkins has won over interviewers by her authoritative handling of a wide range of subjects. Fitzgerald spent ten years on the old "*New York World*" and seven years on the "*Washington Post*," later editing news reels for five years. Before working in the Democratic campaign, he spent some time interviewing "stuffed shirts" for the North American Newspaper Alliance.

STANLEY RICHARDSON (*Veterans' Administration*). Holder of an important post in Military Intelligence during the World War and the \$15,000-a-year director of publicity for the Power Trust (Before Insull's Crash), Richardson is the new public relations man in the Veterans'

New Deal Press Agents

Administration. Mrs. Inez M. Pugh, a holdover appointee, continues to handle routine "handouts," but Richardson is the New Deal's representative. His ability as a press agent is undisputed.

EDWY B. REID (*Farm Credit Administration*). Formerly employed as public relations director by the group of bankers interested in the Federal Land Banks, he moved into the post of Director of Information for the FCA when the land banks were brought under the New Deal legislation. Reid acted as Director of Information in the Department of Agriculture during the Wilson administration.

W. L. STUDEVANT (*Tennessee Valley Authority*). One of the Roosevelt Administration's frankly promotional projects, the TVA and EHFA utilizes the services of the New York advertising agency, Young and Rubicam, for trade surveys and promotional planning. Sturdevant resigned as editor of "*Louisville Herald Post*" to become Director of Information and Press Relations of TVA, with headquarters at Knoxville. Another former Scripps-Howard man, Forrest Allen, is press agent for the EHFA at Chattanooga, while George O. Gillingham, formerly managing editor of the "*Pathfinder*," is the Washington press relations man for TVA.

PAUL J. CROGHAN (*Department of Commerce*). Herbert Hoover's ardent interest in the Department of Commerce was so closely associated with Croghan's routine publicity activities for his former chief that everyone had forgotten Croghan was appointed during the Wilson administration. An affable, efficient worker, Croghan's able services were called to Early's attention through a petition signed by prominent members of the Washington press corps. He has been retained in his old post, although the NRA (like the AAA) has become the tail that is wagging the dog. Other press contact men on routine assignments retained in posts which they held under Republican administrations include: Herbert E. Morgan and Frank Wisner for the Civil Service and Radio Commissions, respectively.

GUY McKINNEY (*CCC*) and **MORTON MILFORD** (*FERA and CWA*). Their jobs are to keep down the number of brickbats which can be hurled at the New Deal's three principal relief agencies. McKinney, formerly Washington correspondent for the "*Chicago Tribune*," succeeded Michelson after his short stay in CCC public relations. Milford was assistant to the director of public relations of the Democratic National Committee

New Deal Press Agents

during the 1920 campaign and has spent twenty-five years in newspaper and publicity work.

THEODORE H. TILLER

(*Federal Home Loan Bank Board*). Erstwhile political writer for Munsey papers and more recently Washington correspondent of the "*Atlanta Journal*," he has one of the New Deal's less important publicity posts.

MICHAEL JAMES McDERMOTT

(*Department of State*). As chief of the Division of Current Information in the Department of State, McDermott accompanied the American delegation to the London Naval Conference in 1930. He was kept in Washington on routine tasks, however, when the Roosevelt Administration sent its delegation to the London Economic Conference. Michelson, the No. 1 public relations man, was sent abroad for the 1933 conference. Confidential clerk to General Tasker H. Bliss during the World War, McDermott has never developed his understanding of press relations beyond that of a clerk. Clerks may have been all right for the staid diplomatic service's press relations during previous administrations, but under the New Deal it takes a well-trained political press agent to fill the bill.

MEN IN GENERAL

THE PRESS AGENTS of the New Deal, with few exceptions, are capable men with backgrounds well-founded in newspaper and publicity experience. Little consideration has been given to men who have not demonstrated their ability to produce either during earlier publicity connections with the Democratic National Committee or in Washington newspaper and publicity work. It is a department of the Roosevelt Administration which cannot afford to have weaklings on the job, for too much of the New Deal program depends almost wholly on favorable public reaction built up through the press, the radio, the news reel and other media of publicity.

Three factors have been highly favorable to the Roosevelt Administration's building up of a government publicity organization beyond anything ever conceived by previous administrations. First, the emergency legislation placed funds at its disposal which previous administrations would have found impossible to obtain under the closer scrutiny of normal Congressional investigation of expenditures. Second, the Depression years forced many competent Washington newspapermen out of their old jobs and made them available for posts in the New Deal's publicity set-up; although some of the appointees resigned well-paid newspaper jobs to accept government posts at even more attractive salaries! Third, the intense national

New Deal Press Agents

interest in the many confusing experiments of the Administration provided a logical excuse for the setting up of "emergency machinery to keep the nation informed." It is the general view that the "emergency" will become permanent!

There are more than 100 writers and literary research workers now on the job; and their subordinate staffs account for another 200. Some writers devote nearly all of their time to "ghosting" speeches, magazine articles or books for the principal "super-salesmen" of the New Deal. Quite obviously, such exponents of the Administration's policies as Rexford Guy Tugwell, Henry A. Wallace and others would find few moments to glance up from their literary laborings if the entire output linked with their names should come from their own pens. Wallace and Tugwell are as naturally prolific as any of the Roosevelt corps of super-salesmen, but their regular administrative duties could hardly permit them the time required for such extensive writing.



Wallace uses a dictaphone to record a brief outline of his ideas for speeches, articles and pamphlets, turning out a page or two in rather sloppy English, which is then turned over to a "ghost" who expands and polishes it for the Secretary's final consideration and signature. Russell Lord, a staff writer for "*Country Home*" who was active in the early stages of AAA publicity, did the literary embellishment of Secretary Wallace's now famous "America Must Choose." John R. Fleming, a nationally known agricultural writer and Assistant Director of Information in the Department of Agriculture, has been responsible for culturing some of the Secretary's other "germ-ideas" into full length manuscripts.

Dr. Tugwell prefers to reverse the process used by Wallace, usually having some able young researcher such as Frederic P. Bartlett prepare the first draft. Dr. Tugwell then polishes the style and diction to meet his own rather flossy literary tastes. This Tugwellian interest in literary embroidery caused the editor of Dartmouth's student newspaper (certainly without knowledge of the composition method used) to head an editorial on the Brain Truster's address at Hanover with this succinct remark: "They Asked for Bread and He Gave Them Cake."

No previous Administration mastered the publicity technique sufficiently to get its story told by its own exponents, and make editors fight for the privilege of publishing the story at a price! That has been one of the high points of the New Deal's press

New Deal Press Agents

To those who have followed the political career of President Roosevelt, this unprecedented emphasis on public relations and publicity is no surprise. No President has ever been more alive to the potentialities of maintaining a "good press," of gauging public reaction to his policies and of timing his announcements to obtain the widest and most sympathetic audience possible. A past master of publicity tactics himself, the President is known as a "natural" to his publicity-wise staff. He has an expert knowledge of the technical intricacies of news dissemination, motion picture production, news photography and radio broadcasting. He is always ready to listen to suggestions from the three veteran newspapermen whom he chose to surround him in the White House Secretariat, but when the "Boss" strikes out on an exploit which does not happen to meet with their favor (which is to say does not conform with standard publicity practice) there is every reason to suspect that a new publicity *coup* is in the making. His judgment of publicity values is uncanny!

The Roosevelt technique has thrown precedent to the four winds. Washington's starched dignity has melted in favor of a humanizing influence which has kept members of the Cabinet and key men of the Alphabet Agencies from turning to marble on their lofty pedestals. The word has gone out to mingle with the crowds. Everyone who has any ability as a speaker or a writer has been added to the list of traveling super-salesmen charged with the task of selling certain phases of the New Deal to the public. Those who lack either time or ability to write their own speeches can at least furnish the sound effects. Those whose literary inclinations are rather limited can at least "edit" copy prepared for them and sign their names to daily newspaper columns, magazine articles, newspaper feature stories, or books. It is easy enough to draw a star writer from the New Deal's corps of press agents, many of whom spent years in Washington as newspaper correspondents before they became cogs in the Administration's press relations machinery. They know what makes news and are having the time of their lives manufacturing it in reams, a pleasant change from the years spent in scraping up the dry crumbs of less publicity-minded administrations.



The White House is the focal point of the New Deal's public relations set-up; all departments and agencies take their cues from the policies established there. When nearly 100 correspondents for press associations and daily newspapers gather for the President's press conferences on Wednesday mornings and on Friday afternoons, the key government press agents file in with the newspapermen, take copious notes and make plans to carry out the press conferences in their own departments on the White House pattern. The President sets a pace which is difficult for his Cabinet members to match. Submitting to oral questioning—with no questions barred—he faces the interrogatory barrage from the correspondents with equanimity. He calls the newspapermen by their first names as he answers their questions. Sometimes his answer is no more than a friendly jibe at the correspondent if the question is one he does not want to answer, but more often the answer is direct and informative. Most of the answers can be used as "background" but never to be attributed directly to the President as a quotation. If the answer is confidential, the President indicates that it is "off the record," which means that it cannot be written or repeated "even to the boss." When direct quotation of the President is permitted, copies of his statement are prepared in order to guard against possible misquotation. The Chief Executive of no other nation receives the newspapermen of the world on anything approaching such terms.

This open door policy on press relations at the White House was calculated to have an electric effect on the Washington newspaper corps, and it hit its mark with salutary results. The first Roosevelt never held press conferences, but talked privately to a small clique of newspapermen who had access to the White House through the back door. President Wilson was the first to hold regular conferences with the press, but the World War clamped down a censorship which closed them up. President Hard-

New Deal Press Agents

agency. The syndicated newspaper columns, magazine articles and books turned out by the Roosevelt super-salesmen during the last year have not only placed the New Deal's story before the public in a way which interviews and speeches could not do, but they have returned a sizeable income to those whose names are connected with such literary efforts.

The success of the New Deal press agents has emphasized the Executive's rise in public favor over that of Congress, which has become the butt of an increasing volume of pointed jests.

Nothing can be quite as damning to a Congressman's reputation back home as a literal quotation of remarks made extemporaneously on the floor of the House, if the orator is inept at formulating clearly the ideas and expressions he desires to use. Newsmen are usually charitable on such occasions, placing the perfectly phrased sentence in the solon's mouth; but occasionally the Congressman's actual mumblings are used to good advantage when there is a political bone to be picked. Then, too, Congressmen sometimes choose to delete caustic remarks hastily made against adversaries under protection of legislative immunity from libel suits. These remarks get out on the news wires and are printed, although they may be deleted from the permanent record in the light of cooler reflection. Representative Cannon (Dem.) of Missouri, who has frequently complained of the treatment accorded him by the press, demanded that Speaker Rainey invoke the recent ban on publication of speeches before "revision and extension." The Missouri Democrat had criticized a fellow Congressman, Representative John J. Cochran, but "revised" his remarks for the record by striking out some of the most caustic comments. Publication of his original remarks stirred his ire and resulted in the ban. Republican Congressmen called it a "censorship of the press" and protested the Speaker's action as "nothing more than an attempt to dictate what the press may say about the Democrats."



The New Deal press agents have saved the Administration from many potentially devastating attacks. As a case in point: the NRA was toying with the notion of endorsing the printing and distribution of more than 1,000,000 "Primers of the New Deal" to be used in public schools. The Primers had been prepared and considerable work on the project finished. Such a program would have been filled with political dynamite. Michelson the Trouble-shooter stopped it, and quickly put out a statement saying

New Deal Press Agents

"The NRA is against use of the schools for propaganda purposes." As he said further in the statement: "It is, of course, very difficult to draw the line between forthright and implied propaganda." Michelson certainly ought to know!

●

The entire public relations project of the Administration is being carried out with such skillful subtleness that its broad significance is not widely recognized even in Washington. If the New Deal fails, it will not be for lack of having had its story told. Perhaps the only danger lies in the possibility that the seemingly prostrate G.O.P. Elephant, having viewed the proceedings thus far with pachydermatous indifference, may rise to do a bit of trumpeting in this manner: "It is an outrage that taxpayers' money should be used to provide the Democratic party with an invincible publicity machine within the federal government itself! Etc."

But the Press Agents of the New Deal have already developed a counter-attack to meet just such situations. It lies deeply entrenched in this frequently used device: "*Constructive* criticism is welcomed, all other criticism is the work of Propagandists!"

New Deal Press Agents

ing, himself a newspaperman, required the submission of questions in writing prior to his conferences, but answered some oral questions. President Coolidge instituted that mythical figure, the "White House spokesman," to whom all statements were attributed, although he managed to become a homely legendary character by encouraging the circulation of stories about himself. Herbert Hoover established himself as a headline maker while he was Secretary of Commerce, but once in the White House his attitude changed; he resented personal publicity on his family life; he required the submission of written questions at press conferences and answered only those which struck his fancy; he postponed and canceled press conferences at will and with increasing frequency until finally he fell from headline stardom.

The New Deal's alertness to the potentialities of publicity has pumped new life into the Washington press corps and the government press agents have played no small part in rounding out the picture. Washington is the world's most important news center today. Those registered in the Press Galleries of Congress now number 435, a corps as large as the House of Representatives itself! When the scores of magazine writers, feature writers and free lancers (not registered in the Press Galleries) are considered, the number exceeds 600. Before Roosevelt entered the White House, there was a tendency to cut down the size of Washington staffs serving the major newspapers and press associations. But the New Deal, with its surfeit of big news, changed all that and fixed the attention of the world upon Washington. Mrs. Roosevelt alone created jobs for a score of women reporters by insisting that men be barred from her press conferences, thereby laying the groundwork for a sympathetic circle of newspaperwomen whose No. 1 assignment is the First Lady of the Land. The NRA and AAA manufactured news at a rate too fast for the daily newspapers and press associations to keep pace with without expanding their staffs. Established government departments—such as Interior, Treasury and Justice—which seldom turned up big news under previous administrations, became live sources for news when the new government press agents were put on the job and the duties of those departments were expanded under the New Deal.

Not even the world's largest corps of newspapermen has been sufficient to cover all the sources of news in the national capital. That's where the government's new press agents have stepped in to do the task for them. The NRA and AAA have organized their publicity staffs on a plan and on a scale comparable with a daily newspaper office, with "reporters" who collect the news and cover code hearings, "copy readers" and "rewrite men" to put it in final shape for the attention of the "city editor," while a "managing editor" passes on matters of policy and directs the whole news gathering organization. Their output takes the form of mimeographed "handouts" (more than 5,200 of these to date have come from the NRA alone) which are distributed to newspapermen at a central point. These "handouts," prepared by government press agents, are the backbone of most of the news stories which you read today in your daily newspaper under Washington date-lines. Formerly shunned by aggressive correspondents who took pride in covering stories personally, the once despised "handout" has become the rule rather than the exception. There is no regulation against a correspondent's covering a story in person, but the impracticability of being in more than one place at one time is embarrassing to the aggressive reporter these days. He soon comes to rely almost wholly on the "handouts" which, by the way, are often better written than if they were prepared by the correspondent himself. Of course, the "handouts" are not likely to turn up a juicy tidbit on a row between certain government officials, but they are accurate—from an official viewpoint. And plentiful.



It is noteworthy that the good-humored informality of Rooseveltian press relations has won over the most hard-boiled and cynical among the Washington press corps. Even some of the old-timers frankly admit that they have been drawn so close to the inner sanctum that they feel

New Deal Press Agents

themselves losing their once prized ability to view each succeeding administration with an objective, if not professionally jaundiced, eye. Correspondents from newspapers whose bosses insist that they are primarily interested in critical stories reflecting the opposition viewpoint go about their tasks with a rather apologetic air, many of them admitting to friends in the Administration that the New Deal's friendly attitude toward the press has overwhelmed them.

Some writers of the "gossip columns," whose life-blood depends upon chit chat from behind the scenes, make a policy of avoiding regular press conferences where they may be exposed to the wiles of the New Deal's seductive friendliness toward the press. They get much of their information from small fry in the government bureaucracy whose wagging tongues spill tales out of school. Their gossipy stories never come from "handouts" prepared by government press agents, and if the columnist should call upon one of the government's new public relations men for verification, the chances are two-to-one that the gossip would never reach your favorite newspaper. The Washington gossip columnist has risen to unprecedented heights under the New Deal (one column now being syndicated to 270 newspapers) chiefly because the old-line correspondents and press association writers are leaning more heavily than ever before on "handouts" and information which bears an official stamp of authenticity, the work of the New Deal press agents.

Every effort has been made to guard against a charge that the Administration is manufacturing "propaganda" for its own ends. Stephen Early, Press Secretary at the White House and kingpin in the New Deal's press relations set-up, has sent instructions to his corps of government press agents that they should handle their jobs "just as though you are working for a newspaper" and "without propaganda." When the Treasury and Interior Departments and the NRA were caught in the act of issuing instructions to officials which closely resembled a press censorship, Early quickly took action upon the complaints of newspapermen and reassured them of the Administration's desire to put no obstacles in their way. Now all "responsible officials" may talk to newspapermen "except on policy matters," which are centered in the hands of a few major officials. The result of the first orders, however, has not been completely overcome. Few minor officials are willing to talk freely and most of them precede their remarks with "Don't quote me, but—" or the now highly favored expression "Off the record." But there is really little reason to bother with minor officials when there are so many big guns booming every half hour with the regularity of an artillery barrage; the regular press conferences of the White House, Cabinet members and NRA alone crowd every available minute in each week's calendar, with some overlapping.

No one will deny that the New Deal press agents put their best foot forward in presenting the news of the Administration. But it is, nevertheless, true that the system provides a power-house of potential possibilities for the suppression, distortion and censorship of news, should such a course be found desirable to the Administration. At the present time it is achieving its ends by bombarding America's 126,000,000 inhabitants with every detail of the New Deal's activity. Perhaps it is purely accidental, but it is nevertheless a fact that the New Deal has created so many news centers that even the most conscientious member of the Fourth Estate finds it necessary to rely upon the Administration's host of press agents.

The newspaper, radio, camera, news reel, platform, and every other device known to modern publicity have provided the means for telling the New Deal story. The major daily newspapers are, of course, the first consideration, because they cast the die which editors in small towns and rural counties utilize to formulate editorial policy. But the New Deal is also reaching out directly to the small town and rural newspaper with "clip sheets" for lazy editors, to the magazines with signed articles by big names in the Roosevelt Administration, and to the people generally through the radio which reaches into the American home. The Government Printing Office has turned out

New Deal Press Agents

more than 1,000,000,000 pieces of printed matter in the last twelve months, a new high in government publication production, much of it prepared for direct mailing to citizens in every section of the country. The story of the men behind the scenes who are directing and carrying out this huge peacetime publicity program is a revealing one. It is the story of the largest and most efficient staff of public relations men ever retained by a government. Excepting Walter Lippmann at the outset of our excursion through this gallery of word-portraits, we present the following as the principal Press Agents of the New Deal:

LOUIS McHENRY HOWE

(*Secretary to the President*). As the master political wire-puller of the Administration, his piercing, beady eyes are more firmly fixed upon the problems of winning future Congressional and Presidential elections than any of the men who immediately surround the President. No man has been more closely associated with the political career of Franklin D. Roosevelt than Howe, who thinks and talks in terms of publicity and public reaction. Fifteen years of political correspondence at Albany for the "*New York Herald*" and "*New York Telegram*" brought him in contact with Roosevelt while he was a State Senator from Dutchess county. Howe, affable wearer of baggy, unpressed sack-suits, managed Roosevelt's campaign for re-election to the State Senate, taught him many a trick of the publicity business and finally gave up newspaper work to be his secretary when Roosevelt was named Assistant Secretary of the Navy. At Roosevelt's right hand during the campaign for Vice President in 1920, he remained as his personal secretary throughout the '20s, pointing his friend and chief for election as Governor of New York and President of the United States. He was the President's logical choice for the No. 1 post in the White House Secretariat.

Howe tossed political tradition aside by accepting the offer of a commercial radio sponsor to pay him \$600 for a brief broadcast from the White House on Sunday evenings, but as dignified Washington was to learn, acts which might have been considered *infra dignitatem* in former administrations were to become commonplace in the New Deal's publicity scheme. "Sistie" and "Buzzie" Dall, the President's grandchildren, are the only members of the President's personal and official families who have escaped the call to write for syndicates, to broadcast for commercial radio sponsors, or to take some part in the program.

Howe is the creator of the government's first press intelligence service, the expansion of an idea which he developed during the Democratic Presidential Campaign to find out the issues being played up in each section of the country and what was being said about the Democratic candidate in particular. It is a kind of seismograph to register the mental rumblings of the milkman in Omaha and his brother voter in every section of the country.

New Deal Press Agents

Washington correspondents' news interests, as well as many intimate friendships in the Press Galleries. He can usually anticipate questions which will be asked the President, and groom his chief for appropriate answers.

Enjoying the President's complete confidence, Early is always in a position to give a reply to questions which arise in the interim between the regular Wednesday and Friday conferences of the press with the President. It was Early who taught the President some of the ropes of Washington publicity when Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, which occurred at the time when Early was covering the State-War-Navy "beat" for AP. After nearly a decade of service on the Washington staffs of the United Press and later the Associated Press, Early went overseas with a machine gun company and was later assigned to the "*Stars and Stripes*," official newspaper of the A. E. F. He became publicity director of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States after the war and was advance agent for Roosevelt during the Vice-Presidential campaign in 1920. Returning to the AP, he was assigned to cover President Harding on his western tour. He scored a national news beat in flashing the news of the President's death from San Francisco. Paramount News appointed Early as their Washington representative in 1927, a position which he held until joining the White House Secretariat. He keeps tab on news that is breaking on a dozen fronts through a United Press news ticker (another New Deal innovation) which he had installed in his office at the White House, an invaluable check on the activities of the department press agents as well as a summary of world news, committee hearings and even registrations at Washington hotels.

The most ticklish task which the White House has faced in its press relations since inauguration was the handling of the President's \$10,000,000,000 budget message to Congress and submission of the 689-page budget itself. Widespread criticism of the budget might have seriously damaged the New Deal's position, and the President recognized the importance of the event. Correspondents were called to the Oval Room on the second floor of the White House; each was furnished a chair (newsmen ordinarily stand during conferences with the President) and each was provided with a copy of the budget message and the thick budget document itself. Then, for the first time in history, the President of the United States took the correspondents into his confidence to discuss his budget freely with them nearly twenty-four hours before it was released for publication. Calling correspondents by their first names, he answered all questions as he went through the

New Deal Press Agents

budget, page by page. Many of the answers were "Off the record" and none of the information, outside the written budget message itself, was for quotation, but the conference made history in White House press relations. The budget was characterized as "the most brutally frank message ever sent to Congress." Franklin Roosevelt's uncanny publicity sense had scored again, for it was the President himself who suggested the conference. Had there been a "leak" through one of the several score correspondents present, the story might have been different.

Early spends a half hour or more with the President before and after each of his press conferences, offering suggestions on the handling of the most important subjects apt to come up for consideration. The Press Secretary seldom puts out statements from the White House without consulting the President. A notable exception was his handling of the Lindbergh telegram protesting the cancellation of all air mail contracts. Early alluded to the "publicity motives" which usually underlie the publication of telegrams in the press before the President has been afforded the courtesy of reading them. The press interpreted Early's statement as a rebuke to Lindbergh. It was actually directed as a slap at Colonel Henry Breckenridge, Lindbergh's attorney, who gave out the telegram, but Early's subtly worded statement did not carry the name of the former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, whom Early's colleagues on the State-War-Navy "beat" used to call the "Boy Scout." Early had to take the "rap," but the President backed him up.

MARVIN HUNTER McINTYRE (*Assistant Secretary to the President: Appointments*). Although his chief task is handling the President's appointments, he is thoroughly competent to pinch hit for Early on public relations when necessary. The President sometimes takes McIntyre with him on trips away from Washington to handle press relations when Early must remain in the capital. Like Early, McIntyre's training has been in newspaper, publicity and news reel work. After four years on the "*Louisville Times*" and "*Asheville Citizen*," he came to Washington in 1909 as city editor of the "*Washington Times*." He served on the Committee on Public Information and as Publicity Director of the Navy during the War; then joined Early in handling Roosevelt's publicity during the 1920 campaign for Vice President. Ten years with motion picture news reels followed until, in 1931, he became business manager and publicity representative for Roosevelt in his Gubernatorial campaign. McIntyre never misses an opportunity to cement the

New Deal Press Agents

White House's relations with the public, whether the opportunity comes in the form of presenting a silver cup to the Health Queen of Mount Clemens, Mich. (for the benefit of news photographers), or some more arduous task. No President has ever had such a publicity-wise trio in his Secretariat as Howe, McIntyre and Early. Their salaries: \$10,000 annually.

CHARLES MICHELSON

(*Public Relations Trouble-shooter of the New Deal*). His high-powered press agency laid the groundwork for the Democratic landslide which put Franklin Roosevelt in the White House. Ready for a well-earned vacation on March 4, 1933, Michelson was hurriedly called into government service as the nation's banks closed. The late William Woodin had been chosen Secretary of the Treasury, but Woodin—a kindly old gentleman—had no experience with handling the press. The eyes of the world were fixed on Washington and the Treasury Department; any move misinterpreted by the press might have proved a severe setback for the New Deal. Michelson was sent into the Treasury, where the high priests of the nation's money were known to consider their activities as sacrosanct and outside the realm of newspaper publicity. The Democratic party's No. 1 ballyhoo man soon changed all that. No financial expert himself, he insisted that the Treasury's intricately worded statements be reduced to language which he could understand; then he gave them to the press. Michelson eliminated the parasites and tipsters responsible for news leaks in the Treasury Department by organizing a Treasury Correspondents Association similar to those at the White House and on Capitol Hill. Within a short time, Woodin, who was naturally suspicious of newspapermen, was sitting on the corner of his desk, laughing and chatting about music with correspondents at his press conferences.

When the pressure of big news slackened at the Treasury, Early switched Michelson to the CCC, which was just being organized, but within a short time another red-hot-spot in the New Deal's press relations had developed: the London Economic Conference. Michelson, still longing for a vacation, was sent to London with Elliott Thurston (now political writer for the "*Washington Post*") as an assistant. Handling press relations for an American Delegation to an international conference is no picnic, chiefly because foreign newspapermen—most of them subsidized by their own governments—coöperate closely with their home delegations, while American newspapermen outwit their own delegations to the distinct advantage of the foreigners. Michelson was credited with getting the American Delegation through its severe ordeal with far less loss of prestige than might have been the case without his minis-

New Deal Press Agents

trations.

Confusion in the NRA was rife when the New Deal's press trouble-shooter again reached Washington, and he was quickly appointed Director of Public Relations for the NRA. Michelson soon saw that the NRA was having prima donna trouble, with every deputy and sub-official spending most of his waking hours in seeking personal publicity. Michelson took care of that little trouble by an order which permitted no one other than General Johnson and Donald Richberg to speak on NRA policy; the indirect result was the creation of General Johnson as a national figure of second importance only to the President, from a publicity standpoint. Michelson, more than any other person, was responsible for General Johnson's acceptance of the Newspaper Code with a clause setting forth the Constitutional rights to freedom of the press. This move, without doubt, was an important factor in maintaining a favorable relationship between newspaper publishers, who contested the point bitterly, and the exponents of the New Deal. With NRA affairs in better order, Michelson finally went to Florida for his vacation, a year later than he planned. He is now back in his office with the Democratic National Committee in the National Press Building laying plans for the fall Congressional elections. His most recent blast: a statement saying that Reed's defeat of Pinchot in the Pennsylvania primaries in no way indicated a weakening of the New Deal's following in the keystone state. Until the primaries are over, he will spend most of his time playing cards in the back room of the National Press Club.

As Director of Public Relations for the Democratic National Committee, at a salary of \$20,000 a year, Michelson transformed a badly deflated Democratic party into a living organism by injecting high-pressure publicity into its veins. His colleagues in the Washington press corps, who had known him as the "*New York World's*" veteran political correspondent, couldn't believe their ears when they heard that Michelson had joined Jouett Shouse in a barren suite of offices in the National Press building to undertake the task of reviving the Democratic party, which seemed beyond resuscitation in the spring of 1929. John J. Raskob, National Democratic Chairman, financed the project; and Michelson was given a free hand. He was soon manufacturing news studded with big Democratic names. Hardly a subject of national interest was without a statement from some outstanding Democrat, all of them written by Michelson. While James West, the Republican publicity director, had to get