

Advertising and the War Effort



BEFORE this war, the radicals and even some otherwise intelligent business leaders said that private enterprise would not survive another world conflict. American railroads were taken over by the government during the first World War. It was said that the government had brought order out of transportation chaos. There was some truth in this observation. So in the years following, it was concluded that all large business would necessarily be managed by the government the next time a great war came.

Behind these forecasts was the tacit belief that maybe government management would prove to be more efficient. In the background also was the old American political hostility to large business organizations. Our standard of living was made possible by the fertility of large business organizations, but politically we have never liked big business.

Reformers were gunning particularly for advertising. To them, advertising was a sheer economic waste. They thought, and they told congressional committees and ladies' clubs and anybody else who was willing to listen, that if only the advertising were omitted we could buy much more cheaply tooth paste and cigarettes and clothes and food and all of the other luxuries and necessities that make up our standard of living.

Of course, these assumptions were erroneous. As everyone knew, who knew anything about the making of goods in large quantities, advertising was the tool that created large markets and so indirectly stimulated industry to devise the economies that resulted in the American standard of living.

Most of this was forgotten during the ten years that led up to the second World War. Business got a black eye during the depression and during the succeeding years never quite regained its self-confidence. So when the prophets of doom began to wail their dismal forecast, a great many businessmen thought that the end of private enterprise had really come.

It has not turned out that way. The government has established controls and set up goals. In wartime the government must assume responsibility for national defense. Private enterprise, however, has borne the burden of the miraculous production that is now helping to win this war.

By every test, private American business enterprise has been proved to be the most fruitful method of production known to mankind. The United States has not had to look to Great Britain or Russia for help in producing guns, ammunition, tanks, trucks, food or clothing. Russia has looked to us, and Prime Minister Churchill and Premier Stalin have acknowledged the very great contribution made to Russian victories by American tools of war.

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The private industry of the United States has aided every country in conflict with the Germans and the Japanese. The capacity of American industry to produce has been something undreamed of in the world. The creative energies of millions of people, alert, intelligent, intent on saving their freedom, have written new chapters in history. It is the sober truth that the United States has been the storehouse of ideas, of productive methods, of inventions upon which all of the nations of the earth have drawn. Private enterprise has created the arsenal of democracy upon which all nations in varying degrees rely to liberate themselves from the Germans and the Japanese.

So advertising, voice of American industry, foolishly denounced by some as wasteful, sometimes despised as frivolous and actually marked for destruction by extremists in various governmental agencies, has modestly accomplished tasks essential to the United States and to a free world. In the process, advertising has been sifted and improved. It has risen to a great opportunity and given itself a new importance and a new dignity.

Soon after we entered the war, the national government, after much debate, decided to use advertising as a means of winning public support for war projects. The public was asked to buy War Bonds, to conserve food, to salvage metals and paper. We were urged to take the complicated steps necessary to achieve some degree of economic stabilization. Young women were called upon to enlist in the Wacs and the Waves and other branches of national service.

The response of the public to these appeals has been magnificent. The great objectives of the nation are being attained. Advertising has performed no miracles, but in practicable human fashion the war goals are being approached. So advertising has been firmly established as a vital instrument of public service. The war itself has proved that, through advertising, democratic people can be persuaded quickly to take action necessary to their whole national defense.

Other advantages, quite unexpected, have resulted. For much of the advertising the government has paid nothing. While Washington was meditating upon the advantages and political complications of buying advertising for national purposes, industry itself organized the War Advertising Council, composed of advertisers, advertising agencies, newspapers, magazines, radio, outdoor advertising and other groups, to mobilize the advertising energies of the country for war. Corporations that had been advertising their own products, voluntarily devoted their money, time and space to the advocacy of public causes designated by the government. During 1943, advertisers actually contributed over \$300,000,000 to carrying on the various informational campaigns that our government wishes to present to the American people.

Advertisers who gave their money, their energies, and their ingenuity to these efforts were moved by the same unselfish considerations that persuaded other men and women to give whatever they had to the national defense. Few, if any, saw advantages accruing to them from these contributions to the government and to the winning of the war.

The businessmen who refrained from advertising their own wares in order to use their space for governmental purposes, however, are being rewarded by a new friendship from their consumers. The manufacturer who used his space or time to help in the war effort has by that fact established a reputation for public service that has given added confidence to his product.

Nobody set out at the start of this war to prove that private business enterprise was the most productive of the available ways of making the most weapons in the shortest time, nor did anybody hope to find a new justification for advertising or for advertisers during a world war. What has happened is merely a by-product of relentless concentration upon the winning of the war. For this very reason, it is the more firmly established.

Collier's

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